

The English Language T-ching podcast

Adrian Underhill & Jim Scrivener

Guided by the slogan 'No lesson plans. No aims. No exams', the podcast hosted by Adrian Underhill and Jim Scrivener positions itself as an informal yet thoughtful space where two highly experienced educators reflect on teaching, learning and the bits of life in-between. Obviously, listeners familiar with their work will recognise some of the topics are closely linked with Underhill's work on the core role of physicality in pronunciation and language learning and Scrivener's contributions on classroom dynamics.

What I particularly enjoyed is that rather than advocating for fixed methodologies, the hosts choose to dive into the tensions and messiness of classroom reality: what it means to 'teach' effectively irrespective of the chosen method, how teachers continue learning, and how values shape pedagogical choices. For instance, Jim Scrivener challenges the notion of 'being busy' as a marker of effective teaching, suggesting that teacher busyness can sometimes reflect varying degrees of control rather than learning. Thus, moving beyond these narrow associations, he reframes classroom management not as discipline, but as the ways in which teachers organise, distribute or delegate control in the classroom, in other words, the deliberate creation of conditions in which learning can happen. This opens up a thought-provoking tension between teaching and facilitation, the latter being more sensitive to the question and source of control.

While for some novice teachers the discussions might sometimes feel too abstract or anecdotal at times in the absence of explicit structure, undeniably, one of the podcast's key strengths lies in the credibility and rapport of its hosts. Their conversational style is delightfully engaging yet at the same time intellectually stimulating. This turns listeners' experience into a highly enjoyable and insightful one, peppered with anecdotes, light humour, real-life examples, reflections on language, life and science and thought-provoking questions to explore tensions and uncertainties, as well as memorable metaphors. For instance, Underhill's metaphor of language learning as a car journey offers a vivid conceptualisation of a broader pedagogical dilemma: should teachers prioritise presenting discrete language items or 'bits' for later use, or create opportunities for learners to communicate and address linguistic gaps as they emerge? So, listeners embark on a car journey to understand that while



learners need 'fuel' (input) and occasional 'repairs' (focus on form), excessive preparation risks preventing meaningful movement. The implication is made transparent for educators: the core of learning lies in use, experimentation and the joy of making visible progress.

I particularly appreciated the ninth episode, which explores the notion of slow learning and how our perception of time shapes the learning experience. The discussion begins with a too familiar institutional pressure: teachers feeling like they are in a race to cover coursebooks, move rapidly through units, and 'tick boxes' with frugal reflection. A key takeaway from this episode is actually not an answer but raising a powerful question addressing how to find the time to create space for deeper learning.

What I enjoyed the most about this podcast is that it is more about provoking reflections and questions than providing prescribed definitive solutions. I think that what makes these episodes appealing is also the balance between conceptual challenges and pedagogical implications.

The short episode length (9–12 minutes) makes the podcast highly accessible and well-suited to busy professionals, both experienced and reflective practitioners, but also to novice teachers with a growth mindset, who are willing to engage with ambiguity and rethink long-established beliefs about teaching.

Armanda Stroia

Teacher trainer, Cluj Teacher Training Centre
armandaramona@gmail.com

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The image shows a woman in a blue shirt writing in a notebook. In the foreground, there is a laptop displaying the IATEFL website with a 'Join Now' button and a 'Login' button. Next to the laptop is a magazine titled 'IATEFL VOICES' with a cover image of a large group of people in a circular room. The magazine cover also features the IATEFL logo and the word 'voices' in large letters.