

## **Saul Nassé English Australia**

Good morning! I worked out that it's thirty-eight years since I first heard of Hobart. My Great-Uncle Oswald emigrated to Australia in the 1940s, and when I was a child he and I used to exchange letters, as he was the only one of my grandparents' generation still alive. The feathery blue fragility of an airmail letter seems a long way from the iPad that my six year old daughter Nikita uses to video call her grandparents.

One thing that bound Great Uncle Oswald – inevitably known as Ozzie – and I was our love for cricket, and over your summer of 1978 and 1979 he sent me newspaper cuttings of the Ashes tour. The scrapbook that I painstakingly assembled with his cuttings, pencil drawings I did of the players and my very own match reports tells me that from January 19th to 20th, England played Tasmania here in Hobart. It was a low scoring game, and in typical style Geoff Boycott scored a painfully slow unbeaten 90, but Tasmania held on for a draw. The test series was another matter. 5-1 to England if I remember. But let's draw a veil over that.

I must admit that boy in 1979 with his glue and his pencils and his pens would never have imagined he would have a career in the creative industries that would take him across the world and finally, in 2016, to Hobart. It's great to be here, great to meet the Australian side of the ELT global family, and great to talk about the subject that's closest to my heart. Creativity.

I spent 23 years of my life at the BBC, which aimed to be the most creative organisation in the world. In some ways it was – I hope I had my moments. But I would argue that the organisation I lead now, Cambridge English, needs to set the creative bar just as high – as do all of us in this room. Because what industry needs to be more creative than education? Shaping the minds and lives of the people who will be our future – that's got to be a creative industry through and through.

The world we live in is changing fast – it's a world where the airmail letter is heading for extinction and where the tablet is heading for ubiquity, it's a world where national boundaries are breaking down and the forces of globalisation are irresistible, and it's a world where knowledge is available to all and where skills are at a premium.

What I want to argue today is that this changing, challenging world is a world where creativity is more important than ever. It's a world where we need to equip our students with top class creative powers. And it's a world where we, the educators, have to think and work ever more creatively to give our students those crucial creative skills.

But first I'd like to take a step back in time. Not to 1979, but to the beginning of 2016. There is a terrific event held in London each year called the Education World Forum, where education ministers from across the globe come together to discuss policy and best practice. I gave a keynote. Not on Creativity, but another 'C' – communication.

I talked about how communication is crucial to humans, the world and to education. I talked about how language and language learning shape the communications skills that people rely on and I talked about how English, in this digitally connected world, is essential for everyone.

A few months after the Education World Forum, I found myself on another stage, this time in Delhi, at our very own Cambridge English conference for Indian educators. This time it was another 'C' – collaboration. I pointed out how collaborative skills are increasingly important in business, society and the workplace. I talked about how collaborative learning underpins constructivist theory, and how our approach at Cambridge English has been founded on Communicative Language Teaching.

The third 'C', Creativity is perhaps the most important of all, as without creativity there would be no communication. Without creativity there would be no collaboration.

Add the three C's together and you have a powerful equation for English Language Learning.

So let's dive into Creativity.

Creativity is innate – it's in all of us.

It's the lifeblood of humans, it's what makes us different from animals. It's creativity that has shaped our world, giving us the wheel and the world wide web, The Sistine Chapel and The Scream, Newton's Apple and the Higgs Boson, Cinderella and Sin City, Beethoven and Bowie, King Lear and Sir Les Paterson.

By the way, I sat in the front row of Barry Humphries' penultimate show on his farewell tour and I was literally in spitting distance of his most grotesque creation Sir Les, the Australian cultural attaché. But I want to turn to a real life cultural commentator, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, who has defined the characteristics of creative people. He says they are:

- People who express unusual thoughts, who are interesting and stimulating.
- People who experience the world in novel and original ways. They are individuals whose perceptions are fresh, whose judgements are insightful, who may make important discoveries that only they know about.
- People who have changed our culture in some important way.

Because their achievements are by definition public, it is easier to write about them – people like Leonardo da Vinci, Einstein, and so on.

But creativity also plays out on smaller canvases - not everyone is inventing helicopters, painting masterpieces or synthesising world-changing theories. Creativity is what gets each and every one of us out of bed in the morning. What are we going to do today? What are we going to create today? Every day throws up challenges and through creativity we rise above those challenges, and gain a sense of achievement and reward from creating something new.

Everyone can learn creative skills and harness them. In our personal lives as well as in our working lives, we all need to solve problems and create new value with new ideas. And doing just that is only going to get more important.

Daniel Pink suggests that we are entering a new “Conceptual Age”, following on from the industrial revolution and the information age, and successful people need to develop new senses. It’s not just down to analytical, computer like thinking, but empathy, inventiveness and understanding. They are going to be the skills that successful businesses increasingly demand.

They will demand those skills because creativity gives businesses a competitive advantage by adding value to their products and services, and differentiating them from the competition. And of course it’s not just businesses that are in the market for creative skills. Universities want the best creative minds to embark on research and to create new knowledge. And Society needs arts, music and literature to enrich the public realm. But how do we get more creative?

Neuroscience tells us that creativity is not a simple division between “right-brain” and “left-brain” thinkers. Creativity is a whole brain activity; we just have to know when and how to tune in to certain aspects of our conscious or unconscious minds.

My old friend, the psychologist Professor Richard Wiseman illustrates this with an example.

“Imagine two men in a room. One of them is highly creative but very shy. The other is clever, not as creative, and far more domineering. Now imagine going into the room and asking them to come up with ideas for a campaign to advertise a new chocolate bar. True to form, the loud man dominates the conversation. He doesn’t allow his quieter counterpart to contribute, and the ideas produced are good but not very innovative.

“Now let’s imagine a slightly different scenario. Again, you walk into the room and ask for campaign ideas. However, this time you distract the loud man by getting him to watch a film. Under these circumstances, the quiet man is able to make his voice heard, and you walk away with a completely different, and far more creative, set of ideas.

“In many ways, this is a good analogy for the relationship between your mind and creativity. The quiet guy represents your unconscious mind. It is capable of wonderful ideas, but they are often difficult to hear. The loud guy represents your conscious mind - clever, not as innovative, but difficult to get out of your head.”

Wiseman’s story of the loud and quiet guys also shows us that we all have the seed of creativity within us – the key is learning how to listen to the quiet guy. Creativity can be practised, developed and trained.

In formal education, an overarching goal is to foster the development of creative minds – minds that are challenging and probing all the time. We must help learners to solve problems and work out how to do things for themselves to meet the needs of life outside of school and in the workplace

With the right creative skills, learners can be:

- Motivated and ambitious for change;
- Confident in their capabilities and the validity of their own viewpoint;
- Able to transfer their creativity skills to other contexts;
- Able to lead and work well with others.

In short - equipped not just to survive, but thrive in our ever-changing world.

Teachers and teaching skills play a very big part of this. Anyone who has been a teacher knows how uninspiring and unfulfilling it can be just to teach by rote, following a textbook from page to page. Developing and using the skills of creativity helps teachers to motivate and engage students, so it's in the interests of both learners and teachers – and school directors - to nurture creative skills.

Because this is such an important topic, I asked our research team to kick off a project to ask teachers around the world directly what they think about creativity. The team designed a short questionnaire and asked a group of our stakeholders to fill it in.

The respondents were English teachers from a wide range of countries, who had attended one of our very successful webinars. We also sent it to teachers in Mexico who are working on a highly creative project I will talk about later, and a handful of teachers in Australia within the English Australia constituency. Over 2500 teachers responded to our survey on their views on creativity and their creative practices. The voices of the teachers came across loud and clear in the comments they shared with us. Here are some of the most common words that came up: Ideas; Teaching; Technology; Different; Share.



Here are some of the numerical findings:

- 95% of sampled teachers of EFL/ESL strongly value creativity, and 94% believe that they need to be more creative in their teaching.
- 81% of respondents tended to agree that they already include practices which might encourage creative skills in their learners.
- 80% of respondents broadly saw themselves as creative and capable of building students creativity.
- The respondents said that their institutions broadly support their creativity, but there was wider variance on these responses - 52% agreed or strongly agreed.
- Developing creative skills as a teacher is seen as very important - 97% strongly agree.
- 90% of teachers felt that they needed more training in how to be creative.
- Teachers were broadly positive that curricula, course books and assessments could encourage creativity in their learners but that “teaching to the test” does not.

So overall, there's a ringing endorsement from teaching professionals that encouraging creativity in the classroom is critically important, but an overwhelming sense that they need more training and techniques to be at their best – and a worry that teaching to the test can cramp creativity.

Those teachers who are most likely to embed creative practices are those who see themselves as creative and those who value creativity for EFL/ESL. Get it right for teachers, and they will have the opportunity to grow and develop as professionals, and foster their inbuilt creativity in the design and delivery of inspiring lessons.

The challenge is to find better ways to empower teachers in what they do, how they think about learning and teaching, and how they relate to their pupils. Part of that challenge is to break down the barriers to change – whether real or perceived — that are related to education policy, rigid curricula, prescribed materials, or the impact of testing regimes.

That's of course where Cambridge English has a particular view. We know that assessment can become part of the problem when it comes to creativity – testing regimes that encourage “teaching to the test” in mechanistic ways will absolutely stifle the creativity of both teachers and learners – ‘negative washback’.

We discourage that by deliberately striving for “positive impact” in the way we design our assessment systems and work with teachers. In fact we believe the Cambridge approach can foster and support creativity in a number of really important and innovative ways.

Creativity does not exist in a vacuum, independent of learning and knowledge – learners need something to be creative with. The teachers in our survey felt that a strong, structured curriculum could support creativity – teaching for creativity does not mean sacrificing content. Providing a strong curriculum and high quality learning materials should scaffold teachers and free them up to teach in even more creative ways.

As the range of work done in the classroom becomes more creative, the assessment tools we use to evaluate and support that teaching and learning need to become more creative, more aligned with the creative approaches of the teachers.

That’s why we at Cambridge English have a new approach to assessment - Learning Oriented Assessment. We’re aiming to link assessment processes and instruments more closely to the learning process in a wide range of learning environments. We take a systemic view – it is not just about narrowing the curriculum and practising test tasks, but joining a community that is focused on better learning as the goal.

Our core community is in Cambridge, where we work with Cambridge University colleagues to sponsor ground-breaking research in language education, but we have a fantastic global network too. This is an extended Cambridge community globally, in our hub offices and regional centres, who work with our thousands of exam centres and preparation centres – it's a huge network of schools and teachers dedicated to language learning and teaching. Get it right, and it can be dedicated to creativity too.

We are always looking to extend our network to new partners. And we would like to work with you, all the people and organisations in English Australia, to include you in our global network of creativity.

Let me give you some examples of people in our community that we're working with to grow creativity in the class room. Anne Burns – talking later in this session – has edited the latest issue of our Research Notes series. In her introductory paper she talks about barriers to creativity. She also demonstrates clearly how Action Research conducted by language teachers can be a spur to creativity. Action Research - studies carried out by teachers in the course of their work to improve the methods and approach of those involved – has proved a particularly rich vein for us.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Anne for her fantastic work with us on the joint Cambridge/English Australia Action Research programme that has now been running since 2010. A great example of one of the other C's - collaboration.

Let's talk about someone else in our network - Marisa Constantinides who is a teacher training expert who runs a Cambridge CELTA & DELTA centre in Athens. Marisa has identified the conditions that need to be met for learners to be creative in the classroom, namely that the interactions should be playful, fun, scaffolded by the teacher, and collaborative. Above all, the students need to be praised regularly and must be made to feel safe in the classroom context so that they will experiment.

Marisa says that teachers make a difference to creativity by:

- showing appreciation
- being patient & encouraging
- showing enthusiasm for student ideas
- modelling creative behaviours
- believing that students can do it

Marisa also provides examples of creativity-enhancing activities, such as

- brainstorming unusual uses of an object
- creating contradictions and taking opposing sides of a problem
- make up facts about...a person/place/thing to 'pitch' to other groups of students

Marisa says the best teachers use their creativity in modifying the curriculum and selecting a mix of methods and techniques to keep the class lively and varied. They use different activity types, and select or create different kinds of learning materials to keep the learning input as varied and stimulating as possible.

Let's look at someone else in the network – David Graddol. David's well-known to you as a speaker at previous English Australia conferences. As part of our Profiling English in Context project and in keeping with a broader theme of "Creativity in working with Cambridge English", we've set up with David an innovative research project in Mexico that we are calling 'Young English Detectives'.

This builds on our innovative collaboration with David on Profiling English in China published in 2013 – which he spoke about to this group.

In the current phase of this new project, an online course for teachers, "Introducing Language Landscapes" was launched in Mexico, and run by David. Teachers of English are trained to guide their students in exploring English around them - in their house, in the street. The learners are encouraged to discover and record "collectable English" - language used in their out-of-school environment using phones and cameras. This is intended to foster motivation, creativity and positive attitudes to learning and teaching English.

About 45 Cambridge teachers have registered for the first phase of the course which will last throughout this summer.

It's a great example of how we can break "out of the box" - and connect the "4 worlds of learning" – the learner, teacher, school and society - through the agency of Cambridge and our partners by us all working more effectively together.

This ecosystem integrates the work of the learner in the classroom with the learner's use of technology outside the classroom in their own time, giving extra chance to learn and practice.

Take Anne, Marisa and David's work on creativity and you see a clear theme emerge –they themselves are being creative. To me that's the progression – the changing world demands ever greater creativity; that drives us to make creative skills an important part of the classroom; and we as educators have to get creative to deliver that.

But there is one more piece to the creativity jigsaw. Technology. I don't need to tell any of you about the massive role it plays in improving teaching and learning. We'll all have our own stories about how we've seen technology, used well, enhancing motivating, stimulating collaborations and acting as a catalyst for creativity: from interactive whiteboards to virtual classrooms to tablets and smartphones and much more.

But every now and then we see things which just make us go WOW, this could change everything. I want to tell you about two things that make me go WOW – brilliantly creative uses of technology that will, I think, inspire creativity in our learners. I think they might make you go WOW too.

I have a great app on my phone called Swiftkey. It's a keyboard that provides personalised predictive text. It certainly made me go WOW when I first used it, as it's uncannily human. It uses the latest machine learning algorithms to produce its often weirdly accurate suggestions of what you are planning – trying – to write. Well we have now teamed up with one of the people behind Swiftkey, Professor Ted Briscoe from Cambridge University's computer lab, and Cambridge University Press to put machine learning to work on language learning. Together we've created an endeavour called ELiT, and this is its first product, Write and Improve.

[www.writeandimprove.com](http://www.writeandimprove.com) goes live today and it provides an instant way for your students to practise their written English. The underlying technology is cutting edge but it is really simple to use. It's free and it provides your students with a choice of writing tasks that they can complete in their own time. When ready, they submit the completed task for marking and the system very rapidly provides feedback. This consists of a proficiency level aligned to the Common Framework of Reference - the CEFR - and pedagogic advice to help them improve specific areas of their writing. Based on this feedback, they can try again and resubmit an improved version – many times if they want to.



Hence the name! It's a creative use of the latest technology, and demands a creative response from learners.

I'd now like to show you how that works by demonstrating the system on line – in other words a live demo! The task I am going to choose is from the intermediate work book. It requires me to write a report on making a video on daily life at my school. Now, as a native English speaking former TV producer hopefully my writing on this topic wouldn't need any improvement! So I have here a piece of typical A2/B1 learner's English that I am going to cut and paste in. Once the text is in, I submit my task for marking by the system and wait for the results

I'm just going to pick out a few examples – including a couple of errors; I'll make the corrections to them, and then resubmit the text.

In paragraph 1, you notice it is marked as white – a well formed sentence.

In paragraph 2 you can see some errors in orange. I am correcting them now and am going to resubmit.

As you see, this now gives new feedback showing that although the level hasn't changed, the writing has improved. I'm now making the remaining corrections in the orange sentence I am changing 'enjoin' to 'enjoy' and adding 'the' before students.

I have also spotted a couple of errors to correct in Paragraph 4. Let's correct those and click check again.

You can see that this has raised the level to B1 – notice the green circle and some exciting feedback.

This graph shows how progress is charted.

In summary, the system is designed to be motivational - to be engaging and encouraging. Overall encouragement needs to be personalised and adaptive – so the system needs to be changing and regularly refreshed.

As we all know, learning a language takes a long time and it is important for learners to be persistent - and to get lots of practice, particularly for the productive skills. As you have seen, learners using Write and Improve are encouraged to read, think - and then have another go until they feel that real progress is being made. It's the kind of iterative approach that's properly pedagogic, and encourages creativity.

Supportive feedback is key to maintaining this kind of interest and persistence. The feedback also helps by creating learning pathways that are tailored to the level of the learner. This is why comments generated by the system are graded to suit the level of the learner.

A low level learner at A1 gets feedback of the following kind:

This is a good start! Now improve your writing. Read the feedback. Make changes and click Check again!

A high level learner at C2 gets a much more complex response from the system, “C2! Your writing is excellent! We advise you to practise writing in many different genres and styles. You can afford to take risks and then check the results. Keep learning! You can use Start again to start a whole new essay or return to Workbooks to try a different task. Keep on writing to keep on improving!”

New developments are on the way. The learner’s interest might be maintained more effectively by building in creative features such as gamification; for example, challenges and achievements to aim at, badges to celebrate, and so on. It certainly makes me go WOW, do point your browser at [www.writeandimprove.com](http://www.writeandimprove.com) and see if you go WOW too. With machine learning, the more people that use the system, the better the performance gets, so you’ll be helping us too!

For my second WOW moment, I want to take you on a journey into the world of Virtual Reality. I first looked into Virtual Reality back in the early 90s when I worked on the BBC science programme, Tomorrow's World (Beyond 2000 was the Australian copy!). Back then the headsets cost literally tens of thousands of dollars but there was already some interesting stuff going on – game playing of course, but also art and even training people to cope with phobias. In short an amazing new platform for creativity.

Well the good news is that headsets are now down to a few hundred dollars, and they're getting better than ever. Cambridge English is committed to this new technology and has created some VR prototypes.

Imagine the VR class of 2020. Students are all wearing VR headsets and headphones so they can immerse themselves in realistic learning experiences. They will be able to see a virtual world, which they can interact with alone, or in groups with the other students, making a rich communicative activity.

This offers rich new possibilities for Language Learning. No more dry textbook exercise. In a virtual world students might be in London, or New York navigating their way around the city, buying a ticket, ordering a meal, asking for directions. The student is not passive - they must engage, understand, and answer questions. They might be speaking with a real, remote person or in some instances a robot voice that can understand and respond in context.

This is not science fiction; it's already possible with headsets like the HTC Vive. But it's possible too with even cheaper and more accessible equipment. Hands up anyone here who doesn't own a smartphone? I thought so, we've all got one. Well everyone else in the room also has one of these – Google cardboard. If you reach under your chair before you leave, you'll find yours. The idea of it is you slide your smartphone inside, and you have an instant smartphone headset.

Any apps that are designed for Google Cardboard will work with this. The app splits the screen into two views, and when you insert your phone into the cardboard goggles, those views unite into one 3D view. Now move your head around. It tracks your movement.

If you've never used Cardboard before you will need to install the right apps for it. We've included links to one we made, but just search your App Store for "cardboard" and you see loads of them. The Google Cardboard app is a great place to start.

Here is a preview of one we are working on. It is a 360 degree video of what it feels like to take our Cambridge First Speaking Test. You meet a test taker who takes you into the test with her, explaining what is going on. Then you even get the chance to try taking some sections of the test yourself. Here you can see me stepping through it, and as you see I can look around, to get a broader perspective.

You can see the view here on the big screen. This isn't the full 3D version as you'd see it in the goggles, but you can see how I'm able to pan around, and explore what is happening. I can turn my head anywhere I like and see exactly what's going on. We're hoping that by letting students experience the exam taking scenario, in advance of their actual exam day, we're able to help them build confidence and create the conditions they need to the best of their abilities. I think it's a brilliantly creative response from my team.

Try it out when you get home. If you scan the QR code on your new Google cardboard it will take you to more detailed information on how to get access to some of our videos, as well as a few tips on other things you might do with Cardboard and VR. Drop me a line if it makes you go WOW!

It's a fabulous brave new world of creativity out there, but none of this technology is any good unless teachers are confident and comfortable using it. At Cambridge English, we run online courses, train teachers through webinars and short courses in how to be more creative in the classroom.

We have also developed the Digital Teacher Framework, which helps to map out the many different ways technology can be used in a classroom and helps teachers to assess and identify areas where further training might expand their skills and competences in using digital technology in the language classroom.

At a simple level, teachers need to be confident in their own digital skills, and able to make use of classroom technologies like learning platforms, and virtual classroom tools, as well as the ability to evaluate the constant stream of new technologies that students bring into the classroom, learning how to keep them engaged, and creating new and exciting artefacts with them, whatever the current tools are

Above all, teachers need to balance a sense of curiosity about digital learning with the confidence to try things out. We're hoping that our Digital Framework can provide the scaffolding to do this.

I began this talk by taking you to 1979, and my glue and pencils and pens, putting together a scrapbook like geeky school boys before and since. I count myself lucky coming out of quite a traditional school and a science degree from Cambridge with my creative instincts not just intact, but enhanced.

But I count children of my daughter Nikita's generation far more lucky. They will increasingly have access to technology that can help unlock their creativity and, just as importantly, the content and teaching that will support them.

As I said, for me it's the three C's. Communication – English is key to accessing the increasingly connected world we all live in. Collaboration – how learners interact socially, and how we us educators come together to maximise our impact. And Creativity, the wonderful, amazing power of the human mind to come up with ideas that the universe has never seen before.

I would add one more C – Cambridge. We stand ready to work with you to unlock the potential of your learners, helping you to train your teachers, provide unique products across the education space and work with you to innovate for the future.

I truly believe that our children's generation are going to need creativity in their lives like never before. So it behoves us educators to build those skills like never before. And we have to – absolutely have to – be as creative as we all can in designing the systems, content and products that will unlock our children's futures. Together we can do it.

Now I've some time for some questions. Although in a minute I do have to pop down to the TCA ground – I hear that Geoff Boycott's still batting.