



## From research to reality: building a new digital ELT experience

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1

### Design thinking

Start with empathy  
Reframe the problem  
Employ a divergent style of thinking  
Employ a convergent style of thinking  
Create and test prototypes  
Iterate

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2

### 2020: The journey begins

#### April 2020 global survey

- 9 in 10 teachers were using digital tools to support teaching more than before.
- 55% struggling with distance teaching and learning.



Global Teach and Home survey 2.5k respondents

3

### 2020: The journey begins

#### Qualitative research panels

- ELT teachers recruited across 4 markets.
- All Macmillan Education research moved online.



4

### 2020: The journey begins

#### Nov 2020 – May 2021

- 3 stages of interviews.
- Becoming more confident and enjoying using technology to support teaching.

#### June 2021 global survey

- Most teachers rated themselves as competent in different digital skills\*. But with this came other challenges...



\*Global Teach and Home survey 2.1k respondents

5

### Understanding teacher needs



6

### What were the main pain points that teachers highlighted?

**Resources:**

- Not intuitive
- Insufficiently engaging
- Content & format repetitive
- Activities too predictable

**Topics covered:**

- Can lack relevance to students' lives and interests
- Can put them off studying English

**Learner variability:**

- It's challenging to teach different ability levels within one class
- Coursebooks don't provide sufficient differentiation
- Short attention spans
- Fear of speaking

**Workload:**

- Hard to find motivating resources at the right level
- Publishers provide lots of materials, but they're in lots of different places and it's hard to find what you need
- It takes time to learn to use new digital tools

7

### The situation in the classroom was evolving

"As we use digital more, we need to look around a lot and it takes time. If things were available all in one place, we could focus on being creative and making learning fun."

**Secondary teacher, Mexico**

"During COVID, everything got way worse when it comes to the students' attention span... it's extremely short!"

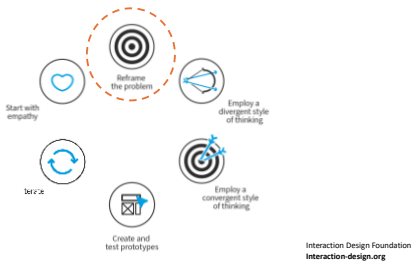
**Adult teacher, Türkiye**

"Students are quite shy and timid. They are afraid to speak in English in class."

**Primary teacher, Poland**

8

### Reframing the problem

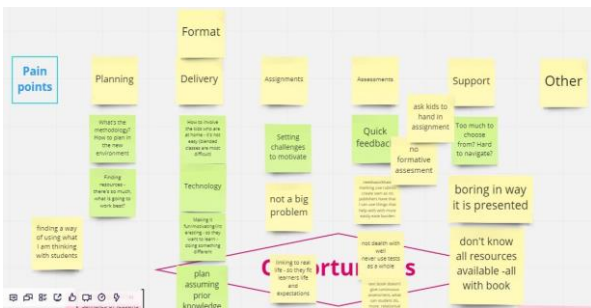


9

### We validated the problems that teachers had described

- We dug further into their key challenges, and asked about the type of support they would like to see to solve them.
- We used the visual workspace and online whiteboard platform tool, Miro, for real-time collaboration and brainstorming.

10



11



12

Teachers faced lots of disparate demands

"I feel like you have to become more and more creative. You have to more and more look for different activities that are more dynamic because each generation is very different."



13

Children felt disconnected from the real world

"Children need to see, experience and get closer to the real world, because the way we have been teaching so far seems very disconnected from their lives."



14

What did teachers want to have in order to address these challenges?



Up-to-date, dynamic resources that can be edited and used flexibly – on- or offline



To be able to immerse their students in real learning situations, and give them real opportunities for practising English



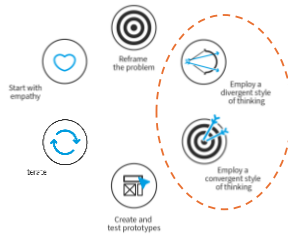
Engaging, motivating projects that inspire curiosity and require critical thinking skills



Teaching suggestions and ideas, based in best practices, to enrich lessons and provide opportunities for professional growth

15

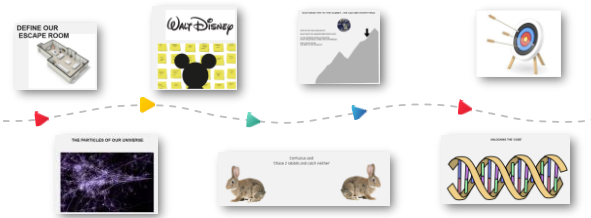
Ideating solutions



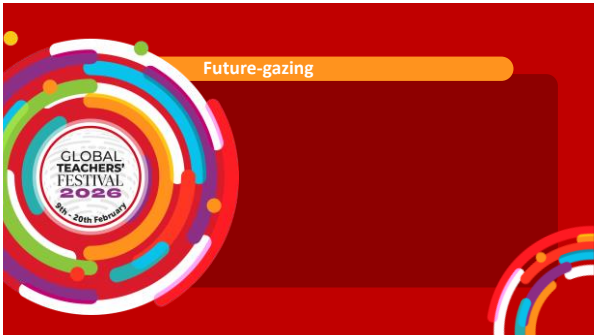
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16

How could we at Macmillan address the challenges teachers told us about?



17



18

Glimpses into the future

July 2021 focus groups

- Online focus groups.
- Invited participants to **fast forward 3 years into the future**, to 2024.
- They met **Maria**, an ELT teacher using a range of resources to support her and her students in teaching and learning English...



19

Dynamic Resources

Challenges:

- Student engagement and motivation
- Resources can lack relevance

- **Proposed solution:** Up-to-date, dynamic resources

Feedback:

- Would keep lessons **fresh and interesting**.
- A **break** from the "regular" content.
- Would **reduce teacher workload**.
- Must **change frequently enough** to remain relevant.
- Would like **supporting lesson notes**.
- A range of **media types** to support different learning styles.

Changes following research:

- The content will be **updated monthly** – and related to recent online resources.
- Accompanied by **lesson plans**.



20

Dynamic Resources

*If the lesson is related to the latest news, this would engage them and be fun.*

Quote from research

21

Dynamic Resources

**Are there any topics you feel students would be particularly interested in for the dynamic resources?**

22

Global Schools

Challenges:

- Student engagement and motivation
- Learning lacks clear purpose

- **Proposed solution:** Global network of schools, giving students real opportunities to practise English.

Feedback:

- The **biggest "wow" factor**.
- **Motivating:** can put into practice what they have learned, in a **real context**.
- Shouldn't be solely synchronous communication; **asynchronous** communication also offers some benefits.
- Being **matched with schools** was a big selling point.



Changes following research:

- Includes **both asynchronous and synchronous** options.
- Monthly Swaps and cultural exchanges with **no extra teacher preparation** needed.

23

Global Schools

*It would open up possibilities for students to put into practice what they have learnt. They can build something together and communicate with people that they could only speak to in English.*

Quote from research

24

Teacher Zone

Challenges:

- Publisher materials in lots of different places
- Teaching different ability levels in one class

Proposed solutions: All resources in one place, including lesson plans, teaching ideas, TPD opportunities.

Feedback:

- Important to have everything in one place.
- Lesson plans would save time, though most would customise plans.
- Loved opportunity for professional development, though time was a barrier.

Changes following research:

- Ready-to-use, adaptable lesson plans.
- Focus on supporting varied learning styles and needs.
- Planning tools combined with professional development tips.
- Quick, practical teaching tips.



25

Teacher Zone

Planning takes a long time, so it would be great to have this support.

Quote from research

26

Gamification

Challenges:

- Student engagement and motivation

Proposed solution: Turns practice into a game with points, badges, and leaderboards

Feedback:

- Gamification would engage and motivate students
- Some mixed feedback about the competitive element

Changes following research:

- Points system rewards effort, persistence and accuracy rather than purely academic performance.
- Gamification included in course activities in adaptive practice.



27

Gamification

Many children are finding traditional lessons boring. They prefer to do more gamified exercises.

Quote from research

28

AI-powered personal assistant

But not everything appealed to all...

- "MEL", AI-powered personal teaching assistant.

Feedback:

- Most agreed that having a virtual assistant would free up their time.
- Fears about losing autonomy and control.
- Loss of human aspect.
- Nervous about teachers becoming too dependant on AI.

Result:

- MEL didn't make the cut.



29

AI-powered personal assistant

I'm not sure about MEL. You'd be handing over your vocation to a machine.

Quote from research

My only concern with the suggestions from MEL is that teachers may become too dependant on the AI.

Quote from research

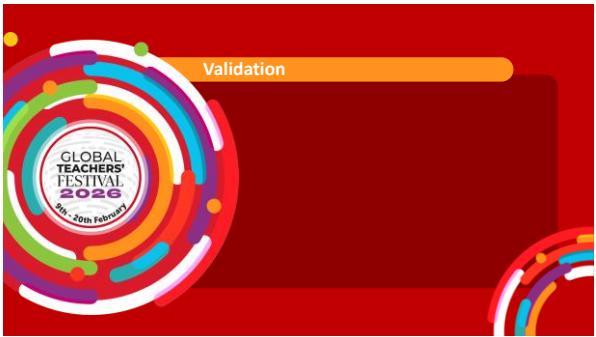
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General feedback about the proposals

*This would be a whole new world of growth and revolution of learning.*  
Quote from research

*The lessons would be more entertaining, challenging and motivating for students. Children grow up being used to modern technology, and this would be a great opportunity for them; for teachers too, as they have to change as the world changes.*  
Quote from research

31



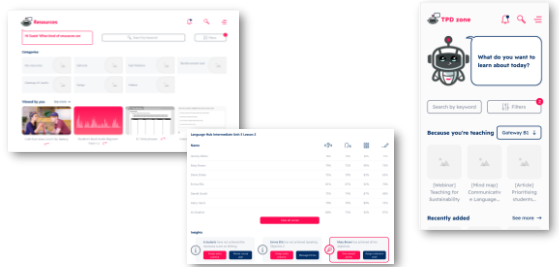
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Product design and co-creation



33

Early prototypes



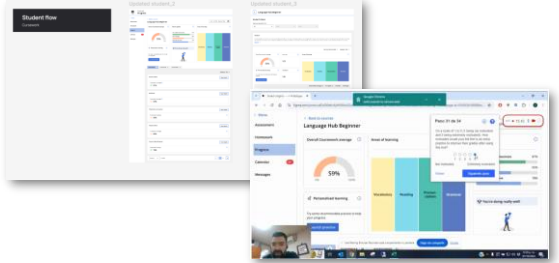
34

Teachers' feedback helped us to iterate and improve our designs

- I like the idea of having the filters option, in case you want to close up the search for resources a bit more. [...] I guess with this tool, it will be easier for us to find what we need for the class and our students.  
Primary teacher, Spain
- I wonder if it would be possible to add more sections here: essential content (activities for weak students), quizzes, warming up, pronunciation, flipped classroom and co-evaluation.  
Secondary teacher, Spain
- I would use the lesson planner tool daily as a way of keeping everything organized and in one place, especially because I tend to add different links to sources.  
Secondary teacher, Mexico
- I would also transfer teacher's notes and teacher's resources from the teacher's book to outline/underline main lesson objectives.  
Primary teacher, Poland

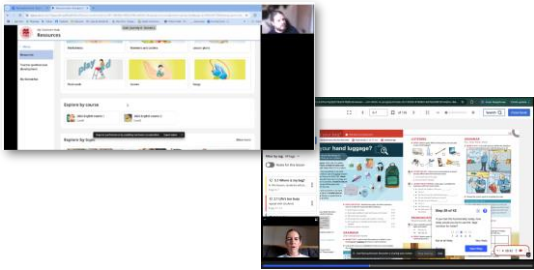
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User experience research has continued throughout the design process

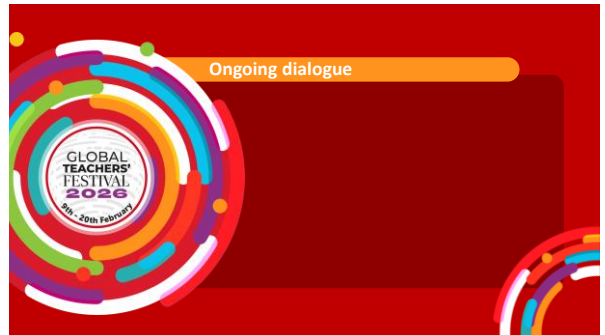


36

Usability testing with clickable prototypes enables us to refine the user interface

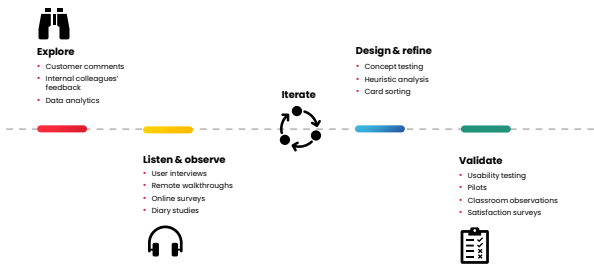


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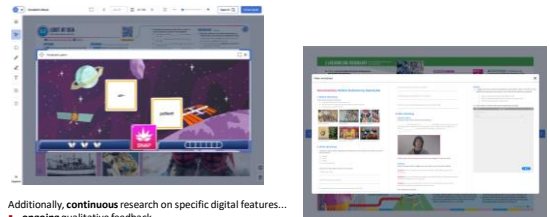
38

We continue our close collaboration with teachers and students



39

Market Research also now validates a "unit experience" rather than a static print unit



Additionally, continuous research on specific digital features...

- ongoing qualitative feedback
- 500+ responses to two surveys

40

Ongoing research ensures the digital solutions evolve alongside customer needs

- It motivates them to see that English isn't just 'book stuff'. (Dynamic resources)
- Students like games like this. They are competitive and want to win. (Gamification)
- Just being able to click and have the content there is perfect. (Teacher Zone)
- Having students speak to others in English will be very enriching for them. (Global Schools)

41

Join us to participate in research!



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42