Delivering Development Podcast – Episode 35

Edited transcript

Kevin: Okay everyone, welcome to episode 35 of the Delivering Development Podcast. This is a bit of a relaunch.

Laura: A bit. I'm laughing at that.

Kevin: A bit. Yes, I had a look, and our last podcast was recorded in October last year. So, this is now a year later. Been a lot going on since then. There were a lot of people absent. I was on holiday. Then we heard the news that our friend and colleague Pete Sharma was ill. And then we found he was in the hospice. and unfortunately he died in the early part of 2026. So that kind of sort of stopped us in our tracks a little bit.

Laura: A little bit?

Kevin: Yeah, just a little bit. It was a big shock. And then I had other family issues, which I had to deal with. And now we're back. So, like I say, bit of a relaunch also in terms of how we're going to approach the podcast in the short to medium term. And Laura: I think it's hilarious that you're calling someone stubborn.

Kevin: I think the fact that I am stubborn does not stop other people being stubborn.

So yes, he was sometimes stubborn, but very knowledgeable on a very wide range of concepts, theories and authors.

So that's what I sent to her when she asked for my thoughts on Pete. So yeah, I'm going to hand over to Laura: I know, I feel so neglected. You've completely ignored me so far. It's okay, I'm over it now.

Kevin: Yeah. Go ahead.

Laura: Yeah, Yeah, I mean, just to follow on from what you were saying, Kevin: I think I'm sure it must have been the 80s here. Yeah.

Laura: And you started in the 90s, having transitioned from another work environment. And I started in 2006, which is when I had my first EFL teaching gig. And so the experience for all of us was something really, really different. So, we were kind of reflecting on what we needed to know at that time. I mean, from the process from being a complete noob to, I mean, like Pete was the top of his game. How do you get there? But where do you start? Absolutely. Where do you start? And it's really daunting. I remember my, do you remember your first class, Kevin: Kind of. I mean, I know where it was. I know it was an in-company class. So I was going into a business and starting an in-company business course. But I don't, I kind of have recollections of bits of it. Yeah.

Laura: Oh, okay. And before you started, what kind of training had you had?

Kevin: Zip.

Laura: Nothing!

Kevin: Absolutely nothing. No, no.

Laura: Oh, my goodness.

Kevin: No, no, I walked straight in. That was my literally no courses, no nothing. No. I'd been in, I'd been in, I'd been a language assistant.

Laura: And what did that entail?

Kevin: Being the native speaker in the classroom, basically. I mean.

Laura: And when they ask you how to explain a grammar point, you're like, I don't know, it just sounds bad.

Kevin: Yeah, nothing to do with me. Ask the teacher, you know. So that was the biggest, probably the biggest learning curve was the grammar, the technical side of the language, because they knew that or they knew about it, and so they would ask you things about it. But no, I literally walked into a classroom of about six or seven young professionals in an engineering company. And expected to teach them how to get better at English in their engineering company.

Laura: That's quite impressive. Did you even have a lesson plan? Did you even know how to do a lesson plan? Did you even know what a lesson plan was?

Kevin: I'm sure I did. I think just me knowing me, I think I would have had a plan, whether it was whether it would have been a recognisable lesson plan in the sort of what people would I think, listening to this, what they would expect me to have is something else. I probably had a book, although maybe not. No, because you see, I was in England for Christmas in 2006. 2006, 1996.

Laura: Yeah, 2006, my starting day. Is this an age thing, Kevin: I'm certainly more than 10 years older than you. And I got a phone call from a teacher at the school where I had been a language assistant previously and saying, look, I've been asked to do this. There's some work in this company. I can't handle it all. Do you wanna do it? You know, basically.

Laura: Wow. But you kind of got thrown in the deep end.

Kevin: Oh yeah.

Laura: Totally.

Kevin: Yeah.

Laura: Okay, so I was a little bit more prepared than you, but I was, so I did an online TEFL. I think it was one of the ones that's measured by hours and I think it was, I can't remember exactly. It might have been 100, 120 hours, but it was online. So, it's, so it did really teach you the basics. And it was because the first job, the first teaching job that I went for, it was through one of these schemes where they place you abroad. I went to China. And so they were like, OK, so you've got a teaching job in China, but you need to do this first. And it was quite nice. So you learn about classroom management. You learn a little bit about how to break down language. I mean, my undergrad was languages and linguistic. I did Spanish and French. So, I already had a decent amount of grammatical awareness, I think, and linguistic awareness. So that helps, I have to say, because there were other people who started at the same time as me and they just, they came from different fields and the idea of breaking things down into this is a noun and the noun does this and this is a verb and it goes here. So that was a learning curve for them. But I still remember my first class and I still remember walking in going, my God, I can't do this because I walked in … no, I've missed a step because, so I did the training while I was still in the UK, then I moved to China. And then for the place that I was working, we also had to do an in-house training. And this is where they taught us how to teach for their context, but they assumed some kind of level. So there were lots of things that were missed out that should have been on the TEFL course that weren't. And they did kind of a lot of cultural training and kind of setting expectations of what it was like in teaching in that context. That kind of terrified me a little bit. And so I just remember walking in and it was 8:00 on a Saturday morning because I used to work Saturdays and Sundays because that's when the school had their kids' classes. And I had a group of 20. They were young. How young were they? They were, they must have been like 10, 11, wonderful age. And I just walked in and went, hi, everyone. And they went, hi. And that was it. My heart just sank. So, I went through my lesson plan because we did do a lesson plan. And I mean, things got better and I kind of picked things up along the way. But yeah, no, I just remember that first lesson was really, really daunting.

Kevin: How old were you?

Laura: I don't remember. Hang on, let me work it out. It was just out of university. Hang on. Four-year degree, yeah, 22, 23, 24, around that, 20, must have been 23.

Kevin: So I mean, I was 35.

Laura: Yeah, a bit different then.

Kevin: I'd already had a career in customer service.

Laura: Dealing with the best of the worst.

Kevin: Yeah, you know. So I think that helped, you know.

Laura: Yeah.

Kevin: I'm sort of fairly confident in myself and You might find it hard to believe.

Laura: You confident and stubborn? So, what comes first, the confidence or the stubbornness?

Kevin: That's a good question, isn't it? I mean, I mean, that is highly relevant to what we're doing here because I think confidence should come from knowing what you know and knowing that you are okay and so on, it shouldn't come from ignorance. And you do meet a lot of people in and outside of our field whose confidence seems to be maybe to a degree unjustified, shall we put it that way?

Laura: There's A psychological effect for that, isn't it? The Dunning-Kruger effect.

Kevin: Dunning-Kruger, exactly, yes. And you know, I think for me, Part of the problems that occur in our field in terms of acceptance of the actual expertise that people bring and the knowledge that they have and their ability to occupy a position of expertise, part of that comes from not necessarily having the training and the development that they need. I mean, for me, a big step for me was my master's. I felt after that, and I'm sure I've said this before on the pod, but it gave me a feeling of qualification in my field. Not just someone who's got experience, not just someone who's got gained knowledge and so on, but hey, I've got a master's and that master's is relevant. And that gave me more confidence to assert myself, if you like.

Laura: I got that before a master's. I got that when I did a CELTA and I realized that my 120-hour certificate really was what everyone kept telling me that was.

Kevin: But you still managed. But yeah, so I did a CELTA 8 years after I started teaching. It helped me because it I mean, this may sound a little bit arrogant maybe, I don't know, but you tell me, I'm sure you will. It confirmed that actually what we were doing was pretty okay, you know? We were doing all right. That's me and my wife. It was like, there were things we learned, don't get me wrong, but a lot of stuff which we hadn't put a name to. We were doing it.

Laura: Because everything's got a name.

Kevin: Yeah, we were doing communicative language teaching, we just didn't know it.

Laura: You just didn't know what it was called, yeah.

Kevin: We were really doing like task-based learning as well.

Laura: And you really didn't know what that was called!

Kevin: No, absolutely. And there were other things that we were doing that they gave a name to. And we thought, okay.

Laura: Once you know the name, you can look it up, you can learn a little bit more about it, and you learn how to implement it even better.

Kevin: Yeah, and you can also refer to it more easily talking to customers and so on.

Laura: But without it becoming a buzzword, I hope.

Kevin: Well, you know, you can say, we use communicative language teaching, this means, and that that makes you look better, that makes you sound like you know what you're talking about.

Laura: True professional, yeah. This kind of leads on to what we were saying, isn't it? Because one of the things that we want to do with the relaunch, the rebrand, whatever you want to call it, of the podcast, is we do want to link theory and practice a little bit more. Because there's, I mean, I know whenever I go to any of the teacher training things around here that come from the universities rather than the language institution, there's always the theme somewhere, bridging the gap between research and practice. And I think that's really important to do because as you say, so the practice is, you, for a lot of people, I imagine, you get thrown in the deep end, you're a novice teacher and you're thinking, oh my God, what on earth do I do with these students? And then as you muddle your way through and then you find out a little bit more about the theory, then you game up a little bit. Yeah, it's just to close that gap, isn't it? And to be able to name things, to be able to explore things, to be able to look at the research that's out there to inform your pedagogical practice, at least that's how I see it.

Kevin: No, absolutely. I've always, I've always, well, certainly since the Masters, I've always said it's very hard to even judge what you're doing without.

Laura: Just need a benchmark, don't you?

Kevin: Yeah, you know, and like the thing with research is it's something, yeh, you may not agree with it, but you've got to acknowledge it and it's been conducted in a way that you can never do unless you actually do, get in a position where you can really conduct research. But, you've they've had a situation where they've been able to conduct that research and then it's up to you to decide what to do with that knowledge and with those results. But I'm sorry, my experience, my individual experience, only works so far. Research gives you access to many, many individual experiences. And I think that for me is the most important thing. I am not the be all and end all. My experience in the classroom could be unique. And it certainly shouldn't inform everything that I do because there will be other experiences. And until I understand the research, I don't really know whether I'm doing I could do a better job. Let's put it that way.

Laura: There we go. Yeah. because it's not really about right or wrong, is it? It's just different ways of implementing things. And in one context, it's going to work well. In another one, I mean, it's like when you've got different... yeah, no, I remember that. When I first moved to Barcelona, I was teaching in a language school, and they thought it would be really easy if they gave me all the repeated levels. So on Mondays and Wednesdays I had, I can't remember what level it was, let's imagine like B1. And then on Tuesdays and Thursdays I had B1 using the same book with a different group of students. One group hated me and that class did not go well. And the other group went really, really well and I loved it. But, yeah, no, and it was just really hard to kind of engage that first group. And in the end, it was just personal individual differences and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. But that's kind of, it's a real-life example of everything is so context dependent. So you take what you need from the research, you apply it to the context, but it might not work. You need to be adaptable.

Kevin: But then it's good to know that as well. I mean, I say, I mean, I say this to learners all the time, you know, just because you don't understand someone, it might not be your fault. Just because they don't understand you, it might not be your fault. And just because your class doesn't work, might not be your fault.

Laura: Yeah, exactly. You're ticking all the right boxes. It's just not the, you're ticking all the boxes, they're just not the right boxes for that class.

Kevin: Anyway, so moving on, I think.

Laura: Yeah, we've laid the framework. That's our theoretical framework.

Kevin: Yeah. So, what are we going to do? So we talked about frameworks, didn't we?

Laura: We did. And you don't like the one that I proposed?

Kevin: No, you know that's not true. Tell us about the one that you did propose.

Laura: Well, because when I, okay, so when I was researching for my thesis, because my thesis focused on computer assisted language learning, so I had to do a lot of reading around it. And one thing that came up a lot was teacher education. and by teacher training, teacher education, teacher metacognition, all that kind of stuff. And one framework that kept coming up because it was specific to online contexts was the one by Hampel and Stickler. And it's been through a few different iterations. So, the first one in 2005, they've got this pyramid and it's set up like the Maslow hierarchy of needs. So it's quite nice actually. So, at the bottom you've got basic ICT competence, which makes sense because if you want to teach online, you have to have basic ICT competence, they call it. And it goes up through different things and kind of facilitation and how you can get students creating things in an online environment. It's nice, okay, and at the time it was like, oh yeah, that makes sense. And then there was an update. Forgive me if this isn't the right year. I think it's 2015.

Kevin: Is correct.

Laura: Yeah, am I right? Did I get it right? Excellent. Excellent. And so this, because I mean, and this kind of, this had an update because the whole idea of basic ICT competence, I mean, what is basic ICT competence in 2015? It's not the same as it was in 2005. because technology had been normalized, Bax, 2004. So things have been normalized and people's digital literacy had increased. And so they focused a lot more on the higher levels because, so they're talking about higher order social skills in terms of online environments. And It's nice because it's still a pyramid and I like structure because that's how my mind works. But then one of the major criticisms of this was that the pedagogy was lost, that it was focusing on technology rather than teaching. So they had this one come out in 2020. which is non-linear. And it's all about development and teachers, because you don't do your development in a linear way. You kind of branch out. You do it here and you do it here. And this is something that I actually felt when I was doing my training. And I felt that I was doing it wrong because I thought that I had to follow the sequence and that if I wanted to get to D, I had to go through A, B & C. And no one really told me that I could learn about online education at the same time as I'm learning about classroom management. And so the new, I know it's insane, isn't it? But so yeah, so they've got this model which leads people through different stages of development and so from novice to expert as a normal framework. But I think the really nice thing is that it's looking at different facets of online education, how it's different from face-to-face education. And I don't know, I think it's quite useful. Kevin: what do you think?

Kevin: As I said, she's horribly misrepresenting me. As I said, I think it's a useful framework within the scope of what it deals with.

Laura: Like any framework.

Kevin: Yeah, but I think it's not a sort of a general developmental framework for language teaching. And I think it's a useful framework within that. And as we chatted about before the pod.

Laura: We are trying to be really cool before the pod. It's no longer a podcast, it's a pod.

Kevin: No, it's a pod. And we were talking in the pre-pod, which is also very cool. Yeah, there are other frameworks that are available. There are a couple I quite like. As Laura knows, we did a discussion at IATEFL in 2020 I think it ended up being, 2021 maybe

Laura: Way back when.

Kevin: It was just post-COVID. It was the first ITEFL after it was cancelled in 20, I guess, so probably 2021, but it was still online. My bit of the discussion included was basically about choosing your path and how to do that, how to do that in a structured way. And I presented three different frameworks, two of which I think of.

Laura: Bit overkill, Kevin.

Kevin: Yeah, well, see, they are all different.

Laura: Because that's the thing, isn't it? They've got strengths and weaknesses.

Kevin: And I think the strength of the Cambridge one, and we'll put links in the show notes to these different things. The strength of the Cambridge one is that it gives a fairly detailed description of each level in each skill. So, for somebody who's not quite certain about what these things represent, it sort of explains it to them.

Laura: Because again, it's important to put names to those skills because if you don't know that the names exist, well, if you don't know that the skills exist, you can't learn about them.

Kevin: And you can't even look for them.

Laura: Exactly.

Kevin: You can't search for them.

Laura: I know. You need search terms. You need to know what things are called.

Kevin: Yeah. So, I like the Cambridge one for that reason. I like the British Council one, because I think the way it's represented, it sort of works better for me, but it lacks the detailed description of the Cambridge one. And it's more extensive. It's got about 20 odd different areas that it considers. And then the advanced HE, as I think they call themselves now, what used to be the higher education I can't remember what it stands for, HEA. I can't remember what the A stands for now. Anyway.

Laura: Oh, they're the guys that do the qualifications for higher education in the UK.

Kevin: Yeah, HEA, FHEA, yeah. Yeah, so I've got an FHEA.

Laura: I have nothing 'cause I live in Spain and it means nothing here.

Kevin: Yeah, exactly. But they have one which is used across all sorts of subject areas. And as a result, it's much more generalized, which again, if you know what you're doing and you've got a good idea of maybe where you might want to lead, your development to lead, that also is quite good because it doesn't put a straitjacket on things, but you've got to have a lot more knowledge for that. So, like I say, there will be links to those in the show notes. And I think what we're going to try and do is sort of do our podcasts on certain areas with reference to the research and what it says about those areas.

Laura: I think that's good.

Kevin: And then link them where I was about to say where possible, but it should always be possible.

Laura: It should, because research and practice go together, Kevin. Were you not listening to me earlier?

Kevin: Sorry, I must have been out of the room. And refer and refer them to the frameworks because the key thing I try to put across in, I've done quite a few webinars, training sessions, articles on this sort of CPD thing. And the thing is about giving yourself structure, understanding where you're going, what you're doing, what things, you know, you don't have to be an expert on everything.

Laura: You definitely don't.

Kevin: And think about where you're going. And the original thing that I, when I started doing this for me was I had done a podcast with Rachel Roberts. Sorry, pod, with Rachel Roberts, who does a lot of stuff on like mental health and that sort of thing. And sort of managing the sort of freelance life and that kind of thing. And one of the things that we very much on the same page on was about if you've got a plan, if you take control, then that reduces stress. You may be in a bad place now, but you've got a plan to get out of that place by doing this professional development, for example. So, I think it works at so many levels to sort of have that kind of structured approach. Works for my brain anyway, and I suspect yours. But I think it's a really good way. Otherwise, where do you start? And where do you go? it's pointless doing a little bit there and a little bit there and a little bit there and you end up knowing quite a lot...

Laura: Especially in today's market, I think, because I understand. I think maybe we've talked about this before, like having a niche is really good for, is really good on a business scale. But to have a niche, you've got to develop that niche, no?

Kevin: And be able to back, you know, walk the walk as well as talk the talk, you know, and that, you know, I think, and that's what, I mean, that's what Rachel also says in her sort of general advice to freelance language teachers is, yeah, have your niche and be prepared to back it up and demand the right sort of recompense for someone with those specific skills. So, I think...

Laura: What was yours?

Kevin: Business. I mean, I'd, been, I mean, there's lots of people that do business teaching. Not many of them have been a small business advisor, have worked in a bank, have dealt with, investment, finance, foreign exchange. I was really able to talk to people as a, from a business perspective. So that was definitely my initial niche. I was able to sort of walk that walk right from the very beginning. And then I developed, say, ICT and assessment, I suppose.

Laura: So, when did you first start structuring your CPD? After you, when, before, after, during you did your master's or?

Kevin: I would say probably after I did my masters, yeah. I think that was the thing that woke me up to, you know, I hadn't not been learning. And I'd been doing a lot on the ICT front before that, pretty much from the word go. But I think the, again, the masters gave me the knowledge to know where to go, if you like.

Laura: And where to Google, yeah.

Kevin: Yeah, you know, and so, I mean, I had a, I haven't done it the last couple of years, but I had a thing where I would say every year I would give myself a goal of training myself in a particular area and finishing that training with either a conference presentation or an article or something based in that area.

Laura: Oh my goodness, that is structured. I never did that. I never did it that in such a structured way.

Kevin: Yeah, I mean, I wouldn't beat this up about it, but you know. Wow.

Laura: But yeah, no, I didn't do it that much.

Kevin: I think it was a really good way, because especially if you sign up for that conference presentation. You've got to do it. The motivation stays pretty high because you're going to stand up and talk about that thing. And if you haven't done the preparation, then you're going to look pretty silly.

Laura: I'm going to propose an alternative route for anyone who's listening who doesn't have this confidence right from the word go. I went to a whole bunch of things that I enjoyed and then I met a whole bunch of people that I talked to about things that I was interested in and then I followed suggestions. So, so I went and taught in China and then I came back and I said, okay, so what shall I do with my life now? And then someone was like, I think you're really good at this. So maybe you could do that. And I was like, okay, I'll do a master's. So, then I did my master's and then I bounced around a few bits and I did, I went to loads of conferences and I met loads of people and then someone was, oh no, doing PhD. It was like, well, everyone else has a PhD. It can't be that bad.

Kevin: Yeah.

Laura: So, but like doing things that you're interested in. So, I mean, there are alternative routes. It doesn't have to be structured. But It's nice having, because, so the, okay, so the point that I wanted to make, so I didn't have the information about the framework, the different paths, but the people that I was listening to did. So, it was informed in that way.

Kevin: And now you are that person.

Laura: Apparently.

Kevin: Right, I'm going to have to wind this up now. We're getting near the end of our time. So, this is our relaunch. Hopefully we can get our acts together now and keep making this month.

Laura: Let's do it every month.

Kevin: We can do it. We can easily do it. So that's the end of this 35th edition of Delivering Development. The blog post will come up on psa.eu.com and anybody can can link to the show notes and everything from there if you've obtained this through, I don't know, a link from somebody else or whatever. Otherwise, I assume you already found it somewhere. So do subscribe and hopefully you'll hear from us in about a month's time. Thank you very much, Laura.

Laura: Thank you very much Kevin.

Kevin: Okay, awesome. And yeah, we'll talk to you next month. Yeah.

Laura: Because obviously we don't talk to each other.

Kevin: No, naturally not. No, no. Obviously we're not going to talk to each other now.

Laura: No. No, not at all.

Kevin: Okay. Thank you everyone for listening.

Laura: Take care.

Kevin: Bye bye.