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# HOT TOPICS

Delta Module 2 with Young Learners: a contradiction in terms?

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## My Module 2 training journey

I have been working on Delta Module 2 for the past decade, ever since this particular Cambridge Assessment English teaching award went modular in 2008. Like a number of Delta trainers, I started as a local tutor for the distance Delta and gradually progressed to fully-fledged face to face and online courses. I inducted as an external assessor for Module 2 (M2 hereafter) in 2013 and have worked on many variations of the course: part-time extensive, full-time intensive and distance learning programmes. Throughout this period, I have tutored several candidates who were teaching young learners for their M2 lessons as well as externally assessed a number of young learner teachers.

Given that M2 is based on an 'adult default' view of ELT and lacks adjustments at the syllabus, assessment criteria and course administration levels for teachers of young learners, this poses a major challenge for candidates and tutors alike. I have found it crucial to provide a strong focus on age-appropriate pedagogy whilst simultaneously enabling candidates to meet the highly adult-orientated M2 requirements. My young learner teacher training background has enabled me to rise to this major challenge. However, given the particular needs of global YL training contexts, my hot topics feature questions whether taking this particular award with young learners is somewhat of a 'contradiction in terms'.

## The award's journey into TEYL

Early predecessors of the Delta Modules were two separate qualifications: the Royal Society of Arts DTEFLA (Diploma in the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language to Adults) and the DOTE (Diploma for Overseas Teachers of English). These were merged in 1988 by Cambridge Assessment English to become the DELTA (Diploma of Teaching English Language Teaching to Adults).

In the mid-1990s, Lynette Murphy O'Dwyer led an initiative to form what Cambridge Assessment called the 'YL sub-committee' of key TEYL specialists. The core members were John Clegg, Lynn Durrant, Carol Read and Melanie Williams. There were additional meetings with other YL ELT professionals such as Annie Hughes and Diane Phillips who also provided invaluable input and feedback on the development of two higher level YL ELT awards: the

DELTYL and the YL Extension to DELTA. Carol Read took the lead within the YL sub-committee for developing these qualifications and the skills and competencies she identified were the result of a long process of developmental work and consultancy with the wider YL teaching community by the same YL sub-committee.

It is unfortunate that Cambridge Assessment English finally decided not to offer a separate diploma for teaching YLs. However, the developmental work undertaken on the DELTYL influenced the later modularising of the DELTA (as its current format) including widening into the YL field by providing the option of taking M2 with young learners (as well as the YL specialist option for Delta Module 3). In 2008, the minimum learner age for M2 assessed lessons was set at 8 year olds and above and as de Nagy (2016:19) highlights, this was 'a move which many of us welcomed as it further lent weight and recognition to this vital area of ELT.'



It is crucial to highlight of course that the vision of the YL sub-committee centred fully on the development of YL-specific teaching skills and competencies. The committee members were in no way advocating the use of adult-centred ELT approaches to training teachers of young learners. This is where a serious contradiction arises as illustrated by my use of the missing piece of the jigsaw and 'identity crisis' images above. A diploma level, advanced practitioner qualification in TEYL is much needed and desired globally, but not one which adopts an 'adult ELT default' position to the content of input, lesson observations and written assignments.

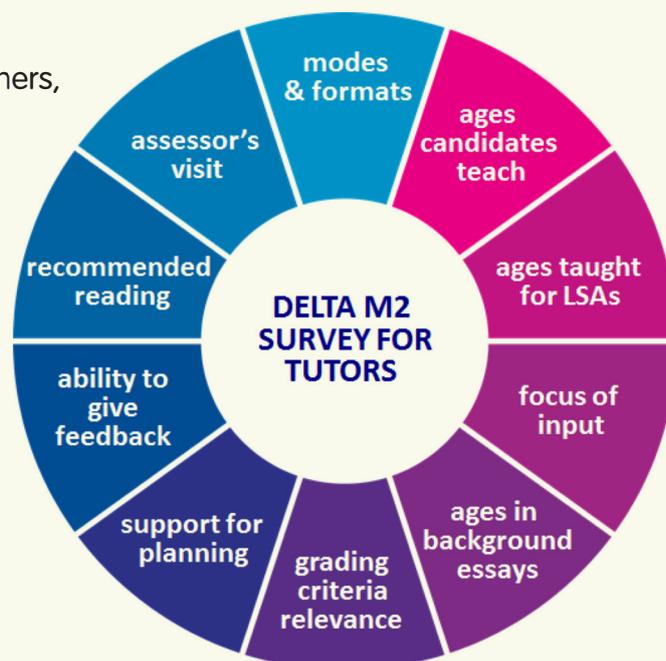
The timeline then becomes rather blurred, but at some point over the past decade, the learner age limit for M2 assessed lessons was removed. Personal communication with Cambridge Assessment English indicates that the introduction of 'any age' was in response to stakeholder feedback which highlighted that children are learning English at an ever younger age. The Assessment Manager notes, 'We also stipulated that teachers needed to provide adequate depth in the background assignment. You can only teach a very limited amount to 4 year olds but the research should be broader than the specific language being taught'. For me, this further highlights the mismatch of M2 regarding age-appropriacy as well as the perception of ELT for children being a watered down version of adult-centred target language.

## The current M2 picture

To identify current realities when tutoring M2 candidates taking the course with young learners, I conducted a survey for M2 tutors in March 2018. This focused on the following aspects:

In acknowledging that ‘young learners’ is an umbrella term which often causes confusion due to differences in national education systems and transition stages, I used the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) mapping criteria in the survey to refer to different age ranges:

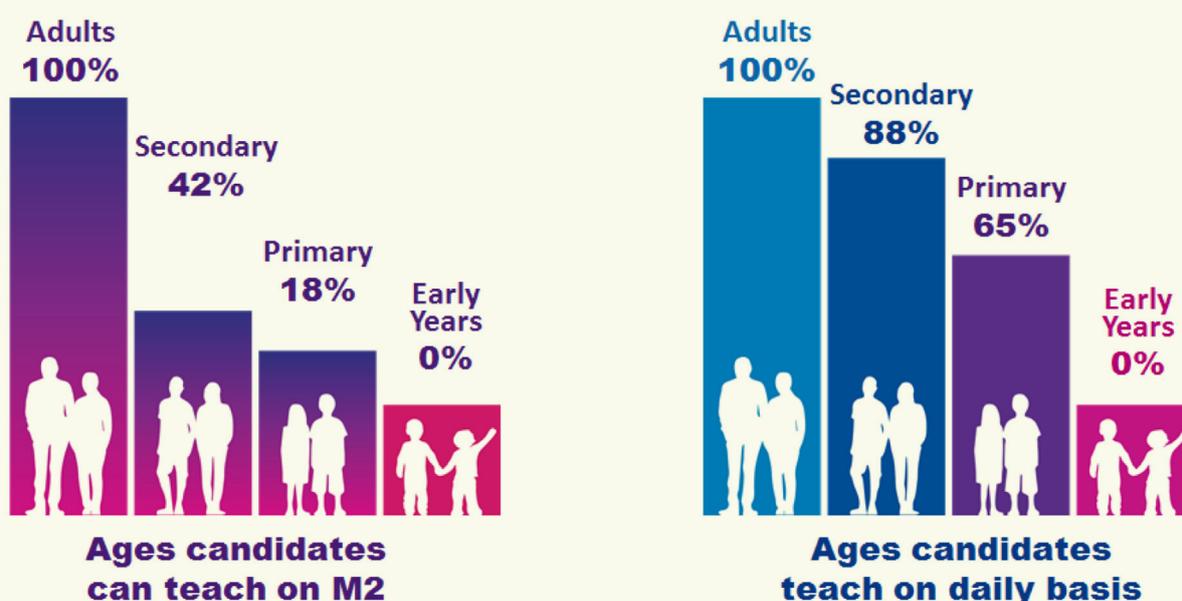
- Early Years (2 to 5 year olds)
- Primary (6 to 10 year olds)
- Secondary (11 – 17 year olds)



Thirty Delta M2 tutors responded including heads of teacher training at M2 centres providing both face to face and online delivery modes. Respondents were a mix of full time employees as well as freelance trainers based in Europe, Asia and The Americas. They represent a variety of M2 teacher training roles including face to face, online and local tutors.

## Key findings from research with tutors

Tutors reported a stark difference between candidates’ everyday teaching realities (which include a significant number of weekly timetabled YL classes) and the focus of assessed teaching on M2 courses:



This again evidences the prevailing tendency for M2 courses to perpetuate an 'adult ELT default', despite candidates needing to up skill their YL pedagogy for their day to day teaching. Tutors were also asked to report on ways they accommodate and include the needs of candidates undertaking M2 with young learners. I focused on these aspects of the award specifically:

**a) Background essays**

Figure 1 shows the approaches which are currently being adopted to background essays when preparing candidates who teach YLs on M2.

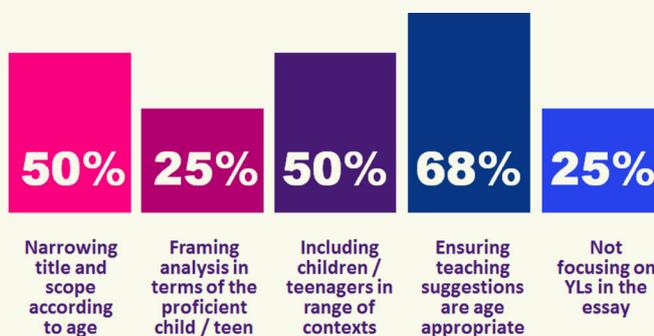


Figure 1

This reflects significant inconsistencies among centres as well as an absence of guidance from the M2 Cambridge Assessment English Handbook. Furthermore, 25% is alarmingly high for not including any focus on YLs and is indicative of the mismatch between course content and global YL ELT teaching contexts, realities and needs.

**b) Input sessions**

Tutors were asked whether they include a focus on different YL age ranges in addition to adult learners during input sessions. The results are shown in Figure 2.

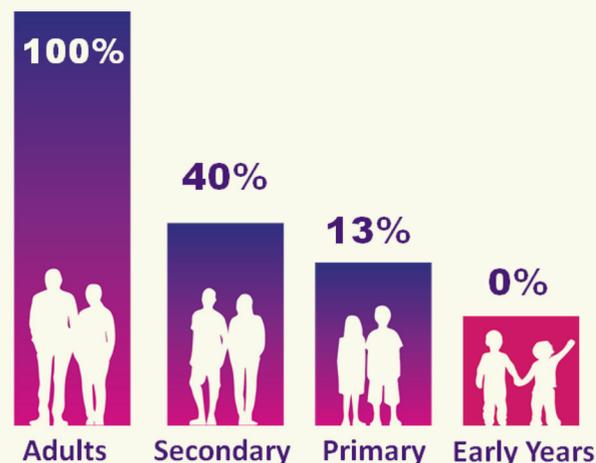


Figure 2

This may reflect the age ranges candidates are teaching during the M2 course and centre responses to accommodate them, despite there being no explicit inclusion of YL pedagogy in the current M2 syllabus.

**c) Lesson planning and feedback**

Tutors' perceptions of their competence and confidence when supporting candidates with lesson planning and when providing post-lesson feedback on lessons with young learners were also sought. An obvious correlation was found between planning and feedback as figure 3 shows.

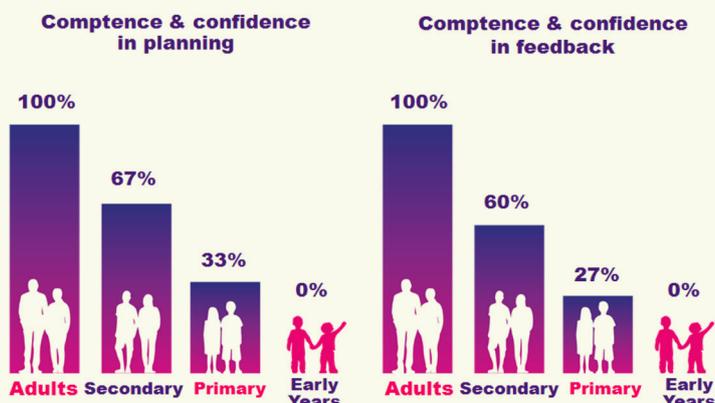


Figure 3

As M2 can be undertaken by candidates who teach any age range (potentially including early years learners) the findings above indicate a significant YL training skills gap and further reinforces the 'adult ELT default' emphasis of the award.

#### d) Assessment criteria

I noticed a similar trend to the findings on lesson planning and post-lesson feedback regarding the relevance of the M2 assessment criteria, as figure 4 shows.

Clearly, tutors' perceptions of relevance strongly relate to learner age range, whereby the younger the children, the less relevant the assessment criteria. This raises concerns for candidates wishing to take M2 with very young children and emphasises an urgent need for age-related adjustments to the criteria.

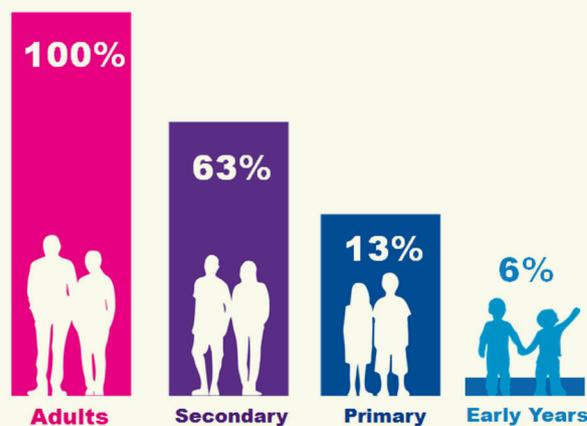


Figure 4

Gail Ellis, Advisor Young Learners and Quality for the British Council, responded to this need by drafting adjusted M2 assessment criteria suitable for YL teaching contexts. If you currently train and/or assess for M2 courses, you may like to compare Gail's reworked criteria with your Delta 5a report form. As you read, notice how she has embedded a very concrete focus on age-appropriate pedagogy throughout. Also, consider the implications these criteria may have for M2 syllabus design, background essays, input sessions, lesson planning and teaching:

### Creating and maintaining an atmosphere conducive to learning:

Successful candidates demonstrate that they can effectively:

- ✓ show they have high expectations of learners including a commitment to ensuring that they can achieve their full potential and to establishing fair, respectful, trusting and supporting constructive relationships with them; teach the class as a group and individuals within the group, with sensitivity to the pupils' needs and backgrounds, levels and context; all pupils are treated fairly with an equal emphasis on gender groups, minorities and all ability groups
- ✓ role model the positive values, attitudes and behaviour they expect from learners
- ✓ use a range of teaching, learning and behaviour management strategies and know how to adapt them, including how to personalise learning and provide opportunities for all learners to achieve their full potential
- ✓ show they understand how children and teenagers develop and that the progress and well-being of learners are affected by a range of developmental, social, cultural and linguistic influences
- ✓ make effective and personalised provision for those they teach, including pupils who have special educational needs or disabilities, and take practical account of diversity and promote equality and inclusion in their teaching

- ✓ set up a learning environment in which learners feel confident and secure in order to take risks with the language
- ✓ implement current legal requirements, national policies and guidance on the safeguarding and promotion of the well-being of children and teenagers
- ✓ communicate effectively with pupils and their parents and carers
- ✓ show that pupils make progress during the lesson and that their progress is directly linked to the lesson aims

## Understanding, knowledge and explanation of language and language skills:

Successful candidates demonstrate that they can effectively:

- ✓ use language which is accurate and age-appropriate for the teaching and learning context and provides a model of natural language
- ✓ adapt their own use of language to suit the learners they teach, introducing new concepts, ideas and language clearly to the age and level of the group and to individuals
- ✓ give accurate and age-appropriate models of language form, meaning/use and pronunciation
- ✓ make appropriate use of strategies and techniques to scaffold and support pupils' developing language, using questions, discussions and plenaries
- ✓ make use of the learners' mother tongue to support learning of the foreign language

## Classroom procedures and techniques

Successful candidates demonstrate that they can effectively:

- ✓ inform pupils of the lesson aims at the start of the lesson, the aims and purpose of each activity/task so they understand their relevance and make sense and relate the different stages of the lesson back to the lesson aims
- ✓ set up activities/tasks which give opportunities to use language for a real purpose, give clear and specific instructions, use effective signposting to start and finish activity/task cycles and different stages of the lesson and work at an appropriate pace for the learners
- ✓ exploit materials and resources that are linguistically, conceptually and cognitively appropriate to support learning and achieve aims
- ✓ provide systematic opportunities for repetition and recycling of language in meaningful and varied contexts
- ✓ inform pupils what is expected of them and how they are to be evaluated
- ✓ monitor and check pupils' learning and respond as appropriate by providing timely, accurate and constructive feedback on learners' attainment, progress and areas for development
- ✓ make effective use of a range of assessment, monitoring and recording strategies
- ✓ support and guide learners to reflect on their learning, identify the progress they have made and identify their emerging learning needs
- ✓ plan homework or other out-of-class work to sustain learners' progress, to maximise, extend and consolidate their learning and encourage home involvement
- ✓ set up end-of-class review sessions/plenaries to reflect on lesson aims, achievements and outcomes

## Classroom management

Successful candidates demonstrate that they can effectively:

- ✓ establish a clear framework to manage learners’ behaviour constructively and promote their self-control and independence
- ✓ acknowledge pupils’ progress and achievements and provide positive praise
- ✓ set up and maintain clear classroom routines
- ✓ establish a purposeful and safe learning environment conducive to learning and identify opportunities for learners to learn
- ✓ ensure pupils remain engaged and focused on the lesson aims, activity/task and the learning outcomes

*Personal communication with Gail Ellis (2018).*

These age-relevant criteria have already been communicated to the appropriate assessment managers at Cambridge Assessment English but unfortunately, Gail has yet to receive a response.

### e) Recommended reading lists

To gain a fuller picture of centre provision for candidates taking M2 with young learners, tutors were asked whether books for different age ranges are included in centre reading lists. The results shown in figure 5 are unsurprising given the lack of YL ELT methodology titles on the M2 reading list provided by Cambridge Assessment English.

This is further evidence of a lack of support for candidates and in my view, unfairly positions YL ELT as being inferior to adult ELT. It also ignores the crucial importance of age-appropriate pedagogy and does not help foster child-centredness.

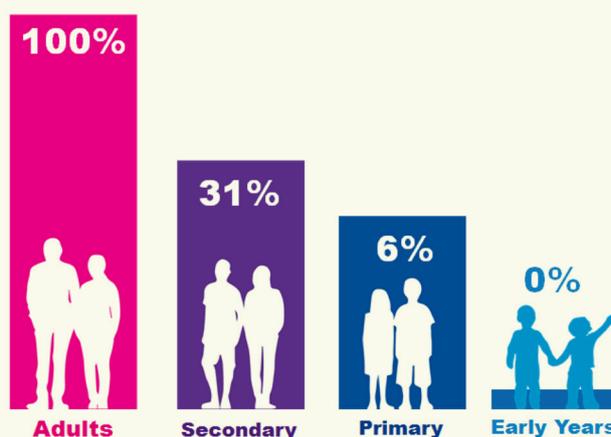


Figure 5

### f) External assessors’ visits

Tutors were asked whether they notify external M2 assessors of the age range of learners in LSA4 lessons. Responses were evenly distributed, as captured in figure 6.

Given tutors’ perceptions of gaps in competence and confidence when tutoring candidates who teach young learners (and the fact that most assessors are themselves M2 tutors), a lack of systematic notifications could result in assessors being inadequately prepared to externally assess lessons. This in turn could undermine the credibility of the external assessment process and related results.

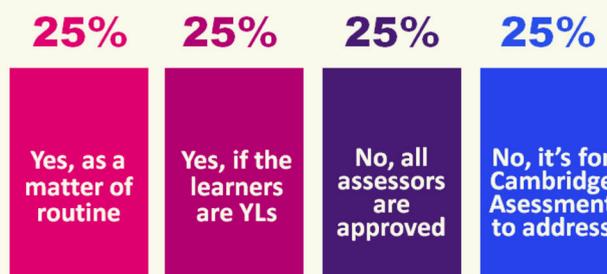


Figure 6

## The elephant in the training room

So far I have focused mainly on pedagogical concerns related to M2 with YLs, however as Etchells (2015) asserts, all ELT professionals working with learners under 18 years of age need to be aware of child protection and safeguarding issues. We need to prove to parents / caregivers, teachers and children that we are actually doing everything possible to protect the wellbeing of the learners in our care. She further maintains how every teacher and institution working with children has a vested interest in this.

In reality, in many M2 contexts this is the elephant in the training room given that some M2 candidates, tutors and external assessors are having classroom contact with learners under 18 without compulsory Disclosure and Barring Service (or equivalent) checks in place for child protection and safeguarding. There is also currently an absence of any DBS requirement from Cambridge Assessment English for M2 tutors and assessors. While this could be regarded as an oversight, it has serious risks to the integrity of the qualification and may also be perceived as negligent when it comes to child protection and safeguarding.

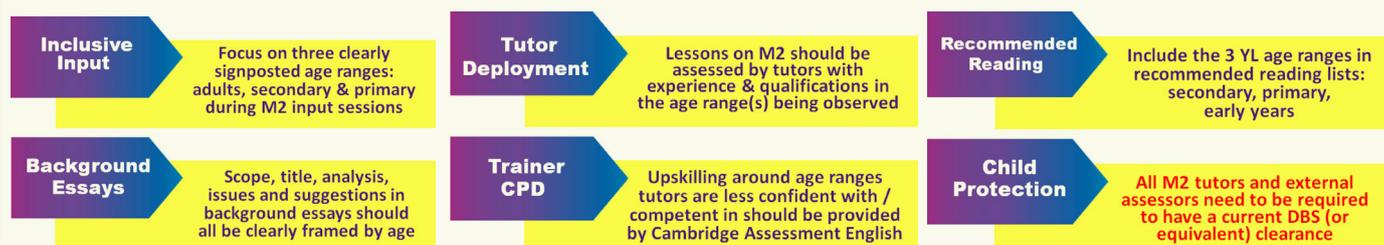
## Key findings and the M2 identity crisis

The findings of my initial small scale research evidence the acute M2 identity crisis as I alluded to earlier. This has been caused by a move to opening the award to teachers of all age ranges without necessary adjustments as this summary of issues and concerns shows:



## Adjusting the M2 award

To respond to the concerns above, the existing M2 award can be readily adjusted, for example, by reinstating the minimum age range of learners being observed on M2 and setting this as **6 and above** (due to the highly specialised nature of early years pedagogy). Other recommendations for changes which can currently be implemented include the following:



## Longer term M2 review and revisions

A more research-driven approach clearly needs to be adopted in order to genuinely address the identity crisis facing M2. This would necessitate reforming a YL sub-committee with a similar function to the group in the 1990s. Such a committee should comprise Delta M2 tutors / assessors with a strong YL background in tandem with recognised global YL ELT specialists. My own personal 'wish list' for this committee's remit would include a longer term M2 review and these revisions:



### Over to you

IATEFL YLTSIG members who are trainers, teachers and/or academic managers would be interested in learning about your own experiences of diploma level ELT qualifications and YLs. It would be excellent if you could share your ideas in response to this hot topics feature with other SIG members. Feel free to contribute via our social media channels and consider submitting a YL qualifications themed blog post for our website.

**David Valente** is Academic Training Manager at the Anglo Centre for Professional Development and Assessment in Mexico City as well as Coordinator of the IATEFL Young Learners and Teenagers Special Interest Group. He has 20 years' experience as a teacher, academic manager, educational consultant, teacher trainer and materials developer and his specialist interests include bespoke YL teacher development, YL ELT materials writing and TEYL inclusive practices. David has been delivering Cambridge Delta Modules 2 and 3 training courses with candidates who teach YLs specifically for the past decade. He also trained on the former Cambridge CELTYL and YL Extension to CELTA awards for over a decade is an external assessor for Delta Module 2 and CELTA. You can contact David at [yltsig@iatefl.org](mailto:yltsig@iatefl.org)

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