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Erasmus+



Ubiquitous disadvantage!

by Andrew Wright, I.L.I. International Languages Institute Ltd, Hungary

I.L.I. International Languages Institute Ltd., led by Julianna Dudás organised a final dissemination a one-day international conference as a closing event of their 2-year-long **Erasmus+ K1 Mobility project** during which 5 I.L.I. colleagues attended teacher training courses in the EU on the theme of latest ICT developments in ELT and how to help 'disadvantaged students', learners in heterogeneous groups, how to retain learners in education, etc. The mini conference was held at I.L.I. International Languages Institute, Gödöllő, Hungary on Saturday December 10, 2016.

I.L.I.'s Erasmus+ project members: **Zsuzsanna Gárdosné, Annamaria Gellai, Agnes Sebestyén, Judit Tallaromné and Julianna Dudás** gave their presentations, hand-on workshops on the professional topics relevant to the project as well as introduction of Erasmus+ funding in general.

Alan Maley, David A. Hill and I (Andrew Wright) were invited by Julia to lead a one hour forum on the subject of disadvantage to wind up the work of the day.

Roland Straub from Babel Centre language Training Centre, Timisoara, Romania was also invited as a quest trainer-speaker on latest ICT methods in EFL, Google hangouts and online teaching, Google apps, etc.

Here are some notes from the session:

What is disadvantage and who is disadvantaged?

Doesn't everyone have disadvantages affecting their learning a new language?

The guests shared their personal experience, views on the topic: Alan described how he took the crucial 11 plus intelligence test without having any idea what it was for and having never done one before. He failed it and was sent to a school for children judged not to be suitable for academic study. (Don't worry about him! He managed to climb through the eye of a needle and went to Cambridge University). He certainly experienced serious disadvantages as a child.

David described how he attended a primary school where his parents were teachers and to show that they were not biased towards him they never acknowledged his achievements and punished him twice over for any deviationary behaviour. To say the least he spent many years feeling he could be of no real value to anyone.

I was trained by my father to pass the 11 plus intelligence test and went to a top grammar school. In the grammar school they found that I was not intelligent at all and they put me at the bottom of the school. I was seriously disadvantaged because my optimal way of learning did not coincide with the teachers' way of teaching. I was disadvantaged because of this and failed my public examinations at the age of sixteen, in English.

Our conclusion was that many people have disadvantages but in common to them all will be their **essential humanity: need to relate socially, need to have self-respect, need to link emotion and cognition, need for opportunity and respect for creativity, investigation, hypothesising.**

What can help the disadvantaged?

Alan went on to talk about some of the approaches and activities which he had found to be relevant to many disadvantaged as well as advantaged students. From the activities he has worked on for many years he chose the writing of **poetry by students**, even students with very limited skills in the foreign language. He described the satisfaction students have in writing real poetry often with an extremely narrow compass of language.

David demonstrated one simple way of helping all students to find a **personal relationship** with what would probably otherwise remain an impersonal experience of the text book. We all drew a **particular tree** which we remembered as being important in our lives. We talked about the tree we had chosen to draw with our neighbour. Within a few minutes our minds were focussed on our individual experience of 'trees'. With our minds full of 'tree caring', David then asked us to open our text books at the unit whose content was 'trees'. **All students benefit from being able to relate new language items to their personal experience rather than being expected to attach 'new language' to flimsy, insubstantial, impersonal memory.**

And my idea? Business people need and use stories as much as children. **Stories are fundamental to being human.** Stories have been used in language teaching for hundreds of years. True! But!

Stories are so often used to test reading comprehension or to introduce a new grammatical point. Alan and David both offered ideas for activities which students can relate to as whole people in such a way that they can use and learn language as students. And stories offer such an opportunity as well. Business people must transact their business deals but business people also know that it is much better for everyone if they can relate on a personal level...and what better way than through stories...personal, factual stories or short entertaining stories, for example, urban legends. In order to be able to tell an urban legend well you must tell it several times. What more does a language teacher want!

A general bag of activities to engage the disadvantaged

We only had one hour altogether! Not much! But we did find time to refer to some of the other ways of engaging the 'whole student' rather than just feeding the 'language student'. Our theme was that if we can engage the whole student then we engage the whole potential of the student and he or she can experience the language and not merely study it.

Other paths to walk on? **Music and rhythm.** Making use of the expressive **potential of the human voice. Drama, including masks and puppets. Story making** and not only story reading...and **publishing the stories** so they are not

written for the teacher to mark but for the student to offer to the ‘world’ through print or through web sites.

The wonderful **internet** now offers an Ali Baba cave of wealth of raw material. What it does not offer so much are ideas on engaging with the material in such a way as to engage the whole person with language development almost as a bi-product of the engagement.

During the decades 1970 to 2010 there was a flowering of ideas for engaging the whole student. These ideas touched on briefly by Alan, David and me are to be found in that other **Ali Baba cave: teacher resource books.**

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Author profiles:

Julianna Dudás, Alan Maley, David A.Hill and Andrew Wright are all members of IATEFL C Group founded to promote **creativity in language teaching.**

Julianna is the director of the ILI International Languages Institute in Hungary and she has also contributed to teacher training in twenty countries.

Alan worked for the British Council for many years particularly in China and India and he has written many classic books for language teachers, including, The Inward Ear, Drama Techniques for Teachers, etc.

David worked for the British Council in Italy for many years. He has written about one hundred books: for teachers and for students. He is also a poet, a blues singer and an expert on Art Nouveau.

Andrew has been an author, illustrator, teacher trainer and storyteller all his life. His books include ‘Five Minute Activities’ with Penny Ur and ‘Writing Stories’ with David A. Hill, “Storytelling with Children”, “Creating Stories with Children”, etc.