

# FELT Newsletter

The Forum for English Language Teachers

8 Darley Court, Palatine Square, Arbour Hill, Dublin 7.

## CHAIRMAN'S ADDRESS

### New Image for NATEFLI

**N**ATEFLI is dead (well, moribund, anyway). Long live **FELT!**

In recent years NATEFLI has lost its way. Fewer people turned up to fewer meetings, fewer decisions were made and ultimately not many people knew what we were there for. Past 'political' problems were still hanging over us and in fact, had it not been for Ciarán's rather lively and forthright presence on the ACELS board representing NATEFLI (and by extension all ELT practitioners) the organisation may well simply have gone under.

However, teachers are not to be abandoned! The committee, which was somewhat cobbled together 18 months ago, lay doggo for a while, taking stock of the situation, and finally decided that something must be done. Some kind of teacher support organisation is definitely necessary, as many classroom teachers feel quite isolated within the cocoon of their own schools, and anyway, Ciarán was determined to have a constituency to represent in his ACELS seat!

And so, faithful friends, FELT was born, phoenix-like, from the embers of NATEFLI.

FELT aims to provide a **Forum for English Language Teachers** – a place where they can debate the issues of the day, from teaching methods to paying for pensions, from getting Spanish students to finish their words to getting Asian students to speak at all ... and most importantly, a place where ideas can be exchanged and techniques can be shared. In the past, a lot of emphasis has been placed on the idea of the caring, sharing classroom – the philosophy of FELT involves caring and sharing in the teachers' room, and our mission statement is 'by the teacher, for the teacher'. The focus is on the practical aspects of the EL teacher's life – all of them!

When we don't have any wisdom to impart, we will still offer each other the opportunity to get together and let off steam in a sympathetic (and suitably alcohol-fuelled) environment.

At the moment the Committee consists of the Chairman, Gronia de Verdon Cooney; Ciarán McCarthy, Vice-Chairman and ambassador to ACELS; Margaret Leahy, western correspondent; Ciara O'Donovan, Roisin O'Connor and Sam Holman. We need somebody from Cork or Limerick to be our southern correspondent, and someone in or near Dublin who can handle finances.

And so, dear readers, let me urge you to put some of that Christmas loot to good use and join up straight away. The annual subscription is a mere £10, and we're planning the next few gatherings even as I write. If you have any suggestions for topics you would like us to discuss at a meeting, or ideas for workshops which you or a colleague would like to lead, please make a note on your membership form. And please feel free to photocopy the form and pass it around among your colleagues – the more members we have, the more ideas go into the melting pot.

Finally it is my pleasure to wish everyone a happy, productive and very 'feeling' new year!

Gronia de Verdon Cooney  
FELT Chairman

## IN BRIEF

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## FELT'S FIRST MEETING

### English Through Song

REPORT ON THE WORKSHOP HELD IN THE TEACHERS' CLUB

ON SATURDAY 5<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 1998

**T**he first workshop of the Forum was 'English through Song', led by Judith Silver. Judith has taught EFL/ESL in England and abroad for many years, and is also a professional musician, writing and performing her own material. Last year she spent some time working with summer school students and teachers around Britain, and the previous year she published a song-based 'language pack' containing 6 of her own songs with lyrics, complete lesson plans and photocopyable activities.

During the workshop, we concentrated on building an entire lesson around a song, rather than using it simply as a warmer or filler. We worked together to complete lists of listening, speaking, reading and writing activity types which could be used as a framework with many different songs. It was also pointed out that while 'traditional' grammar can be focused on (tenses, conditionals, etc.) most songs also contain whole useful phrases – lexical chunks – which can usefully be taught to students, particularly at lower levels.

Judith then gave us a long list of songs which are 'useful', and we discussed the various activities which could be linked to them. These included the familiar gap-fills, Cloze, dictation, jigsaw reading and listening, error correction, comprehension questions and pronunciation. We also mentioned ordering and sorting activities such as matching pictures to parts of the song. For more unusual suggestions we took a step back from the song itself and came up with a range of more inferential activities such as role-playing and incidents from the song, writing letters from one character in the song to another, describing the background – what happened 'before the song', and writing newspaper articles

about the events of the song or what happened next. Furthermore, the song-based lesson can be extended to include video/MTV, authentic material related to the song or the theme, rewriting the words to reflect another point of view, or writing a poem with a similar theme... and this list is by no means exhaustive!

We decided that the characteristics of a 'good song' are that it should be popular with the students (preferably in the charts to engage teenagers), have clear words, and if possible have a strong message or story line. In fact, country and western music may be a vast, under-used resource just waiting to be tapped by the enterprising teacher. (*Oh God! - Ed.*)

In the second part of the session, Theresa Murphy and Ann Collins took us through their experience of developing new materials and trying to get them published. Theresa is the co-ordinator of the Materials Development group which meets fairly regularly in ACELS under the kindly eye of Jim Ferguson. The group has about 7 members who collect material on agreed topics and then work together to devise activities around them. At the moment they have materials on food and drink (always a popular topic), religion (!), the Irish abroad, foreigners in Dublin ... and other topics.

These materials are kept in the ACELS office and arrangements are in hand to make them generally available to interested TEFLers.

Ann then told us of the frustrations involved when publishers think your pet materials are interesting, and then drag their heels about getting you into print. Ann has been waiting nearly a year for a definitive decision from CUP on her literature-based materials for advanced learners – she's hoping that 1999 will be bringing her good news.

Ann's experiences led to a general discussion about the possibilities of publication – and the attendant difficulties – but the session ended on an optimistic note, with participants feeling that there IS some point in making the effort to produce more home-based materials for the Irish market.

The Forum then adjourned, in time-honoured fashion, to the bar for further inspired conversation.

**Gronia de Verdon Cooney**

## Hard Words

### Anodyne

*adj.* Dull, boring, bland, having anaesthetic quality.

## NEW LEGISLATION

# The Organisation of Working Time Act

## A LAYMAN'S INTERPRETATION

A new and very exciting piece of legislation was enacted on April 1 1998. It does away with most of the silly stuff inherent in the older legislation. Do you know your rights? Take a look below - you might be quite surprised to what you are entitled to as an employee under this act... and remember, if you do some work somewhere, you are an employee (unless you are a consultant... and you're not 'cos you're an EFL teacher - the old invoice for your pay thing just won't stand up any more). Here are the main details:

### Entitlement to Annual Leave

The transitional provisions of the Act provide that an employee is entitled during the leave year 1/4/98 to 31/5/99 and on a normal annual basis thereafter:

- to 3 working weeks and 3 days in this year in which he works 1,365 hours for the same employer or
- to one- third of a working week for each month in the leave year in which he works at least 117 hours or
- 7.2% of the hours he works in the leave year (but subject to a maximum of 3 working weeks and 3 days) or
- whichever is the greater.

If a teacher provides the school with a doctor's certificate for a day of his annual leave for which he is ill then that day is not counted as part of his annual leave. A teacher who has worked more than 8 months during the leave year 1/4/98 to 31/5/99 is entitled an unbroken period of 2 weeks, unless otherwise agreed with the employer.

### Times and Pay for Annual Leave

The school may determine the times at which annual leave is taken, having regard to work requirements. It is **equally required** to take into account the teacher's need to reconcile work and any family responsibilities, and also the opportunities for rest and recreation available to the teacher. The leave must be granted within the leave year to which it relates, or the teacher may consent to the leave being granted within 6 months of the end of the leave year.

### Public Holidays

Subject to a teacher having worked for a school for at least 40 hours during the period of 5 weeks ending on the day before that public holiday the teacher will be entitled to

a public holiday entitlement. The school may opt, in relation to a public holiday, to give the teacher:

- a paid day off on that day,
- a paid off within a month of that day
- an extra day annual leave or
- an extra days pay

A teacher may not later than 21 days before the public holiday request the school to decide which option it is opting for, and is entitled to notification of a decision 14 days before the public holiday. Failing notification the teacher shall be entitled to a paid day off or if already entitled to a paid day off then to an extra days pay.

### Sunday Work

If a teacher, or other EFL staff member, is required to work on a Sunday (and this has not been taken into account in his/her pay) the teacher shall be compensated:

- by the payment of a sum which is reasonable having regard to all the circumstances
- by increasing the rate of pay by an amount which is reasonable having regard to all the circumstances
- by granting such paid time off by an amount which is reasonable having regard to all the circumstances
- by a combination of 2 of the above

### Compensation on the cessation of employment

Where employment ceases and the whole or any portion of annual leave remains then the teacher shall be paid an amount equal to the pay calculated at the normal weekly rate or a rate proportionate thereto. Where employment ceases during a week ending the day before a bank holiday, and the teacher has worked for his school during the 4 weeks preceding that week, the teacher is entitled to an additional days pay as his public holiday entitlement.

## So, in summary...

- You are entitled to paid holidays, or holiday pay for any time you work.
- If you get sick while on holidays and have a doctor's letter, you are deemed to be on a sick day, not a holiday, so you get another paid day off.
- Your school must take into account your family situation when granting holidays.
- If you've worked 40 hours in the 5 weeks before a public holiday, you're entitled to a paid day off that day, or a paid day off another day, money instead or a paid day off added to your holidays.
- If you ask at least 3 weeks before a public holiday, your boss has one week to tell which of the above you will have.
- Any refusal to give this holiday pay is illegal. You can approach the Rights Commissioner of the Labour Relations Commission (01-6609662) for a free judgement in the matter.

## CALL FOR MATERIALS

## URGENT !!!

I hope you have enjoyed reading this first FELT newsletter of 1999. It has been put together by an army of EFL teachers - so that we can provide a forum for the issues that concern us. The FELT motto is "By the teacher, for the teacher."

It is important to realise that this newsletters can only continue with your help and support, so please join FELT if you haven't already for only £10. You can photocopy the application form enclosed and pass it around to your colleagues.

This first edition is a little wordy and a bit grey. **We urgently need submissions for this newsletter** - papers, class plans, jokes, cartoons, materials, anecdotes, news, views or anything you like. These columns are for ELT practitioners like you. Let us know what you would like to see in future editions.

## INDUSTRY NEWS &amp; COMMENT

RELSA & MEI  
to Merge?

**T**alks are underway between RELSA (the Recognised English Language Schools Association) and MEI (Marketing English in Ireland), the Bord Fáilte product marketing group for EFL.

This merger has been on the cards for several years and this is not the first time the two groups have had talks on the subject. RELSA and MEI have a joint office in Dublin run by the manager Ms. Jaci Joyce.

Ireland is the largest EFL provider in the world per capita population, and the phenomenal growth seen in the last few years is linked by many, directly or indirectly, to the activities of MEI at language travel fairs around the world. RELSA's activities are little known outside Ireland, but since opening a full-time office its reputation has grown enormously.

Fears have been expressed by smaller RELSA only schools, especially in the summer school sector, that a merger with the more expensive MEI could see their annual subs soar with little in return.

The moves towards a merger are a positive move for EFL in Ireland, which is increasingly being seen abroad as a quality language learning destination. This quality image can only be maintained by higher academic standards within schools, brought about by greater investment in teachers. Those schools that wish to survive in today's competitive markets must exceed the ACELS regulation that requires on-going professional development for teachers.

## ACELS REPORT

The Advisory  
Council for English  
Language Schools  
Ltd.ANNUAL REPORT  
1998

## Introduction

It is now three and a half years since ACELS was reconstituted in April 1995 with its extended remit. During this time we have consolidated the work carried out on the administration of the Inspection/Recognition Scheme on behalf of the Department of Education and Science. Progress has been made in undertaking the additional functions laid down in our remit, namely:

- to control standards in teacher training, both initial and in-career for EFL teachers in Ireland
- to ensure the establishment of appropriate tests for EFL students and to control standards in the certification of their performance
- to promote an Irish cultural dimension in EFL courses, particularly in the textbooks used in schools.

In order for Ireland to compete successfully on the international scene, it is important that regulations and standards are in place to meet the expectations of students and their agents and sponsors and that the Inspection Scheme gives a guarantee of quality assurance for all courses offered.

It is equally important for Ireland to forge an identity of its own through the establishment of Irish course materials and examinations and accredited teacher training courses and qualifications. We believe that a great deal has been accomplished to date, yet much remains to be done.

New Inspection /  
Recognition Scheme

ACELS was set up by the Department of Education in the late 1960s to administer the Inspection/Recognition scheme and this continues to be our main function. The Scheme seeks to provide quality assurance for all EFL students by monitoring standards in recognised schools.

As the number of students travelling to English speaking countries to undertake language training has increased

dramatically over the past few years, national accreditation schemes have been set up with government backing to regulate and support EFL industries which are reputedly worth over £2 billion world-wide. As in other service industries, the guarantee of quality, customer care and value for money are critical success factors and the role of regulatory bodies such as ACELS is fundamental in protecting the interests of English language students and in ensuring that national industries are in a position to compete effectively.

In order to support the quality initiatives undertaken by EFL schools and to enhance the reputation of EFL in Ireland, we have over the last eighteen months been working towards a new model Inspection scheme to be introduced in 1999. The principal aims of this Scheme are to provide a guarantee of quality service to all students, their agents and sponsors, and to offer schools advice and support in developing and improving the services they provide.

The criteria and procedures for inspection have been drawn up based on best practice from around the world and, through a series of six workshops held around the country, been amply debated with school owners and directors. Teachers' views have been sought during the piloting process and **further discussions with teachers will be arranged during the next few months.**

In the past year, four pilots have been conducted in Dublin, Galway and Cork and these have been very beneficial in fine-tuning the inspection process. Details of two elements which will be central to the new model - the school self-assessment and the student focus group - are still to be finalised.

In order to operate the new model inspection scheme effectively, the Inspector Panel will need to be increased from its present two members to eight and training provided for all. In May and June of this year, a 16 hour module on Inspector Training, open to present and potential inspectors and teachers wishing to undertake professional development, was held in Dublin, Limerick and Cork with a total of 31 participants. Phases 2 and 3 of Inspector Training will be held in October and December. Phase 2 will be open to all participants, while phase 3 will be limited to those chosen to join the Inspection Panel. Of the 31 participants, 16 have expressed a wish to be considered for the Panel.

The new criteria and procedures contained in the new model Inspection scheme will have implications for the Regulations Governing the Recognition of Schools and Schedule of Minimum Standards and certain modifications will be necessary. Furthermore, as the Regulations and Minimum Standards have undergone only slight modifications since they were originally drawn up, now

might be an opportune time to review them completely in the light of current issues and developments affecting the Irish EFL context. I would propose, therefore, the setting up of a sub-committee to review the Regulations and Minimum Standards.

The administration and implementation of the Inspection Scheme account for over 80% of ACELS annual budget of £112,000 (£86,000 grant allocation from the Department of Education and Science plus £26,000 in annual fees from schools). The time and financial resources that we have been able to devote to the other functions included in our remit following the reconstitution of ACELS in 1995 (see following sections) are extremely limited.

In addition, with the introduction of the new Inspection Scheme, we will incur a considerably greater administrative and financial burden. The proposals for the New Model Inspection Scheme include a provision for an Inspection fee, to be levied following the full inspection of a school, which, in normal circumstances would take place every three years in accordance with the regulations.

I would propose that the Board provide guidelines for the aforementioned sub-committee to present recommendations on the inspection fee and on a restructuring of annual fees to increase income from the schools in order to defray some of the costs incurred in administering the Inspection/Recognition Scheme.

## TEFL Accreditation Scheme

Accreditation of pre-and-in-service teacher training courses has become a major issue in the EFL world and there is widespread recognition that measures need to be taken to regulate the wide variety of courses on offer in the interests of trainees, quality course providers, employers and students. In Britain, reports have been commissioned by the British Council and the British Association of TESOL Qualifying Institutions (BATQUI) in an attempt to establish guidelines for the regulation of TEFL courses.

In Ireland, where we do not have validation bodies with the international standing and prestige of the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES) and Trinity College London, it is imperative that we strive towards a TEFL Accreditation Scheme that will guarantee high quality teacher training programmes that will equip teachers to work both in Ireland and overseas. This will serve to enhance the reputation of Ireland not only as a provider of quality pre-and-in service TEFL courses but also of general and specific English language programmes. It is undeniable that our reputation on the

international scene has been seriously damaged by the proliferation of poor quality courses on offer here and those recognised schools that have endeavoured to provide quality TEFL courses are looking to ACELS to regulate and monitor teacher training provision in the interests of the Irish EFL industry in general.

Under the guidance of the Advisory Panel, plans for a TEFL Accreditation Scheme are being put in place. The aims and objectives of the scheme are:

- to establish criteria and procedures, based on 'best practice', that will guarantee a high quality of service in the provision of TEFL courses in Ireland
- to enhance the reputation of course providers and Ireland as a centre of excellence for EFL teacher training
- to give on-going support and advice to accredited providers
- to provide quality assurance for:
  - a) trainees seeking EFL employment in Ireland and overseas;
  - b) EFL organisations in Ireland;
  - c) EFL schools, recruitment agencies and educational institutions overseas;
  - d) EFL students at home and abroad.

### Scheme Components

It is proposed that the scheme consist of 3 'strands': *(This area is still under discussion and is likely to change. We would welcome your views on this for the newsletter - Ed.)*

- TEFL Certificate (pre-service teacher training)
- TEFL Diploma (in-service training for academic management)
- TEFL Certificate for non-native overseas teachers

Accreditation for the TEFL Certificate and TEFL Certificate for Junior Summer Schools should be in place by the year 2000, *(Looks like 2001 now - Ed.)* following which preparations would begin for the introduction of the TEFL Diploma and Certificate for Overseas Teachers.

In order to set the TEFL Accreditation Scheme in motion, proposals will need to be drafted on:

1. the composition and terms of reference of an Accreditation Committee/Teacher Training Board which will report and make recommendations to the ACELS Board of Directors on the management and policy of all aspects of the Scheme and which will be responsible for the development, promotion, implementation and monitoring of the Scheme;

2. the eligibility of schools/institutions to provide courses under the Scheme;
3. the appointment and training of a panel of moderators/inspectors;
4. the criteria and procedures for moderation/inspection of each of the 4 'strands' to include:

- selection of candidates - number of hours devoted to face-to-face tuition, pre-course reading and tasks, assignments, teaching practice and class observation
- curriculum and learning outcomes
- academic resources
- assessment and certification
- trainer requirements (qualifications, experience).

Whilst we recognise the urgency required in setting up the TEFL Accreditation Scheme, we have been unable to make much headway because of the demands made by the administration of the Inspection/Recognition Scheme and the preparation for the New Model Scheme which must remain our priority. The time and resources required to bring the New Model on stream - piloting, further training of inspectors, redrafting Regulations, Schedule of Minimum Standards etc., mean that without additional financial and human resources, we cannot envisage the TEFL Accreditation Scheme being implemented in the near future.

## Language Testing Project

The Testing Group was set up in early 1996 with the following aims and objectives:

- to develop Irish EFL exams based on best practice and current thinking on language testing theory and practice
- to enhance the prestige and identity of Irish EFL through the provision of quality examinations offered at a national and subsequently international level
- to provide examinations that meet the specific needs of students coming to Ireland
- to reduce the dependence on UK-based Examination Boards
- to generate income for the Irish EFL industry

It is estimated that over 5,000 EFL students per year sit examinations from Examination Boards located mainly in the UK -

- The University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES) has over 1,000 candidates per year

- in Ireland. UCLES is the largest and most reputable Board in the world, and many students come to Ireland specifically to prepare for one of their suite of exams which are internationally recognised.
- Trinity College London tests between 3,000 and 4,000 Junior students, mainly in the summer months. These exams are cheap and easy to administer, but have come under increasing criticism from schools who submit candidates.
- Between 500 and 1,000 candidates sit exams offered by Boards such as Pitman, TOEIC, London Chamber of Commerce and Industry which are more geared to English for Specific Purposes, and in particular Business English.

Most schools in Ireland have an end-of-course test for their students with an in-house certificate awarded. In a questionnaire circulated to schools in 1996, 60 stated that they would be interested in presenting candidates for an Irish-based EFL exam. In addition, many of those schools which present candidates for the Trinity College London exams, would be favourably disposed towards an Irish alternative.

A dedicated group of six EFL directors and teachers have been working on the development of the Test of Interactive English (TIE) over the past two years, meeting on a fortnightly basis. Although group members receive no remuneration for this work, the Board of Directors agreed to a budget of £1,000 per annum, to pay two members of the group to undertake additional work involved in the administration of the project.

Following the drawing up of the test format and provisional assessment criteria, over 100 pilot tests have been carried out. Consultants Richard West (University of Manchester) and Dave Allan (Norwich Institute of Language Education), who are leading international experts in the area of language testing, have been advising the group on a regular basis.

The work to date has also been reviewed by testing experts from UCLES and all are agreed that TIE is a highly innovative exam which meets the requirements of best practice and market demand.

According to the original schedule for test development drawn up in October 1996, the first serial administration of the TIE should have taken place in the Summer of 1998. Despite the enormous effort of the group members, we are a year behind schedule and the next phase of preparation, to include final elaboration of written and oral descriptors, preparation of a training manual and video for assessors, assessor training and preparation of publicity material, will be extremely time-consuming.

Unless considerable extra funding can be granted to the Testing Project, it will be some time before TIE can be launched.

## Materials Development Project

Over 90% of EFL course and supplementary material used in Irish schools emanates from British publishers and much of this material does not meet the needs, interests and expectations of students coming to Ireland to study EFL. In order to remedy this situation, the Materials Development Group was formed in early 1997 with the following objectives:

- to reduce the dependence on coursebooks and resource material published in the UK;
- to produce in-class materials that meet the needs of students coming to Ireland;
- to encourage the design of courses and produce supporting materials for components on Irish literature, culture and history;
- to produce materials to support afternoon social/cultural activities, so that these activities become an integral part of the language programme;
- to produce materials and coursebooks to prepare students for the Test of Interactive English (TIE);
- to provide training and support for potential authors.

The Materials Development Group, made up of 10 EFL teachers meets every six weeks and has been producing materials on themes and topics with an Irish cultural dimension. Individuals and sub-groups have been developing materials in their own specific areas of interest and presenting these at the group sessions. One member of the group is responsible for the organisation of a bank of materials in the ACELS Resource Room and circulating copies to those schools involved in the project.

## Training and Development

The training and development initiatives that we have undertaken since the ACELS reconstitution in 1995 have continued, albeit on a smaller scale. Five workshops have been programmed in 1998:

- Designing Summer Courses for Junior students
- Design and content for pre-service TEFL Courses
- Materials Development for General and Specific Adult Courses
- The Language Awareness Component in TEFL Courses
- EFL Total Quality Management (as part of Inspector Training module)

In 1997 we organised two very successful international conferences -

Materials Development Association (MATSDA) Conference, attended by 107 delegates from over 20 countries and the ELT Authors' Conference with over 150 participants. It is planned to organise these conferences every two years and we are preparing for the 1999 MATSDA conference in January and the Authors' conference in May.

## The Irish EFL Industry

In 1998, there are 170 EFL centres recognised by the Department of Education and Science, of which 67 are year-round schools and the remainder summer centres. It is estimated that the growth in student numbers since 1995 has been of the order of 7% per annum and that in 1997, 150,000 students came to Ireland to undertake English language programmes, thereby contributing over £200 million to the Irish economy.

Projections for 1998 point to an increase of between 10 and 15% in student numbers. These estimates are all the more impressive as our main competitors, the UK, Australia and the US are forecasting falls in student numbers of 10, 40 and 30% respectively. Of the main EFL destinations - UK, Ireland, US, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, South Africa and Malta - only Ireland and Malta have experienced an increase in demand in 1998.

While it is undeniable that our competitors have been severely hit by the financial crises of South East Asia and that the UK in particular has been affected by the high rate of sterling, Ireland's growing reputation for good quality EFL programmes has been the main factor contributing to the increase in student numbers. Growing international interest in Ireland and her culture and the highly effective marketing initiatives undertaken by Marketing English in Ireland (MEI) and individual schools have contributed to our success.

This success has not been without its problems. Most of the increase in student numbers has taken place in the peak months of July and August and this has put tremendous strain on the summer schools in particular to recruit qualified teachers and find adequate host families. The host family situation should be of particular concern to ACELS and the industry in general, as Irish hospitality and the quality of the host families have been one of our major selling points.

The successful efforts of MEI and individual schools in attracting students from new destinations - China and the Pacific Rim, Russia and the former Soviet Republics, Eastern Europe and South America - have brought another problem in their train, namely the granting of visas to enter Ireland. Following industry concern at the high number of visa application refusals, three meetings have been held this year involving representation from the Departments of Justice and Foreign Affairs, Bord Fáilte Éireann, Immigration Officials, MEI, RELSA, the International Education

Board of Ireland (IEBI) and ACELS. Although considerable progress has been made at these meetings, some school owners and directors continue to express their unhappiness that so much business is being lost through delays or refusals in issuing visas.

A final problem which will have serious implications for the Irish EFL industry is that, with the growing reputation of Ireland as an EFL provider and the growing interest shown by agents, educational consultants and sponsors in sending their students here, multi-national organisations have begun to set up operations here. Some, including the world's largest language course provider, have over many years been bringing students to Ireland for EFL courses in the summer months and have operated outside the Recognition system, often using unqualified teachers and offering host families large numbers of students, irrespective of their nationalities.

Recognised schools, which can place a maximum of 3 students of differing nationalities with host families in accordance with the Regulations, are losing host families, attracted by the lack of restrictions imposed

by non-recognised organisations. Recent developments, however, have seen the arrival of five of the world's largest EFL organisations with bases in the UK, the US and Japan. These organisations have set up year-round schools and have begun the process of application for recognition from the Department of Education and Science. Whilst the quality of the services of these organisations is not in doubt, it is incumbent on the Irish EFL industry to plan strategy in order to encounter what some believe to be a serious threat.

## Conclusion

It is our firm belief that the Irish EFL industry has reached a critical juncture in its development. Interest from agents, educational consultants and sponsors has never been higher and rates of growth in student numbers has been very impressive, especially when compared to those of our competitors. Our reputation for providing value for money in all aspects of junior summer programmes has been augmented by the expertise of our adult year-round schools in providing a wide range of specific tailor-made courses.

There are, however, danger signals appearing, which, if ignored, will be to our cost. Student numbers in the peak summer months have increased dramatically whilst, in the view of many, the number of good host families willing to take young students has decreased as a result of the Celtic Tiger phenomenon. Schools in this sector will need to re-assess their strategy and consider whether the traditional policy of low cost- low yield is the most appropriate given the changing circumstances. Now that many of the towns and cities in which

summer schools operate have reached, or are close to, saturation point, a strategy of pursuing higher yield business, with the emphasis on quality and value for money rather than competition on price alone, needs to be considered. Otherwise we risk becoming victims of our own success and reports from agents, both old and new, expressing concern about the direction that our industry is taking, must be heeded in the interests of our long-term success. Host family provision and qualified teacher recruitment are far less problematical for the year-round schools offering courses for adult students. These schools are to be congratulated on the progress they have made in attracting students for their general and specific courses. This adult sector is fiercely competitive and the reputation we are gaining for good quality courses bodes well for the future.

Although the Irish EFL industry has, through the hard work of individual schools and supporting agencies, come of age, we must beware of any complacency. The rules of competition are changing dramatically and the emergence of multi-national organisations and corporate giants entering the 'language industry' must be confronted. Other EFL destinations are gearing themselves for the new millennium when competition for English language students will certainly hot up. The British Council with its considerable financial resources and global network of offices and centres in over 70 countries provides a support infrastructure for their recognised schools that we cannot match.

Multi-million pound Australian government support to their EFL industry has enabled their schools to offer a high quality product and to diversify beyond their traditional S.E. Asian markets into European markets. The down-turn in student numbers to the United States, caused by the financial crises in S.E. Asia, will inevitably lead to a greater push from American EFL organisations to attract students from Europe.

Since the reconstitution of ACELS in April 1995 we have endeavoured to build on the work carried out since the inception of ACELS in the 1960s in the area of EFL school accreditation. We are fully aware that the success of the Irish EFL industry will depend on quality assurance and value for money and believe that the New Model Inspection Scheme based on Regulations and Minimum Standards that meet the requirements of best practice from around the world will place the Irish EFL industry in a highly competitive position. Allied to this, we believe that we have an important role to play in supporting schools through programmes of training and development for everyone involved in the industry.

The additional functions given to ACELS following the reconstitution in 1995 regulating and monitoring of EFL teacher training, developing tests for students coming to Ireland and designing materials with an Irish cultural dimension

- are of fundamental importance if Ireland is to develop an image and identity of its own, rather than being considered an adjunct of British EFL. The challenge to break away from the domination of British teacher training validation bodies, examination boards and publishing houses is an enormous one, and although we will never have the multi million pound resources enjoyed by these institutions, we must strive in the long-term interests of Irish EFL to carve out an independent image and identity of Ireland where students come to study through Irish produced materials in preparation for Irish exams with teachers with reputable Irish TEFL training and qualifications.

This vision of Irish EFL is shared by those members of the Advisory Panel and Academic Committee who give freely of their time and expertise and to whom we are extremely grateful. We are also indebted to those dedicated teachers and directors who have put in so much of their free time to working on the Testing and Materials Development Projects. We appreciate the support and guidance of the Board of Directors, both past and present, and we are grateful to them all for helping us to chart the new and challenging course before us.

The staff of ACELS however have reached the point where the strain being put on human and financial resources is no longer feasible. Because of the priority which must be given to the Inspection/Recognition Scheme, which is our central function, and the fundamental changes which are being brought about in the administration and implementation of the Scheme, we will have very little time during the final months of 1998 and early months of 1999 to devote to the other parts of our remit. If the TEFL Accreditation Scheme and the Testing and Materials Development Projects are to come to fruition in the near future, and we believe that in the interests of Irish EFL they must, then additional personnel and financial resources must be put at our disposal.

**Jim Ferguson**

**Managing Director, ACELS**

## MATSDA 1999

The second Materials Developments Association Conference entitled *Constraints and Creativity*, took place in Blackrock, Co. Dublin, on January 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> last, and was attended by about 80 delegates.

Among the Irish speakers were Trisha McKinny (CES), David Maguire (ECI), Anne Collins (ISC), Susan Kennedy (LCI) and Teresa Murphy (CES).

The next issue of the FELT newsletter will contain reports and discussion of the conference, as well as a preview of the ELT Authors' Conference at Easter.

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

## Learner Training for Learner Autonomy on Summer Language Courses

by Ciarán McCarthy

*I read, and I forget.  
I see, and I believe.  
I do, and I understand.  
(Confucius)*

### Introduction

In this paper I intend to briefly introduce the reader to the notions of **Learner Training** and **Learner Autonomy**, and to consider the relationship between the two. Further, I hope to make some practical suggestions as to how training might be woven into a typical short-stay summer language programme, in the hope that it might improve the effectiveness of the students' learning while on that course, and perhaps more importantly, their continued learning after that course. This, I will argue, can be done in three simple ways - first, by giving explicit instruction to the learner, second, by allowing the learner to follow his or her ideas through in class, and, third, by providing the learner with opportunities outside the classroom, by way of the social programme, extracurricular activities, or anything else that the learner may feel is appropriate. Training is appropriate in most any situation because it gives the learner the tools to learn the language more effectively, those same tools that are, or at least can be, used by the autonomous learner. Of course, autonomy is quite possible without training, and training certainly does not entail autonomy - they exist in a relationship which is unsteady, yet fruitful when dynamic.

### Learner Autonomy

Learner autonomy is "a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision making, and independent action" (Little 1991:4). Even in this simple definition it is clear that "autonomy" is not any one specific thing - it is a capacity, and like any other capacity, it can grow with practice, or be lost through inactivity. McGarry (1995: 1) notes that "The majority of students are still being taught in ways which promote dependence and leave them ill-equipped to apply their school-learned knowledge and skills to the world beyond the classroom", and from this we may recognise that the role of the teacher in promoting autonomy may be central to its success. It is not true, however, to say that the non-autonomous classroom is devoid of any relationship with the outside world; on the contrary, it is a place where skills and capacities may be developed and tried out, before, and during, contact with the world beyond.

McGarry concisely sums up the essential arguments for autonomy:

"Students who are encouraged to take responsibility for their own work, by being given some control over what, how and when they learn, are more likely to be able to set realistic goals, plan programmes of work, develop strategies for coping with new and unforeseen situations, evaluate and assess their own work and, generally, to learn how to learn from their own successes and failures in ways which will help them to be more efficient learners in the future". (Ibid.)

This is also true in the case of EFL students visiting an English speaking country, as, in a sense, autonomy is thrust upon them. In choosing to come to a country and undergo an intensive language programme, the learners are committing themselves to the ultimate authentic experience. Not only will they study English in class, they will learn English by virtue of the fact that they will be forced to communicate through it on a daily basis - necessity being the mother of invention, the skills and capacities and strategies of the successful learner will be fostered by the communicative necessities of daily life.

Those that choose to ignore this opportunity, preferring, rather, to speak their mother tongue to their compatriots, rarely reap the greatest benefits of the experience. This is hardly surprising, as after all, autonomy in language learning is defined as success in language learning.

### Learner Training

It has been said that teaching is nothing more than showing someone that something is possible, and learning is merely discovering that something is possible. The objective of learner training is to improve the effectiveness of learning, and effective learning is part and parcel of autonomy. Training should be a course in learning how to learn, as Trim (1988: 3) quite rightly reminds us that:

"No school, or even university, can provide its pupils with all the knowledge and the skills they will need in their active adult lives. It is more important for a young person to have an understanding of himself or herself, an awareness of the environment and its workings, and to have learned how to think and how to learn".

Indeed, studies, such as Naiman *et al.*'s (1978) "The Good Language Learner", note that even the best of language learners varies significantly in the strategies he or she uses; even if all those studied were capable of using the same strategies, their personal preferences in language learning would still create differing emphases. Another important, though not surprising, finding of "The Good Language Learner" was that effective learners were actively engaged in the learning process. Dickinson (1992: 1) comments that:

"Effective learners are capable of identifying the learning objective currently being pursued by the teacher. They know what to learn and how to formulate their own learning objectives [...] and they restructure the teacher's objectives to suit their own changing needs. They are able to select and implement appropriate learning strategies, monitor their use of strategies and change them if necessary, and monitor the effectiveness of their learning. This is what is meant by engaging actively in the learning process: these are the kind of decisions effective learners take about their own learning".

This, of course is characteristic of the autonomous learner. It is also a description of some of the strategies that students can be trained to master.

### The Course

In this next part of the paper I intend to describe some of the concrete proposals that can be easily implemented on any short stay language course in an English speaking country, such as Ireland. First, though, I feel the reader should have a basic idea of how this imaginary school operates.

As is required by local regulations, class numbers are kept to a maximum of 15, though as a rule, they rarely rise above 12. Teaching hours on the normal course are from 9:25 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. and are split into four periods roughly equating to the four skills. There is a strong emphasis on functional use of language during these hours. In addition to this, students are strongly encouraged to attend study tutorials at least once a week; teachers are available during these hours to help the students in any way possible. These study hours are usually taken in the school library, though students are permitted to adjourn to a classroom if they require to work in groups for any reason. A modest self-access centre is also available, allowing students access to audio, video and computer materials, as well as a language laboratory - these are available from 8:00 a.m. until classes begin, and again after school hours until 6:00 p.m.

Clients enrolled in the intensive courses take an additional class after lunch two days per week, in ESP, translation, literature or some other area of interest. While not compulsory, a most popular activity among those enrolled in the school are the workshops, which are available each weekday in debating, art, drama, music and creative writing, amongst others things. The emphasis here is on having fun and relaxing while doing something meaningful through English.

The social programme includes excursions in the Dublin area on weekdays, and optionally to rural places like the Aran Islands or the Ring of Kerry at weekends. A large well-equipped sports hall, and tennis courts are also available each afternoon, as well as a number of football pitches. Each evening,

a café is open in the school and the families hosting the students are encouraged to come along and socialise with the students. Discos and theme parties are also organised on Friday nights.

### Explicit Instruction

Explicit instruction in various areas can be most beneficial to the students; a sense of learner autonomy as a capacity, as Little (1991: 4), above, suggested is a good starting point. I would propose one, or maybe, two sessions, as part of the afternoon workshops, in making the learners aware of the language acquisition process, and the ways of improving, facilitating and speeding it up. It is uncontroversial to assert that learners need this sort of meta-knowledge, and meta-language is, of course, a necessary part of understanding this explicit process, but in itself it has no pedagogical merit - it is merely a means of allowing students to understand what is going on - it is the first step on the road to critical reflection.

Needs analysis is the first concrete step to be taken, for it is only in setting realistic goals, that the learner may move forward with confidence. Many courses are available in learning how to learn, and each has its own good and bad points - the most important thing that anything of this nature must accomplish is to instil a sense of reflection into the learning process; see Willing (1989) for some useful ideas.

Concrete practical training in dictionary use and the phonetic alphabet also serves an important purpose - to empower the student. The term dictionary is not intended to signify a pocket bilingual dictionary, but a substantial learners' dictionary, such as the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary. They give the learner a sense that they can find out anything that they might want to, in the absence of someone to consult; this is just one type of independence.

The use of authentic materials is perhaps the most important target of this explicit learner training. The self-access materials available in the school, are modest in nature, and are easily equalled when the student returns home. Magazines such as Time, or Newsweek, are available all over the world; Bord Fáilte and many other organisations are willing to send out information packs to foreign students at no cost; even when back in their native countries, the students will be able to find no end of authentic materials if they know where to look - schools, universities, libraries and so on. The Internet, and more particularly the World Wide Web, is predominantly English based and is increasingly multimedia based. Authentic texts, and authentic experiences, are by far the richest source of language. McGarry (1995: 3) notes that authentic texts "can play a key role in enhancing positive attitudes to

learning, in promoting a wide range of skills, and in enabling students to work independently of the teacher. [...] That this is so becomes apparent when we examine the contribution authentic texts can make in two areas of major concern: a) the matching of language learning opportunities to the needs and interests of individual students, and b) the creation of the conditions under which students can most successfully exploit the opportunities." Once the students have understood this, they are empowered to search out authentic materials and situations in which they may learn effectively. Being in the target language country, they are presented with the ultimate opportunity to rise to this challenge of independence.

Explicit training in strategies is also important; it is hoped that the students might learn some specific strategies from these sessions, such as writing away to one of the authorities mentioned above, in order to use their language productively, and then receive concrete feedback; but, in the absence of this, the most important thing is that they become aware of strategies in general, so that they will be able to select, implement and monitor their own use of strategies in the future - to engage actively in the learning process. Ellis & Sinclair (1989) and Willing (1989) both provide excellent exercises for explicitly teasing these strategies from students, and provide further ideas on how to concretise them and thus, allow students to build on them.

### Following Through

If the ideas and measures taught, and teased out, in the explicit sessions are not followed through in class, it is unlikely that the learners would have faith in any new strategies they might choose to follow. It is here most particularly that the teacher's role is critical in allowing the students room to experiment. For example in choosing a particular task, the teacher may allow the students to perform it with reference to a piece of authentic material of the students own choosing.

Another suggestion is project work. I envision this taking place in one of two ways. Either the students may be permitted to work in groups of their own choosing, on topics of interest to them. Or, perhaps a more comprehensive, but more restricted plan of action is suitable. If a weekly "topic" is chosen for the programme, on Irish Writers, for example, the teachers and students are free to choose materials of interest to the members of the class, and to concentrate on them, just as they would on any other materials they use. The consistency of the theme provides reinforcement of the functions and notions involved, while allowing the students to work independently of the teacher.

### After Hours

Of course, learning does not stop at the door of the school, and some would

argue that perhaps it really only starts there. Practical project work on suitable areas provides the perfect excuse for the learners to go out, and use their language. Continuing with the topic of Irish writers, the students could be encouraged to do some research into where further information can be found. Apart from libraries, places such as the Irish Writers Museum, or the James Joyce Tower in Sandycove, are mines of information in this area. Those students who can be encouraged to visit any of these places, will discover the benefits of learning in context. In this way hopefully, they might understand the purpose and effectiveness of the complete learning experience that this training is intended to enhance.

### Conclusion

By a simply implemented course of action, such as the one outlined above, it is hoped that the effectiveness of students' learning may be enhanced. Learner training in certain explicit areas can broaden the horizons of the learner and may empower him or her to become autonomous in some or all aspects of language learning.

In becoming actively involved in the process of learning the student may set his or her own objectives and by working independently of the teacher both inside and outside the classroom, and in selecting and using the strategies best suited to the occasion, he or she may realise a sense of autonomy, and this process will have been worthwhile.

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