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Original article and hypertextual references on the web: http://www.territorioscuola.com/associazioni/comenius_irlanda_2010.html

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As the exams never end for people, in the same way for all teachers the training never ends: modern phrases such as Continuing Training, or better yet Lifelong Learning, give an idea of how it is essential for any teacher during his/her working lifetime to keep up-to-date, to get back into play, modernize oneself, to keep pace with more innovative teaching methods, which comply with the ever changing needs of our students and societies.

If one may consider this as an obligation a bit hard to fulfill, given the many courses that are being continuously offered after the daily teaching activities, with the stressful assembly line "*classes - sandwich - refresher course*", a great resource and chance which is offered to all teachers belonging to the European Union is provided by the Comenius-funded training courses, for which teachers of English language but also of all other subjects may apply, in order to encounter a foreign context open to all EU citizens, with exchanges of ideas, projects and strategies that go beyond the traditional simple lesson.

My experience took place in a Comenius training course, SELL - Staging English Language Learning, a two-week course, held at North Monastery Language Institute in Cork , Ireland.

Since I teach English language and culture, I chose to attend a training course in this land not only for the friendliness and hospitality of Irish people, but also for the charm that this green, unspoilt island, rich in drinking water, has always exerted on me, prompting me many years ago to choose William Butler Yeats's popular plays for my degree thesis.

The full immersion in sceneries and landscapes characterized by rivers, lakes, endless stretches of green fields, trainer teachers suggesting working methods in a relaxing and funny context, all of this made our stay in Cork a study-tour aimed at a refresher course "on the road", alternating with moments of leisure and comparison with the Irish culture.

Together with other colleagues from Bulgaria, Spain, Czech Republic, Romania , the first day of course in the afternoon we were sent in pairs to play a treasure hunt, following the city centreroute we had previously been provided with, and asking passers-by specific questions about the traditions of the city itself. Meanwhile, we also took pictures to present our results on the following day.

So two weeks flew among team games, contests, treasure hunts even within our class, drama, poetry staging, brainstorming, a lot of computer works using the Internet and Power Point, and typing projects through websites rich in resources and activities applicable to our classes and students.

Working methods adopted in the course were as follows:

- Information technology and computer works;
- Group work and pair work, preceded by an introduction and / or tips on how to undertake them, and in case of computer works, information materials on the Internet resources and websites from which you could take your answers: for example planning a weekend in Dublin, according to some websites that we were given, to consider all the details of the trip;

- Treasure hunts through strategic guidelines: departure point, destination and questions to passers-by, for the discovery of Cork; presentation - displaying of results the next day;
- Listening and analysis of Irish traditional songs and their themes (migration, famine, etc.)
- Group work on Irish civilization;
- A day trip to Gougane Barra, Kenmare & Killarney, Sunday 25 July 2010;
- Brainstorming;
- Individual work and Math-Logic games;
- Projections of scenes from movies set in Dublin, whose vision was preceded by a task where all of us, together with students SILL, previously provided with keywords on characters and situations, had to invent the plot, assuming it; after watching some scenes we had to answer a questionnaire on what we had seen and heard;
- Individual creation of poems, among them a poem that each of us had to create, following a pattern, to dedicate it to the colleague sitting at our own left side;
- Quizzes in tandem, to be designed through the website www.quia.com, consisting in 5 multiple choice questions by each pair of trainees, and based on the civilization of their own native country: as starting point each of us received five multiple choice questions, each containing the website hyperlinks to find the correct answer; so our task was to formulate quizzes in tandem following this pattern ;
- Team Games: onion skin , whisper relay, games on metaphors (images and lots of abstract nouns were given us separately, then each team had to try to associate an image with a name, giving reasons or references), matching exercises, searching information and idioms within sentences and phrases scattered throughout the classroom, completion exercises to use prepositions in context, and more ;
- Drama games, mime, staging of scenes from “Romeo and Juliet” and “Titanic” and acting out in the classroom, (it was very funny);
- Organization during the two-week course of a flexible project/module, on an Irish or English subject, potentially applicable in our teaching context, but different from the traditional Presentation-Practice-Production paradigm. Therefore it should be focused on what the students discover by themselves, instead of what the teacher hopes to achieve. Basically the purpose of this project is to make English language learning more lively and make the class more interactive and creative than usual.

Each trainee teachers’ project was presented in plenary session, on the overhead projector, the last day (07/30/2010). Such works showed how important it is today staging lessons in a flexible way, focusing on lessons where the student by his/her own has to experience and discover the content, rather than on those pre-packaged by teachers. This turns out to be essential to improve conversation, speech and fluency in English, even before grammatical structures: our teacher Sally liked to say that the Irish enjoy speaking English breaking its grammar rules!!!

In the evening we used to meet in the pubs of the city to breathe their typical atmosphere, to listen to Irish music and why not, to enjoy their beers, among which the dark ones were especially exceptional: the inimitable Beamish, the beer brewed in Cork , and the Guinness, from Dublin but nevertheless ubiquitous in all the pubs in Cork.

As for some examples of linguistic discoveries on the spot:

The so-called *pen drive*, in English is *USB stick*, *flash memory chip* or *memory stick*.

For the Irish *a craic* means fun, and if they say *Garda* they are not thinking of our beautiful Italian lake, but they are referring to a cop; the examples could continue.

What can I say? Can anybody think of a better refreshment course?

Seriously, the full-immersion in an environment where the native spoken language is that you teach in your country is an opportunity you can't miss. Many methods, words, customs, induce people, in our case teachers and students, to draw comparisons between different cultures, to broaden their horizons and their own way of thinking; when we add to this the same excitement and pleasant atmosphere we experienced at the SELL course, our innovative lessons may become even more feasible with the use of information technology in the classroom.

Teachers from all over Europe flock to such courses through the opportunities offered by Comenius, and come back enthusiastic, like I did.

The choice of countries wherein such courses are held is broad: you have only to look at the online database Comenius!

Choose one of these courses for your lifelong learning: such experiences are memorable and it's worth it!

The Italian website to refer to for any information on Comenius funded courses is:

<http://www.programmallp.it>

The courses database is on the website:

<http://ec.europa.eu/education/trainingdatabase/>

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