

PAGES FROM A STORY-BOOK: AN ACCOUNT OF A BRITISH-HUNGARIAN PROJECT OF CULTURAL STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

The article gives an account of a British Council project on the area of teaching Cultural Studies, which has been going on for four years in Hungary. It is a complex project of teaching culture, literature and language in an integrated way and aims to introduce new methods especially in language teaching at secondary schools. The frame of the article is the chronological order that covers the period from 1996 up to the present days. It shows the different stages from the beginnings, which go back to a British Council summer course for teachers at Lake Balaton. The next period includes the teachers' effort to try out the new methods at schools and disseminate it among colleagues at workshops and presentations. At present the group is involved in material writing. The article gives a short practical example of teaching literary pieces from cultural aspects. The novelty of the project and its impact on Hungarian ELT is a key issue, which is also outlined. Besides methodological and pedagogical sides of the project, the psychological factors of teacher development and that of a closely co-operative work are also examined. The aim of the article is to prove that, on the basis of the Hungarian example, similar projects could be carried out in any place of the world where foreign languages are taught.

KEY WORDS

British Council project; novelty; integrated culture, literature and language teaching; experiments; practical aspect; field trip; Britishness; cross-cultural aspect; material writing; teacher and student friendly material.

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RESUMEN

Este artículo da cuenta de un proyecto desarrollado en el área de la enseñanza de Estudios Culturales, que se ha venido desarrollando a lo largo de cuatro años en Hungría. Es un proyecto complejo de enseñanza de cultura, literatura y lengua en forma integrada y trata de introducir nuevos métodos, particularmente en la enseñanza del inglés en la escuela superior. El cuadro temporal del artículo se refiere al período desde 1996 hasta el día de hoy. Muestra varias fases de desarrollo, desde un curso de verano en el Lago Balaton organizado por el British Council para docentes de inglés que representó el inicio del proyecto. El período siguiente está marcado por el esfuerzo de los docentes por aplicar estos nuevos métodos en la escuela y difundirlos entre sus colegas por medio de talleres y conferencias. Hoy en día el grupo está comprometido escribiendo materiales. Este artículo da un ejemplo corto y práctico de cómo enseñar fragmentos literarios a partir de cuestiones culturales, y enfatiza la novedad de este proyecto junto con el carácter fundamental de su impacto sobre la enseñanza del inglés en Hungría. En el artículo, además de cuestiones metodológicas y pedagógicas, se discuten los factores psicológicos del desarrollo de los docentes y del trabajo en colaboración. Concluyendo, la finalidad de este artículo es demostrar que, a partir de este ejemplo húngaro, se pueden desarrollar proyectos similares en cualquier lugar en el mundo donde se enseñen lenguas extranjeras.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Proyecto del British Council; novedad; enseñanza integrada de cultura, literatura y lengua; experimentos; aspectos prácticos; viaje en el territorio; Britanidad; aspectos multiculturales; escritura de materiales; material "friendly" para docentes y estudiantes.

RÉSUMÉ

L'article porte sur un projet du British Council dans le domaine de l'enseignement des Études Culturelles qui est en pleine activité en Hongrie depuis quatre ans. C'est un projet complexe de l'enseignement de la culture, la littérature et la langue dans une forme intégrée et qui vise à introduire de nouvelles méthodes, surtout dans l'enseignement de la langue dans les lycées. Le cadre de l'article est l'ordre chronologique qui couvre la période de 1996 jusqu'à nos jours. Il montre les différentes phases à partir du déclenchement, qui remontent aux cours d'été organisés pour les professeurs au Lac Balaton. L'étape suivante comporte les efforts des professeurs pour mettre les nouvelles méthodes à l'épreuve dans les écoles et les diffuser dans les collèges, dans les ateliers et dans les présentations. Maintenant, le groupe est occupé à écrire les matériaux. L'article donne un court exemple pratique d'enseignement des pièces de littérature d'un point de vue culturel. La nouveauté du projet et ses influences sur l'enseignement de la Langue Anglaise en Hongrie sont d'une importance capitale qui est aussi définie. Outre les aspects méthodologiques

et pédagogiques du projet, les facteurs psychologiques du développement des professeurs et du travail en étroite coopération sont examinés en même temps. Le but de l'article est de prouver que sur la base de l'exemple hongrois, des projets similaires peuvent être mis en place dans n'importe quel endroit du monde où les langues étrangères sont évaluées.

MOTS-CLÉ

Un projet du British Council; nouveauté; culture, littérature, et l'enseignement des langues intégré; expérimentations; dimension pratique; classes vertes; "Britannisme"; dimension entre-culturelle; l'écriture des matériaux; matériel professeur et pro-étudiant.

It started as a usual teacher-training summer course organised by the British Council in a Hungarian resort on Lake Balaton in 1996. Now, when four years have passed, we find ourselves in the middle of writing and editing a book for intermediate secondary school students hoping that we will open new ways to teenagers and their teachers who want to get familiarised with the up-to-date culture of the language that they are studying and teaching. Originally, we did not intend to get so far in carrying out our plans. Actually, our plans were much more modest. Yet, why did we stay together, what was the coherent force of continuing our meetings and what was the aim of our work?

Writing and compiling a book which integrates language and culture is undoubtedly a good outcome of our four years' activity. Is the end of our project a necessary result, a plateau where we can have a little breath and go back to our classes as if nothing had happened or is it a springboard for a national and international dissemination of our methods to our colleagues and the new generation which is studying English?

You can answer the questions and will hopefully find some aspects that are worth thinking over in your own situation and line of teaching English wherever you pursue your job.

I. THE PAST ("SIMPLE")

Long, long time ago...

Everything has its own history. Whether the official story coincides or not with the one we have experienced is usually a point of argument. It proves that our private experiences and the result of our first

meetings were just as positive as the accounts we handed in to the British Council 'officially'.

'I am sorry, I won't go this time...', I thought to myself while I was opening the usual envelope from the British Council in the summer of 1996. By that time I had taken part in most of their summer courses and I thought I would deserve a real summer holiday. Two minutes later I picked up the receiver and heard my voice: "Yes, I'd like to apply for one of your courses..." The turning point was a title which I had not seen among the topics before: "Teaching Literature and Culture in Secondary Schools".

The course was supplementary training for English teachers from all over the country. With the help of our two trainers, Prof John McRae and Mark Andrews, we managed to see a different aspect of language teaching. Although most of us had already tried out his/her own methods, the course managed to reinforce the values of an area that had not been taught at universities as part of initial pre-service teacher training.

To sum up the uniqueness of the course the first thing to mention is that language, literature and culture appeared in a very integrated way, and not as an abstract side of language teaching. We were provided with lots of authentic materials, and were glad to see that topics and language points were carefully selected.

I think the idea of a course like this coincided with the practising teachers' old wishes. We had been attending several courses which were fun and really useful, after a while however, pure methodological training became superfluous. The course was undoubtedly a breakthrough not only because it gave us a fresh and novel approach to teaching culture and literature, but also because of the satisfaction that we found a group of teachers with a similar interest.

A step forward-The age of experiments

Our heightened interest and a very fortunate coincidence made our later work together possible: in September 1996 a new post was created at the British Council to integrate British Cultural Studies and ELT. This post was taken up by Mark Andrews, one of our tutors on the Culture and Literature summer course. Due to his insistence and belief in the mutual work we met again in the autumn. We all realised that the summer course had had an enormous impact on our everyday teaching job, yet our ideas about future co-operation were vague.

We met on a regular basis (once in every two or three months) when we exchanged ideas and tried to identify what we were working on. At this point we became a little embarrassed as we could not apply the old, well-known terms we came across during our previous studies to our activity. It could not be jammed into a category. It could not be labelled. As soon as we found a pleasant-sounding name we found other reasons why that was not appropriate. We were arguing a lot about the pure terms such as “Civilisation”, “British Studies”, “British Cultural Studies” or simply “Cultural Studies”.

We had to face the categorisations of our subject matter.

Culture is a difficult concept [...]: culture as a set of superior values, especially embodied in works of art and limited to a small elite; culture as a whole way of life, the informing spirit of people; culture as a set of values imposed on the majority by those in power; and culture as the way in which different people make sense of their lives. (Pennycook, 1994, p. 62)

The content was not really new, but the way we were trying to introduce it to our students and colleagues was.

What was new comparing it with more traditional ways of dealing with this subject matter? At one of our early meetings Alan Pulverness, a free lance teacher trainer based at the Norwich Institute of Language Education, summarised that in a project like this teachers want:

- their students to understand themselves and each other better;
- to strengthen the inter- and intracultural functions, i.e. to give students the chance to appreciate the differences and similarities between their own and the target culture;
- to develop empathy;
- to help objectivity – on the basis of their knowledge students learn to observe their culture and that of the target countries without bias;
- to widen students' horizon;
- to develop the ability to be tolerant;
- to result in a positive attitude to language learning.

As far as pedagogical methods are concerned some basic novelties were also emphasised by him:

- the starting point is the students' own culture, teachers have to use it as a fundamental springboard;

- grounds for comparison – e.g. similarities and differences of the different cultures should be stressed (comparing the two instead of judging them!);
- practical activities:
 - students should collect material according to their own fields of interest based on personal relations,
 - analysis of the given data (creativity vs. “swotting for exams”);
- approaching the given social and historic environment on the basis of personal experiences;
- avoiding generalisation and spreading stereotypes;
- to raise interest in other people’s opinions.

After a while it was not enough to share the ideas amongst only ourselves; we felt the urge to introduce the project to other colleagues. The IATEFL conference in Budapest (1997) proved to be the first suitable place to do it. There everybody was given the opportunity to share his/her knowledge and experience about a topic of a special interest. It was followed by conferences both in Hungary and abroad (Oxford, Dublin, Manchester; Croatia, Yugoslavia, Russia, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Poland). In this way we made the outcomes of the project available to many colleagues, and hopefully more and more of them were interested in the approach and tried it out in their own places.

How to put it all into practice?

Stopping a little in the story of the project, at this point I would like to illustrate with a warmer and a text to show how it is manageable to teach a piece of material according to the above guidelines. My students were from a college of pedagogy, 18-19 year-olds, their level was intermediate, their major was not English.

• **The warmer**

This time it was a guessing game with loanwords.

1. Students were given a sheet with five loanwords and their funny illustrations that came into the *Hungarian* language.

The words were as follows: szputnyik, dzsem, pék, forint, papucs. (In English: sputnik, jam, baker, forint, slippers.)

The possible countries of origin were also written on the page, certainly not in the order of the loanwords: Germany/Austria, Turkey, Italy, Russia, England.

2. The game was similar with the *English* loanwords, too. Most of these words are qualified as international words, so it was even more difficult to find out their real origin.

The “English” words were bungalow, tobacco, zebra, karate, robot, espresso, disco, anorak, barbecue, coach.

The offered places were France, Italy, Hungary, the Antilles, Greenland, Africa, India, Czechland, South-America.

After matching the places with the words we discussed the following questions:

- Why are these words present in your *mother tongue* and in *English*?
- What *connects* these words?
- Can you mention a special *historic reason* for the “migration” of these words?

As far as the Hungarian words are concerned, most of the students recognised the similarity between the word “*pék*” and the German “*Bäcker*”, and a few of them remembered from their studies that behind the word “*forint*” hides the famous Florentine gold coin with lily.

It was a surprise that “*disco*” and “*barbecue*” are also loanwords in English. Students took their English origin granted! Even “*coach*” sounded English. It is however among the few words from Hungarian which are used almost internationally. (From the name of the village, Kocs.)

In the case of the English words we also practised the pronunciation, which was also surprising sometimes.

The *goal of the warmer* was to realise how many connecting points and interactions there are between the apparently different cultures already from the aspects of the languages.

• The text

The text was *Athol Fugard's* drama, “*My Children! My Africa!*” which I found a suitable song for, *Tracey Chapman's* “*Across the Lines*”. While listening to the song, students were able to follow the lyrics with their eyes, too. On the basis of the words the following questions served as an introduction to the piece from the drama:

- Find some *key words* and justify your decision!
- What is the *problem* involved in the song?
- *Which places* of the world might this problem arise? What about *your country*?

The song could also be a short summary of the drama; only the names of the places should be replaced...

Fugard was inspired to write it by a little note in the local newspaper reporting the death of a teacher who had stayed at his desk in spite of a call for a boycott at his school. He has turned this everyday incident into a play full of genuine emotions and themes thinking about discussing, in spite of all the changes for the better that have happened since the play was written. As its theme is more general than mere criticism of the situation in South Africa then, it will remain topical and popular as long as there is human suffering, as long as there are oppression and discrimination because of race and colour, in short: as long as there are unjust societies. (Schafranek 1995, p. 5.)

There was a very simple pre-question (*What is the scene?*) which only focussed attention to the country of the drama.

Students read the text to themselves, and after discussing the most relevant unknown words, read it out in small groups.

This piece of the drama is a lyrical part that tells the reader what his teaching profession and his home, Africa means to Mr. M. He shares his feelings with a favourite student, Thami in a disordered school. He also tells the boy that at the police he had already reported the approaching boycott. Thami wants to tell a lie in the interests of his teacher and he wants to convince the others about the innocence of Mr. M, but the teacher refuses help. With his bell Mr. M runs out to the schoolyard where the mob kills him.

This time the task did not only make the students think, but also demanded creativity in writing. In three envelopes there were three different tasks:

- i) Write an article for the local WHITE newspaper about Mr M's death.
- ii) Write an article for the local BLACK newspaper about Mr M's death.
- iii) Write a FACTUAL article about Mr M's death.

Having written the articles students displayed their sheets on the wall, so that everybody could see it. Finally we tried to find out which of the articles were written for the white/black/neutral newspaper. Students also pointed out words and expressions which were characteristic of bias and neutrality. The most difficult article to compose was the one for the “neutral” newspaper.

At the stage of the contextual discussion the question of different values came into the limelight. After discussing the differences between Thami's and the teacher's different ideas of values, students were talking about their own opinion in the light of their own lives.

The homework was as follows: In “My Children! My Africa!” Mr M. made a journey from the south to the north in Africa. What would you see if you walked across Hungary either from the west to the east or from the north to the south?

The next lesson we discussed the topic.

The field trip

While teaching materials in a similar way, we felt an increasing need to get an up-to-date picture of Britain as a whole group. We got this opportunity by the British Council in the summer of 1998.

As we did not want to go unprepared we were happy to welcome Michael Byram from the University of Durham, whose instructions about ethnographic techniques were highly appreciated during the trip.

Our visit was considered to be unusual as, unlike other foreign groups, we did not take part in any of the usual British Studies courses of The College of St Mark & St John. We intended to work according to our own plans we had made before the journey. In this way we tried to follow our schedule, but to handle it in a flexible way.

Our group, 14 Hungarian teachers of English and two teacher trainers, were divided into four interest groups the task of which was to examine four major aspects of British life such as volunteer work, arts, language and family life.

Besides the above division of the fields, for the sake of a deeper understanding our aim was to take different other aspects into consideration, e.g. what kinds of roles do tradition, gender, region, age, values and classes play in the arts in a certain area of Britain?

We spent most parts of the days visiting official places. We went to secondary schools (e.g. Devonport High School for Girls, St Boniface Roman Catholic Boys School), libraries (e.g. Plymouth City Library),

museums (e.g. City Museum, Art Gallery, Merchant's House Museum, Prysten House, Plymouth Dome), churches (e.g. St Andrews Roman Catholic Church, The Church of the Ascension on Crownhill) and different organizations (e.g. Oxfam, National Drugs Helpline, Disabled Foundation).

In every place we seized the opportunity to make interviews, video-recordings and to take photos with people who represent the different areas of British life, e.g. teachers, head-teachers, students, priests, librarians or street-musicians. We held gatherings at the university every afternoon in order to give an account of the work we did that day and to prepare for the following day's tasks.

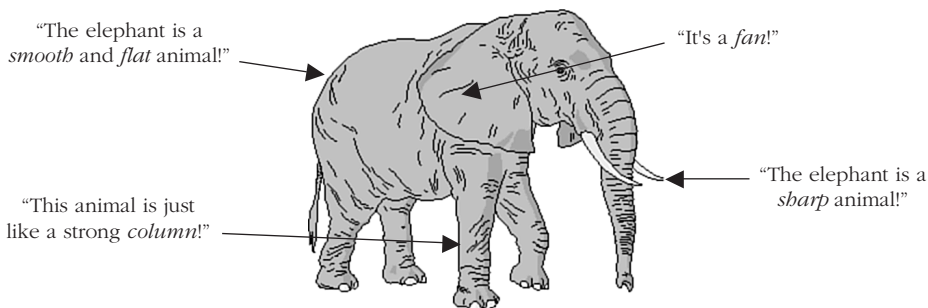
Our range of interest determined evening and free-time activities. Therefore most of the time of our trip to Bristol was spent in a multicultural school and an educational centre (St Thomas More School; Bristol Education Centre). We followed the traces of Celtic heritage in St. Ives, where Bob Deveraux, the owner of Salthouse Gallery, who played an important role in forming a colony of artists in Cornwall, welcomed us.

We spent the summer solstice with Phil Bowen, a poet who recited his poems on Kit Hill.

At the end of our study tour we gave a Hungarian farewell party where we tried to give an authentic picture about Hungary with plenty of music and poems.

The visit to Britain proved to be a relevant stage of our two years' co-operation. Although most of us had visited Britain before, this trip, due its specially organised form, gave something extra to each member of the group. Besides the tangible results, i.e. gathering authentic materials, the Plymouth experience undoubtedly developed our understanding of 'Britishness'. We were curious to know what Britain was like, in which way it had changed after our previous visits if we had been before.

To me 'British life' seemed to be similar to the elephant in the old Persian tale after Plymouth. According to this old fable people were asked to give a definition of the elephant. As the examination of the animal happened in a dark place, nobody was able to see the whole animal, so everybody had to rely on their sense of touch only. After the scrutiny, which was limited to certain parts of the animal, people got strikingly different impressions about the same animal:



Before our field trip we also had some conscious and unconscious presuppositions about our target country:



In the end we came back with fourteen ‘elephants’. Some preliminary conceptions proved to be true, while some others turned out to be nonsense. The overall picture was much more subtle, refined and complex.

In 1998 England was not a country far beyond the iron curtain any more, which can be visited by only a few Hungarians and which existed in our secondary school text books and in our curious adventure-seeking teenager minds in the early 80s. Due to the social and political changes taken place in the past decade the role of the English language has changed as well. Studying the most widespread language

of the world is natural in our country too and this phenomenon is welcomed by teachers who remember the false judgement of English and that of the whole western world.

On the other hand the language and the culture behind which is streaming into Hungary today sets the English teachers more and more tasks. What language should we teach? What culture should we transmit? What values are worth introducing to our students and why?

One of the strengths of our field trip was to search for the answers on the spot. We were given the opportunity to refresh our views, to revise 'our' Britain, i.e. to keep pace with a dynamic world.

According to our group leader, Mark Andrews, "From the project point-of-view, it was essential to give the teachers some form of extended experience of contemporary Britain. For us, British Cultural Studies must include an experimental dimension and involve emotional engagement as well as cognitive analysis. Otherwise, key concepts remain abstract and divorced from lived experience." (1999, p. 5)

Our field trip gave inspiration to one of our group members, Katalin Purda, who is also a poet. Here is her poem:

St Ives
 Finally relaxed on the warm,
 white, screaming sand of gulls,
 with exotic thoughts in the air,
 and captured by the salty despair
 of one who got lost on the beach...
 Tracing the humid colours of fear
 near the sea – which is
 dashing me with recent agony
 of Gulf Stream and fisher-boat history
 closed among the walls
 of the Salthouse gallery.

2. THE PRESENT ("PERFECT")

We did not come back from Plymouth only with different 'elephants', but also with 14 different suitcases full of material. "What to do with it? How can we use it?" were the following questions to answer. In the first phase each interest group gave an account about their research. Parallel to the reports, we also taught lessons based on the brought material. It was difficult to cope with the quantity, so we tried to standardise the form of the teaching material into lesson plans. Gradually we found there was a treasury lying under the surface, so we

started to uncover and categorise the different reports, photos so that any of us could use it during his/her lessons. We compiled “packs” under different headings, like “Family”, “Home”, “Festivals”, “Charity”, “Free-time”, etc. These packs were the prototype of the book we are writing at present. First we thought we could publish a kind of booklet with practical lesson plans supplemented with authentic material. What came out is exactly the opposite as the quantity and diversity made us change the original idea: it is going to be a course book with a separate teacher’s guide plus an audio and a video cassette.

Apart from the pedagogical reasons, we, just like a colleague in Romania, soon realised the advantage of self-made material.

“[...] the fact that all recordings and photographs have been made exclusively for the project allows us to use authentic material without the copyright problems which so often impede materials development.” (Townson, 1998, p. 16)

What is new and how is it presented?

The basic idea of the book is to guide students through a part of Britain (i.e. the South West area) with the help of Hungarians. Although the idea itself already sounds innovative in case of a course book, we also tried to leave the old path in the form of presentation as well.

To summarise the major novel features, the following characteristics must be mentioned.

The book is:

- *very personal*

The whole book has an introductory part where we clearly tell students who we are and what we would like to do. Besides that each unit starts with our photos and a few personal words in bubbles. We want to keep our own identities and speak to students in an informal way with helping attitude instead of an abstract, hard-to-follow manner. It shows in the instructions, too. The material also mirrors our different personalities as the photos and the texts were taken and collected by ourselves.

- *interactive*

Students are not only invited for the trip as passive armchair-travellers, but active participants with their own knowledge, feelings and opinions. They have many opportunities to share them in workbook-like parts and exercises of the book.

- *up-to-date*

The freshness of the material has already been mentioned. We would also like students to look at Britain and Hungary with fresh eyes. Not only fresh eyes but ears are also needed, because in listening parts instead of the well-known studio voices real people talk about their real activities.

To help being up-to-date even web-site addresses are indicated.

- *breaks down stereotypes*

The book deals with a wide spectrum of British life. The old topics, however are usually missing or replaced from new “teenage” aspects. It is shown already in the title of the units, e.g. “*Knock! Knock!*”, “*School’s Cool*”, “*The Death of the Tie*”, “*Who Cares?*” “*From Mud to Dust*” just to mention a few titles about home, school life, charity or festivals. To break down stereotypes the book introduces the personal backgrounds of the “characters” and their surroundings so that students could avoid generalisations like “British schools are all private schools which are attended by well-to-do parents’ children”.

- *involves a cross-cultural approach*

From the very beginning we have had the idea the book will only reach its aim if Hungarian culture is also involved in a well-balanced and integrated way. Simple parallels are not enough at this stage. We were searching for contact points which serve as springboards for further discussion e.g. about school-life, charity or a Hungarian boy’s school-year in Britain.

For instance in the unit about multiculturalism we get students to think about the life of Hungarian minorities, too.

From a linguistic point of view, typical mistakes in English made by Hungarians are paid attention to.

- *develops learner autonomy*

The book lacks ready-made materials for behaviouristic memorisation. Instead, tasks which demand students’ creativity are common. For example reading a historical introduction about multicultural Bristol, students are asked to make a similar wall-chart about their own community where they could use their own materials. Teachers are often given samples in the teacher’s book as a kind of resource and help. Other examples of these types of activities are making interviews, doing research or simple discussion points.

Apart from this students are highly advised to use dictionaries on their own also with a little help, and told where to find supplementary grammar exercises to the different units as we believe that developing learner autonomy is very important.

To check and summarise the “tangible” outcome of the units students are asked to write their own diaries after the units with the following helping lines: “*I found out that...*”, “*I was surprised that...*” or “*Interesting to hear about...*”. Unit diaries are followed by a short “*Test yourself*” section.

- *is not exam-centred but exam helping*

Although this kind of book is not based on exam materials, we would like to give students help to pass their final examination in secondary school and the state examination in Hungary, which is popular among students. To keep it in mind we would like to provide students with useful exercises. All communicative (e.g. discussions, role plays, picture description) and written exercises will meet the requirements.

The points above will probably result in a teacher- and student-friendly material. We would rather be companions to the students than unknown authors far away from their teenage lives. Although most of us have gone through the children’s disease of a non-native English teacher, i.e. we wanted to pretend, sometimes with our behaviour, that we were native speakers of English, by now we are mature enough to admit and accept our status. As Medgyes describes:

[...] we suffer from an *inferiority complex* caused by glaring defects in our knowledge of English. We are in constant distress as we realize how little we know about the language we are supposed to teach. Indeed, most non-NESTs (non-native-speaking teachers of English) are all too aware that they are teachers *and* learners of the same subject.

We gladly undertake this dual responsibility.

How to make sure the material will work?

Although the different parts of the book have been presented in classrooms all over the country, we wanted a more detailed piloting process which took place in October 2000. We asked colleagues, either who had known about the project or had not heard about it (initiated and uninitiated teachers), to help us to try out each unit of the book.

At the beginning of November we gathered together where they presented both their own and their students' feedback. It proved to be a relevant and useful stage of our work.

According to teachers and students who were involved in piloting, the book:

- gives relevant and authentic knowledge about a culture students know rather superficially;
- is not a language-orientated material, but much more;
- develops different skills in an entertaining way;
- encourages students to make comparisons between Britain and Hungary;
- teaches *real* language.

Obviously not each part was welcomed. Some students found a certain topic interesting while their classmates found it absolutely unnecessary and boring. Teachers wanted a more satisfactory historical and social background to units. Students missed the traditional exercises and topics. Most of them still insist on getting to know more about cricket or how to drink tea. It precisely mirrors what students had had to give an account of at an examination; what had been expected and discussed under the heading "English culture". Students also complained about the quantity of new vocabulary.

At our meetings with the colleagues we discussed the feedback in minute detail in the case of each unit and made the necessary alterations. At present we are at the stage of sending out the revised versions into classes.

Difficulties to come over

The major problem presented itself soon: we are not professional material writers. It especially became obvious when we sat down in front of the computer. For most of us even the software we are working with was unknown; not to speak about dealing with video and audio recordings. Sometimes the question is very simple: "Should it be authentic or audible?"

Although the publisher reassured us that not every tiny detail is our responsibility, we still feel more comfortable if we ourselves take care of font, colours, numbering in order to indicate our conception to the editor.

The rest of the problems are more psychological than technical. Although by now we have managed to form a real working team it is not easy for twelve people to harmonise ideas! On the other hand, our individual virtues and weaknesses have become clearer, which helps us to undertake the proper task in the different phases of the work.

Self-development in a group

If we speak about development we must mention two kinds of that. One of them is the professional development and the other is the personal. What the project has given us up to now is self-explanatory, yet for the sake of completeness let me quote my colleagues.

What do they say about our professional development?

Csilla: “Consequently, my concept of British studies has altered as well. I have realised that instead of learning/teaching *about* Britain I should study/teach Britain itself through various material manifestations of that culture [...] By doing this, students explore cultural topics and improve their linguistic skills simultaneously, therefore language and culture are integrated in the EFL class, which is the only natural way of EFL teaching –using the language as the medium and culture as the content of study.”

Gyöngyi: “The topics and materials [...] require a lot of responsibility, soberness and courage on the part of the teacher. Topics such as drug addiction, teenage sex, teenage pregnancy, violence in society and the like can easily make teachers feel uncomfortable to deal with in the classroom. But involvement in the project, I feel, has prepared me for it.”

As far as personal development is concerned we also feel the changes:

Kati: “[...] I was so lucky that I had a chance to make a similar presentation at an international conference in Zagreb with another member of the group: Csilla. [...] The only way to overcome the tension of this responsibility was the most precise planning and long-long discussions of all the questions related to our views on education, culture, values and life in general. By the time of the presentation we got so close to each other that probably either of us could have given similar answers to the arising questions.”

Csilla: “The project has had an effect on me as a person, too. I have become more interested in political and social affairs [...] Having grown up in a multicultural environment (the former

Yugoslavia) as a member of a minority ethnic group, I have always been interested in questions of national and cultural identity/identities [...]

Moving to Hungary raised lots of questions in me concerning assimilation and/or keeping my identity, which my being involved in the project has helped to resolve. I believe that the personal and professional identity I have been able to create for myself here in Hungary is closely related to my work in the project.”

3. THE FUTURE (“CONTINUOUS”)

While remembering the past times and dealing with the present duties, we must not forget about the future commitments either. There are two types of future plans in the working of the group. First of all we must concentrate on some short-term problems to solve e.g. inserting dictionary entries, writing glossaries or such overall tasks as standardising the form, checking the places and quality of audio and video materials. As we work within a very tight schedule we constantly feel the pressure of time in the case of near future activities. Till we did not start writing and compiling the book, we had vague ideas about the publishing process.

Therefore it was interesting to meet our publisher who shared the “hidden” part of editing with the group.

Although we did not cherish the illusion that it would be an easy task, sometimes we still wonder how many tiny details are left to check before sending the material to the publisher, and how many times we will have to alter different parts. It seems to be a never-ending process.

Apart from these everyday activities we have to keep other, at present a little less frightening, deadlines in mind. If we want the book to come on the market for the next school year, i.e. September 2001, we have to make other preparations in the interest of making other teachers familiar with both the content and the approach. It will mean different forums all over the country.

Who is the book made for?

It is basically written for teenagers, 16-17 year-old students at secondary schools. Students of language schools might also make use of it as most of them go to study English outside school to get some extra material and learn the language in a less traditional way.

As it is a pioneering book of the kind in Hungary, hopefully it will become a useful companion for the students of teacher-training institutes where the spectrum of methodology should be widened. We sincerely hope that also teacher trainers will welcome a fresh aspect in ELT.

Dreams and reality

According to our experience in Hungary the methodology of ELT and cultural and literary studies are still separated. Those who deal with the latter consider pedagogy a subject of secondary importance. While teacher trainers involved in ELT tend to think that culture is so sophisticated that it is not worth dealing with it in the classroom. It raises the question of reform both in secondary and tertiary education.

We do not think that our book will solve the problem, but we do hope it will offer a new aspect which help teachers to realise that it is possible to integrate what is today artificially separated. At the same time we would like to give students the opportunity to revise their old stereotypes about Britain and replace them with a fresh, up-to-date picture, even if they have not visited the country.

[...] greater consciousness will, [...] help make learners more reflective, flexible and adaptable. A more reflective language learner is a more effective language learner. (McCarthy, Carter, 1994, p. 165)

We firmly believe it is valid in the case of Cultural Studies, too.

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THE USE OF POETRY IN TEFL: LITERATURE IN THE NEW LEBANESE CURRICULUM

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I demonstrate how the analysis of the language of poetic selections could be the basis for TEFL lessons. To illustrate, I use sample selections from the poetry of two Lebanese-American poets namely Ameen Rihani's *The Chant of Mystics* and Gibran Kahlil Gibran's *The Prophet*.

Nowadays, more arguments support the relevance of using literature to the teaching of a foreign language, and discuss the usefulness of the linguistic analysis of literature for pedagogical purposes.

The New National Curriculum of Education put into effect in Lebanon beginning academic year 1998-1999 differs radically from the old one in methodology, approach, and distribution of cycles. The new curriculum adopts the content-based approach, which allows for the possibility of using literary texts as one source of content. My major focus in this paper is on the use of poetry in the secondary cycle of the Lebanese English curriculum. The poetic selections handled are rich in their vocabulary and structures, which allows for a variety of activities. Whether we are teaching a foreign language or even a native one, literature is a highly recommended vehicle for a number of reasons. In such cases, focus on the language paves the way for a meaningful and rewarding literary appreciation.

KEY WORDS

ESL/EFL, linguistics and poetry, vocabulary, parallelism, coherence, cohesion, Gibran, Rihani, antonyms, awareness, cloze, curriculum, sound patterns, structures.

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