

## **Irish Dancing and the INTERACT in Kosice**

Based on the four summer courses of Celtic Kaleidoscopes, Michael O'Shea and I were asked to lead two sessions of Irish dancing within the INTERACT 2009 in Košice, Slovakia.

Some of you might still remember drama courses organised by the British Council in Šlapanice some years ago. The INTERACT has risen from these event and has been going strong for 5 years since then.

INTERACT CENTROPE, subtitled Integrating Drama in ELT, was held in Košice, Slovakia 5th – 8th November, 2009. The participants came from as many as 10 countries, primarily from Central Europe. They were not only teachers but also gymnasium students and to organize the 4 day programme for the two diverse groups required a certain mastery: the skilled organizer Toni Prochazka from Vienna has proved more than that – and also thanks to him the conference has been a success.

“Drama as a teaching method is not so widely known in Europe. It is both a creative and holistic form of learning which not only motivates students and helps to speed up their learning process, but can also improve their relationship within their class and create a positive learning environment.“ This was a quote from the INTERACT booklet, with which we can only agree.

Students from the Košice Gymnázium sv. Tomáša Akvinského (led by Agnesa Kovalčíková) presented a simplified version of Hamlet using modern English language. As Agnesa says “Even beginners of primary and secondary schools can easily follow.“ Unfortunately, I could not see the performance myself, what a shame.

I was more lucky with the Importance of Being Ernest brought to Košice by gymnasium students from Vienna. Their teacher Elizabeth Mayr founded the English Drama Club three years ago and her students, loving acting and English, were truly remarkable. Acted with verve and conviction and with almost no trace of Austrian English accent!

Anita Debska (UK/PL) did her charming series of lively drama activities based on brief extracts from an abridged version of Romeo and Juliet. She is the autor of a wide range of lovely booklets based on Shakespeare's plays, all in a similar vein, prepared especially for learners of English. She uses fragments of the original text, sometimes single words only or a carefully chosen sentence to cover the subtle nuances of the complexity of the original. It works incredibly well.

David Heathfield (UK) brought a geysir of activities (most from his recent book *Spontaneous Speaking* published by DELTA publishing). No photocopying required, generating a lot of language. One example for all: try out a simple activity  
My Pet.

In pairs, if you don't have a pet, imagine one. Be standing, mime, holding, stroking it, bring it to life. Let your partner touch, stroke, even hold it for a moment.

Possible questions for conversation:

*What kind of pet have you brought here today?*

*Is it yours?*

*Is it male or female?*

*How does it move around?*

*Has it got its own smell?*

In the end you should decide if your partner's pet is real or not and why you think so.

Easy but fun.

Mike and I had been asked by Toni to do two sessions of Irish dancing.

The afternoon session of 120 minutes was designed for teenage students of international background, Austria, Hungary and Slovakia respectively.

We decided to base the session for major part on teaching dancing and minor part on providing some theoretical knowledge and historic information on the dances themselves.

The number of students present during the session kept changing, some being late, others leaving, some more staying but talking to each other. Yes, it was a challenge but, to be honest, we won them over when we introduced The Riverdance Olympics show from Dublin on youtube. The students could marvel at perfect examples of step dancing and the inimitable atmosphere.

The two dances we taught were well received. First, Mike taught the students an intricate Irish ceili dance, which took rather long to learn but in the end it proved a success. I prepared a simple dance called Everyman's Chance and indeed, everybody joined in and managed to dance with joy.

The long session left everyone tired and sweaty but full of enthusiasm for Irish dancing, which was our aim.

The evening session for adult participants of the INTERACT required a different approach: much less talking and explaining the background to the history and more dancing and singing. Mike taught the Irish dance he had practised successfully before with the students. I had previously chosen and prepared copies of three Irish songs (one on a CD with Sinead O'Connor) for everybody to join in and sing. In the afternoon she practised with Michael Manhart from Salzburg who kindly agreed to provide an accompaniment on the guitar. Singing was truly enjoyable and fun. Then I taught everybody an easy Irish dance Everyman's Chance which had been successfully practised with the students in the afternoon.

The Irish dancing set the tone of the evening and some people managed to stay up and talk until small hours.

The programme and organisation of the INTERACT was prepared more than well, with lots of care, love and expertise.

Many thanks, Toni!!!

Míša Čáňková  
Prague

cankova@volny.cz

2009