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Dyslexia for Teachers of English as a Foreign Language



Project

Dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty that has an effect not only on literacy skills in students' first language, but also on foreign language learning. In order to ensure that dyslexic students successfully acquire the necessary levels of foreign language competence, they need additional support.

In our project we are developing a training course and self-study materials for teachers of English in order to raise their awareness of the foreign language learning needs of dyslexic students. We are planning to hold meetings with teachers and important stakeholders to publicize our course and encourage educational policy makers to incorporate it into teacher training curricula. One of such events will be a one-day conference in Łódź, Poland (October 11, 2013), planned for over 100 participants, offering workshops devoted to all the course units. 2 keynote speakers and 5 experts in dyslexia are invited for plenary and round-table sessions. A poster session is also planned in order to involve the participants. There will be no conference fee, the participants just cover their travel expenses. More information and a registration form will be available soon at the project website www.dystefl.eu. At this webpage you may also find out more about the project and try out a self-study course.



Testing the course

When the materials for the course were ready, testing phase started in December 2012. The aims were to find out if the course meets the expectations and needs of the trainers and their trainees as well as to collect specific ideas and recommendations for the improvement of the course. The plan was to test the overall structure of the course, the content of the course, the content of the selected units which respondents covered during the testing phase, the choice of particular tasks, clarity of instructions and appropriateness of materials. All partners agreed to get responses from at least 10 trainees per country, however the feedback we received exceeded our expectations (over 400 responses). The modes tested included a face-to-face course, self-study and Moodle variants.

Both primary and secondary school teachers as well as teacher trainees took part in piloting. After each unit they completed an evaluation form. Most of them appreciated the structure of the course, indicating that both theoretical and practical units are included. When asked which elements of the course need improvement, 85% of respondents stated there is no need for any change. The remaining 15% pointed out that more time than planned is needed to complete the tasks. The overall feedback was very positive, both the trainers and trainees found the material useful and informative. They assessed tasks as well prepared, clear, varied and relevant to their teaching context. They emphasized that all units were useful and appreciated additional materials and model answers. When asked for general comments, they stated: **'It is great that every unit brings up something new and interesting to reflect on', 'It must be one of the best taught courses I've ever had'.**

Since the feedback was so positive, the authors of the course decided not to remove any units or tasks from the units but to mark some of the tasks and steps as optional. In this way, the choice of material needed to illustrate a particular point on the agenda could be a matter of trainer's personal preference, tailored to his/her trainees' particular needs. Although the course remains a 30-hours structure, when treated as a resource material it allows many more hours of work both for experienced teachers and inexperienced teacher trainees.

'It was an amazing and very insightful course; I have learnt a lot of useful things that I will try to use to my dyslexic pupils' advantage.'
(Varvara Perdikari)

'This online course was a really great experience for me. Different people, different contexts, one common thing: Dyslexia.'
(Vasiliki Sioziou)

'I can honestly say, that it has been a life learning and changing experience. Thanks for the inspiration.'
(Maria Byrne)

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