

ELT



Ireland bulletin

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Being your own DoS

by Rob McComish (Everest)

What happens when you put a Spanish journalism graduate, a neuroscientist and an ethnomusicologist in room together? Well, obviously, they open an language school. Over the course of a year three language teachers ,with no background in business, relied on friends, favours, hard work, bluffing and hundred of Youtube tutorials to turn a pub conversation into a thriving little school.

Maria studied law and journalism in Madrid before she decided to come to Ireland to enjoy the life of being a language student and to experience life in Ireland. She quickly moved from being a student to running administrative departments in a number of Dublin's English schools. Her first hand experience of being a language student, along with her developed knowledge of the administrative workings of a busy language school led her to the last piece of the puzzle - becoming an accredited teacher herself. For this, she turned to the Instituto de Cervantes and gained the Spanish teaching accreditation which she has been putting to use in Dublin over the past years.

Anne-Marie on the other hand, started in Ireland with a degree in Language and Cultural Studies and it was her Erasmus year in France that sparked a love of both learning and teaching languages and left her with a desire to travel the world armed only with a CELT [Certificate in English Language Teaching]. Her love for teaching English really began to develop while travelling and teaching on the Caribbean island of Martinique. That love of teaching has since fed into her ongoing research, which focuses on the psychology and neurophysiology of on second language acquisition. Combining her interest in cognitive science and language learning, the Everest DoS [she] is currently adding the finishing touches to her Ph.D in Trinity, titled The Cognitive Benefits of Bilingualism and Second Language Acquisition.

I am the third teacher involved in the formation of Everest Language School. Having recently graduated from my master's in Ethnomusicology, a TEFL cert seemed like a convenient way to fund a lifetime of travel. However, at the end of my CELTA course I knew that language teaching was more than just a means to an end, and was in fact an incredibly rewarding job. I gradually became more involved in the academic management of the schools I was working in and got increasingly interested in syllabus creation and teacher development.

We had all been working in various schools in Dublin and around the world, all the time observing the wonderful things other schools were doing and spotting things we felt could be done differently. Unbeknownst to each other we were all dreaming of opening our own school. One evening, while having a drink, sitting opposite a vacant school building, the conversation began. In that hour the conversation escalated from daydreaming to a serious commitment to opening the school we always imagined working in. Once we knew we were all sure that we wanted to go ahead, it was time to leave the jobs we had and say goodbye to companies, co-workers and a stable income.

Together, we felt that a school directed and operated by teachers had the potential to create a better student experience and a better work environment for our fellow teachers. The goal was, and still is, to make a school where new approaches to teaching can be developed, where student experience feeds back into course development and where teachers are at the centre of all academic decisions and where we can continue to conduct and contribute to research on second language acquisition. It is a dream that creates ongoing challenges and was definitely not easy to turn into a reality.

Having left our jobs, the struggles of starting a business and particularly a language school became apparent. We visited premises after premises trying to find the ideal place to locate our school. But to our disappointment, in the wake of the slew of college closure, landlords were extremely reluctant to rent a building to three teachers with no business background. We built a website and every day were watching the statistics and seeing no visitors. We had set up our email address and day after day we were coming back to an empty inbox. We called every agency we could find, but none of them were willing to take a chance on a new school in the midst of the spate of schools being shut down.



All our own foundation;
Rob, Ann Marie and
Maria.

Pic by Everest

After months of trying to find a location we were at our wits' end and beginning to question the sanity of our venture. The break finally came when we passed 15 Westmoreland street and spotted a sign from ICOS (Irish Council of Overseas Students) stating that the college had shut down. After much effort we eventually got to the landlord of the building and organised a meeting. We had never pictured ourselves sitting in an office negotiating over lease terms and could suddenly empathise with foreign language students as we bluffed our way through the legal jargon. Inexperienced as we were, in what felt like a matter of minutes, we had done the deal. Suddenly, after all the months of daydreaming, planning and searching, it had happened, we were in our own school.

Standing in the school, everything felt really possible again. We began calling in favours and in a matter of weeks had the place painted and our logo on the wall. With a new enthusiasm, we tried everything we could to get the first students in the door. This included doing "busking" English classes in Temple Bar, climbing the Wicklow Mountains to do a duck race for publicity and desperately trying to "sell" free classes. And it worked. After all our scrambling and hard graft, the students began to come, and they started to tell their friends, and then they started to come. A mentor we had from the Local Enterprise Office once told us that you will learn more in one year as an entrepreneur than in any business degree. Over the course of the year our search history shows the evidence of our learning and the DIY spirit we had to adopt. When I type "How" into Google I'm reminded of past searches: "How to write a business plan", "How to negotiate a lease", "How do you stick vinyl to a wall", "How to make Internet cables".

It hasn't been easy and we're still climbing our Everest every day. As our own bosses, we learned early on that we need to look out for and manage each other and ourselves. While inevitably we work long and busy days we make sure we all take breaks and cover for each other when the load gets too heavy. While we wholeheartedly recommend a DIY approach to starting a school, it is important to remember that you can't do it yourself, you need to surround yourself with great people. What makes it easier is the fact that we are now developing a team of incredible teachers who are making our job a lot easier and who are helping to turn our dream into a reality. In less than a year we have had hundreds of happy students, from over 20 countries, study with us. Looking ahead into 2016 we can see plenty of challenges ahead of us, and being your own boss is certainly no walk in the park, but it is allowing us all to build the type of school we dreamed of working and studying in.

Creative projects in the language classroom

by Collete Godkin (ATC)

I incorporate project work regularly into my lessons, as I have found that some of the most engaging classroom activities are those where students are making something - be it physical or digital - which they can be proud of and show to others. Project work has also been shown to provide "opportunities for students to develop their confidence and independence and to work together in a real-world environment" (Fried-Booth, 2002) Additionally, even though the focus of our class projects has always been practising the language they have recently studied, the satisfaction for the students of a job well done is a bonus whose importance for motivation should not be underestimated. In this article I would like to describe my experience with a number of creative projects in adult English language classes and give some practical tips on how these can be carried out.

Making a Facebook group

At the beginning of 2015, I started a class Facebook group with my adult C1 general English class. We use the group as a forum for sharing work and ideas and also as a way for former students to keep in touch with the class. I promote the group as a shared space, rather than a teacher-led space, by encouraging students to comment on posts and to post anything which they think would interest the group. As soon as I, or one of the students, find something of interest online, e.g. a useful language learning site or video,



All your ingredients for a microwave cake, just add English.

Pic by Margaret Barrett