

PRELIM 2

Lithuania: LAKMA (Lithuanian Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language) with **West London College**

August 2022

Project background

Partnership overview		
Course overview	ETA partner	Lithuanian Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (LAKMA)
	UKI partner	West London College (WLC)
	Course length	10 weeks / 30 hours
	Number of groups/cohorts	2
Participant profile	Total number of CPs	36
	Language level(s)	B1 - C1
	CPs' teaching context	Primary & lower secondary
Mode of delivery	Synchronous platforms used	Zoom
	Synchronous session length	90 mins
	Synchronous session frequency	2 x per week
	Asynchronous workload	Google Classroom
Course content	Language development focus	Grammar & vocabulary, classroom language
	Methodology focus	Lesson planning - PPP, TBL
	Technology focus	Various online tools and resources

Description of the partners

LAKMA has an active membership of around 400 English teachers who work in the primary and lower secondary sectors in Lithuania. It runs regular CPD events for its members, predominantly online, in order to reach across the whole country.

West London College is a large Further Education college with an ELT department at the Hammersmith and Ealing centres which dates back over forty years. This includes teacher training programmes and the test centre, which runs exams for Cambridge, IELTS and OET. Approximately twenty qualified teachers provide tuition to an average of 1,000 students per year from over 50 different nationalities.

Key features of the context

In Lithuania, many of the teachers spoke of a lack of opportunity to practise and develop their language skills, and also of little subject specific professional development within their schools as often they are the only English teacher.

Outline of the course and rationale

During discussions with LAKMA, we reached the conclusion that two sessions a week would be manageable for full time Lithuanian teachers to attend over a ten-week period. We agreed that ninety minutes would strike a balance in allowing sufficient input and practice, without being overly-exhausting. With the framework in place, we used a combination of our own initial ideas, input from our partner ETA, and comments from the applicants in the pre-course questionnaire, to create the course outline in terms of content. A lack of confidence in course participants' (CPs) use of the language, both generally and professionally were key aspects for us to consider, including how this impacted on the way that CPs presented language in their classrooms and the types of activities they would use. Therefore, we agreed that the course should comprise both language input and practical ideas for the classroom, looking at the methodology and rationale for certain approaches.

Project findings

Working in partnership

An introductory meeting was quickly set up to allow us to introduce ourselves to our ETA, for them to give us an overview of themselves, and for both of us to present some initial ideas on how we viewed the programme. This was extremely useful and laid the foundation for easy channels of communication, expectations on the two sides, and helped to develop the direction of the programme. Having discussed the course schedule, we agreed on deadlines for the pre-course questionnaire / application form to be ready, so that it could be shared amongst the LAKMA membership by email and on social media, in order to allow sufficient time for applications to be received and processed, and for feedback to be taken on board with regards to course content. We prepared the questionnaire so we could ascertain the applicants' self assessment and background, and this was shared with our partners, along with the link for a language placement test. LAKMA gave some suggestions for minor tweaks, and requested one or two additional questions that would assist them in the selection process to ensure the expected entrance criteria were met, and in the monitoring process of who had applied from which contexts. This included urban/rural locations, primary/secondary schools, whether English is the main/second subject they deliver, and for how long they had been teaching English.

Working within the CoP

Having never used Slack did not present any practical issues as it was extremely straight-forward and very well sign-posted with clear channels for communication. The project managers from NILE were successful in promoting discussion and consideration of various relevant topics without ever causing a sense of being overwhelmed. There were wide levels of participation within the CoP on Slack from some

regular contributors and respondents, to some that appeared to hardly ever, or perhaps never even, engage with the wider community. However, overall, any questions posed were given answers, and ideas proposed were given feedback. Our project was one of the first to get up and running, so we were happy to share some templates that we had created, as well as giving insights to early progress.

The whole CoP meetings were very useful and the use of breakout rooms to focus on different themes was a good idea as some of the themes were not relevant to all attendees, with different UKIs facing different challenges. The meetings were well-timed, ahead of upcoming deadlines and tasks, which was particularly useful for those of us who hadn't participated in PRELIM 1. Some meetings had two potential time slots, which was much appreciated as during several periods my workload increased significantly, away from the PRELIM project. Some sessions were recorded and I was able to watch them back. Speaking to colleagues in other schools, it may be an advantage for the UKIs to use a senior teacher or experienced teacher trainer to lead on the project rather than a Director of Studies.

Working with the CPs

The pre-course questionnaire gave us an invaluable insight to the teachers we'd be working with. What was striking was the vast differences in background, with several newly qualified teachers as well as some with around 20 years' teaching experience. The majority of the teachers were involved in teaching both primary and lower secondary age pupils in their schools, with just a handful only engaging in one. In total, there were over 40 applicants for the programme and half of them responded with 3/5 for their level of confidence in using English. The remainder were evenly split higher and lower. However, a surprising finding came from the language assessment in that rather than the expectation of one group at A2-B1, and one at B1-B2, we actually had the majority of CPs testing at around B2, with a reasonable number even at C1.

Unfortunately, a few of the original applicants were unable to commit to the course schedule due to work and personal commitments. Some explained that they would be unable to attend all sessions but agreed to make arrangements with the course tutors and peers to catch up on any missed work, which was made much easier through the use of Google Classroom to share materials, further reading, and some recordings.

Designing/delivering the course

One aspect that we were very aware of was that our main area of expertise is teaching English to adult learners, and training teachers who will be doing the same, certainly not for teachers in a primary school setting. When it came to designing the course, we first drew on our experience of junior groups and the challenges faced along with the type of activities and approaches that are successful. Secondly, we created a reading list of relevant materials for teaching younger learners and looked for common themes that could be incorporated into the programme. Next, we devised a list of typical language points at the levels of the two groups. Finally, we considered which activities could match with the language points and drafted a table for our scheme of work. The ETA was able to suggest on typical feedback that they receive from members on difficulties faced in their teaching, which also influenced our thought process.

The main themes we finally decided upon were:

- Beginning of a course
- Beginning lessons (warmers)
- Personalisation
- Structuring lessons (methodology)
- Exploiting materials
- Exploiting technology
- Assessment & feedback

When it came to delivering the sessions, we had decided that the most effective way would be to set up activities for the CPs, and then afterwards to reflect on how they'd been delivered, how they had found them as 'students', and what considerations might be needed, such as potential problems and how they could be avoided. Finally, we would look at how the activities could be adapted, depending on the particular group, in terms of age and level, plus possible extension tasks.

The tutors on the course had regular meetings to reflect on previous lessons, to share any key points that had arisen, and to consider any possible amendments to the scheme of work and future lesson plans. In addition, at the 1/3 stage of the programme, each CP had a 1-to-1 tutorial with their teacher to gain initial feedback on early impressions of the course, and was also asked to complete an online survey too. A second individual tutorial also took place at the 2/3 stage to allow further feedback, and also to look at possible amendments to the themes for the final few sessions.

What became apparent from the outset was that the CPs' approach to lesson planning was very different from that of the typical adult EFL teacher in the UK. Warmers appeared to be a rarity and lessons were designed to reach the main aim quickly, focusing on specific target language. Consequently, what were viewed as our most common ice-breaker activities were completely new to everyone on the course. The CPs thoroughly enjoyed the nature of the activities, and could easily see the benefits. They were enthusiastic to reflect and to discuss how the activities could be adapted for their own groups. One offered in her feedback that "I got a lot of interesting ideas for my lessons (how to use authentic material, about error correction, running dictation, etc...)"

Course outcomes

A highlight of the programme was hearing how the teachers had taken things away from the sessions and used them in their own teaching, incorporating approaches or using whole activities with their pupils. By encouraging the CPs to share these success stories, it emboldened others to also try. This is one area where the use of Google Classroom was particularly useful as CPs could add to specific threads where materials and ideas had been shared.

84% of the CPs had already tried activities from the course in their lessons, and the remaining 16% all said that they were planning to use them in the near future. When asked how useful they had found the practical ideas, 90% responded 5/5, and the remaining 10% said 4/5.

One of the main aims of the course was to increase confidence levels in the CPs' use of English. In the end of course survey, all but one responded that they definitely felt more confident as a result of the programme. It was so satisfying to hear the teachers' reflections, such as *"I feel more confident speaking English language and I am freer and braver to use a variety of incredible classroom and technology tools the programme gave me"* and *"I became more creative and confident in my lessons."*

Something that became apparent from the tutorials was that the CPs were concerned over a lack of enthusiasm from some of their students and were keen to find ways of making learning a more fun and enjoyable experience. This made the comments particularly satisfying, such as *"I think my lessons became more interesting for students due to variety of new methods and classroom activities. Students are more engaged and active"* and *"the learning became more attractive for students."*

Moreover, based on feedback from the tutorials, it was clear that there was a sense that the style of presenting grammar was not always effective, and that there was a limited approach to the practice of certain skills, especially writing. One reflected on her practice by saying *"it was a huge step forward in teaching English in the lessons."*

Although all of the CPs had used Zoom to teach online lessons during lockdown, there was still a fairly limited breadth of online resources being used to supplement lessons. Following a pattern of comments during tutorials, it was decided to dedicate a session to sourcing resources online, and how they can then be analysed and exploited. Apart from Padlet, no more than a handful of the teachers had actually used any of the ones we focused on, such as WordWall, Mentimeter, Quizlet and Kahoot. One described the benefits by saying *"positive effects, lots of useful and easy teaching methods, lots of great games."*

Several of the CPs discussed issues in their lessons with students with special needs - mainly behavioural, such as ADHD. Although we weren't able to explore this in depth, the teachers did feel that the fun nature of many of the activities with focus on different learning preferences would naturally appeal to some of their learners.