



## **EFL made to measure, for adult learners with intellectual disabilities**

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### **Abstract**

English without Frontiers was a Lingua project (2005-2007). In this project, we developed a course to teach English to adult learners with intellectual disabilities. We used mainstream materials for inspiration, but developed the course from scratch. The handbook, all activities, worksheets and materials were developed specifically for the target group. Because our target group is so varied – between countries, within countries – we developed the materials, so that teachers in their turn can adapt the course to meet the specific needs of their target group.

We developed the materials for classroom teaching, because e-learning is difficult for our target group, and more importantly: it's not so attractive for them. Most of our group – and many of their teachers – are convinced that they cannot learn English. Many of them come to class mainly because they enjoy the interactions with other students, and with the teacher. And are happily surprised that they can learn to understand and speak a foreign language.

We developed a handbook that consists of 10 modules, each with 10-12 activities. Some activities focus on understanding spoken English, others on speaking, a few on reading and writing, and many on using English in a fun way and in games. From this handbook, teachers can select the activities that they think are appropriate for a specific group. We made many worksheets, and a DVD with video recordings of native English speakers. Several of the speakers have an intellectual disability. We found a theater group for intellectually disabled people in London, mailed them, travelled to London with a small videocamera, spent 3 days filming, and many days editing. On the DVD different speakers address the viewers, in easy English: "Hi, my name is Jill, what's your name?" We have several speakers who say this – to provide the repetition that is so important for our target group. And we have some speakers who say the same thing, but just a little bit differently - to help the learners stretch their newly learned skills.

We have interactive activities: multiple choice and a 'talking dictionary'. We made these in Powerpoint, so that teachers can select the slides they need, adapt them if they want, and even make their own.

In the past, most teachers used 'cut and paste' to develop materials for learners with special needs. We were great in cutting up magazines, writing our own stories, photocopying.

In this project, we basically did the same: we made our own materials. By using ICT, the materials look professional and can be and are being used by colleagues across the EU. In May 2009, our project received first prize in the Lingua category at the Conference on Innovation & Creativity in the Lifelong Learning Programme in Prague.