



“Careers, not inflatable chairs!”

by Simon Harrison on August 16, 2009

At the University of Swansea job fare, David from the English Language Teaching department was offering “careers, not inflatable chairs!” Unlike the other tables, his was not strewn with free pens, novelty sweets, give-away mobile phones and other gimmicks. David was not even smiling. On his table, a pile of yellow application forms for a CELTA course sat neatly next to an empty coffee cup. (CELTA stands for ‘Certificate of English Language Teaching to Adults’).

Back in 2004, this petite Welshman with wispy eyebrows was head of the English Teaching department, and I was a beach bum about to complete my four-year degree in French (with Business and Surfing). I didn’t know exactly what I wanted to do after my degree, but whatever it was, it wasn’t in Swansea. I was on the lookout for opportunities. I approached David, who picked up one of the yellow forms and said:

“Training on a CELTA course with Swansea University will allow you to start a career to teach English Language either abroad or in the UK. You don’t need previous experience or knowledge of languages other than English. This course is recognised world-wide as a basic training qualification for employment in English teaching. The course costs £1,000 and runs for four weeks in summer, beginning in either July or August. Apply quickly; this is a spring board to great opportunities”.

What’s another £1,000 pounds to the student loan? I applied immediately. Our group was diverse, carefully selected from various age groups, different nationalities, and assorted academic backgrounds (18 people max. per course). The training covered all the essential skills that you need to teach—lesson plans, classroom management, teaching materials, comprehension checking, level analysis, group work, and grammar. You teach every single day to foreign students recruited by the department for free English lessons. By the end of the month, you are ready to walk into a classroom anywhere in the world and teach English to anyone.

The skills that you acquire on the course go beyond teaching. This might sound odd, but think about it. You learn how to prepare quickly to do something you’ve never done before, and then to stand up in front of others and do it with confidence. You learn how to work under pressure in a team, how to be clear and to the point, how to motivate and control a group of people, how to deal with colleagues, secretaries, students, and professors, how to tell when someone hasn’t understood, and what to do when that happens. Are these not general skills—skills that everyone needs whether they are in academia, in business, or in industry?

I am now a junior lecturer in English at the Sorbonne Nouvelle in Paris. I am also a communication consultant for factories in the food industry. I have covered some terrain over the past six years, collecting various certificates and degrees along the way (including a Ph.D. in Linguistics), but the initial training I received on the CELTA course has been crucial. CELTA fits nicely onto your CV and distinguishes your profile from otherwise similar ones, especially in academia. I’m sure it helped me get accepted to teaching and research positions at prominent institutions, such as the University of Bordeaux, the University of Berkeley, and the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Lyon. CELTA is one of the two best courses I have ever

taken. The other was an ocean rescue course on jet skis in shark infested waters. Both changed the direction of my life in potent ways.

If you are about to complete your degree, and do not have work lined up for the summer, apply for the CELTA course. It is quick, intense, and highly valuable. You meet great people, learn loads, and walk away from Uni with a powerful qualification, not an inflatable chair.

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