

English Quest - The Insider's Story

The English Quest competition is an all-year-long event. The day after we had successfully completed the first edition of the competition, we began planning the second one as we immediately realized how many things we could improve.

The greatest challenge of all was to convince sponsors to support a private language school in its efforts to promote English language learning. Hundreds of e-mails, letters, telephones and meetings later we had more than we had expected - we had obtained the Mayor's and Starost's patronage, extraordinary prizes including two trips to Scotland and two other holiday trips and countless smaller and bigger prizes in kind.

The most discouraging part of the competition was the response from local schools. For whatever reason, we had to use a lot of coaxing to attract teachers to enter their representations into the competition. All in all, we had 5, 7 and 3 representations respectively for primary, lower-secondary and secondary schools.

The three days were very hectic but the final outcome rewarding. All the participants and their support teams showed a lot of enthusiasm and passion for the language and culture.

At all three levels we saw the same nervousness and anxiety when we were sending participants to test rooms. They were divided in such a way that no two students of the same school wrote the test in one room. That easily solved the issue of 'test co-operation'

While the participants were writing their test, the support teams began their own quest for knowledge. We had prepared a short quiz based on the brochures and leaflets about the United Kingdom. All the main room where we organized English Quest was full of such materials and the idea was to encourage young people to learn more about the UK. Some of our teachers said it had been the best part of the whole competition! You should have seen them running around the room reading, trading and swapping essential details. That was a brilliant idea.

After the tests had been all handed in we had only a few minutes to correct them and select the top five results. At that stage the students were still using code numbers. The oral part was a challenge for all these young people as they had to converse with a native speaker from England and for some of them it was their first such contact. Surprisingly, it was the lower-secondary school students that did best according to Philip Taberner, our teacher.

The final results were not divulged at that stage, yet.

The time had come to begin the cultural quiz where school representations answered questions at three levels of difficulty. Each team had a different strategy and they were more or less successful. The fact is that secondary school representations obtained the fewest number of points. The younger students had apparently prepared better for the competition and their knowledge amazed us many a time. What made the rivalry vivid was that each point was significant as the final score for each

representation was both the points won in the cultural quiz and one tenth of the points the students had achieved in the test.

To avoid monotony, however, we were far from it at all time, we introduced three extra tasks after every five rounds of questions. One was to put in order the puzzles of the map of the United Kingdom; then the students chose out of twelve different photos from the UK trying to identify what they showed; and finally they had to complete the lyrics listening to the song (a different one at each level). We also involved the support teams as they could help their school to answer one question upon the representation's request.

Announcing the final results was just sheer pleasure. The prizes surely rewarded the effort and nobody left the room empty-handed. We are restarting English Quest activity again getting ready for 2008. Whatever the cost, it is worth it.

In the close up:



