

ELTons Awards Ceremony Review 2014

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May 23rd 2014, www.mikejharrison.com

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Last night I was lucky enough to attend the British Council ELTons awards ceremony. This is the annual evening that has recognised innovation in English Language Teaching (the capitalised ELT in the event's name), now having run since 2002. I've never been nominated at these (yet!), kindly being invited by the Council having worked with them closely on a couple of projects over the last three or four years.

However, this year I was pleased to see among the nominees a couple of familiar faces, people who, while I wouldn't say I know them very well, are people that I have had the pleasure to meet at various ELT conferences and other events around Europe. And it is always a nice opportunity to catch up with other attendees and meet new people.

Pleasing to see less widely publicised issues receiving recognition

The evening was, as usual, quite full of pomp and ceremony. No bad thing when ELT brings a lot to economies and the culture in places in the UK and around the world (of course with a few elements that are less pleasing). ELT is often overlooked and undervalued, and this awards night aims to address this.

In particular, it was pleasing to see among the nominees a couple of really worthwhile and interesting projects and causes: firstly, the Dystefl project, an EU-funded initiative looking at issues relating to helping English language learners with dyslexia; and secondly, the Disabled Access Friendly campaign, which aims to raise awareness of issues affecting those with mobility disabilities through teaching English. And it

was even more pleasing to see both these nominees win awards, garnering the awards for Excellence in Course Innovation and Innovation in Teacher Resources respectively. I think it's so important that there is recognition of these things, amid all the innovative new publications and shiny apps. Teaching is much more than the content of our lessons. Recognition of Dystefl and Disabled Access Friendly reminds us of the human element of language teaching.

Winners out of left-field

Another slightly left-field winner last night came from Devon, representing PALS, 'a scheme set up by Country Cousins alongside Devon Youth Service that aims to recruit teenagers from the Ilfracombe area to integrate international language students into the community'. They won the award for Local Innovation and the work they described in their acceptance speech reminded me of the kind of local focus I'd seen when I visited Sharing One Language, a language school in Barnstaple. This kind of work, getting local young people to work with international language learning students seems to me to be really important work. People moving to a new area to live and study, however long their stay may be, can easily become isolated and disillusioned.

There were awards for writing and apps too. Interesting in particular to me were a series of books aiming to bridge the gap in provision for people with English as a second or other language moving into higher education in English-speaking contexts.

However here it was actually the first award of the evening that caught my interest: the Macmillan Award for New Talent in Writing. The winner in this category was Lizzie Pinard, someone I know primarily through activities online. Lizzie is a hugely active member of the English language teaching community online, blogging, tweeting and being on Facebook. She presented her writing project, Compass, another set of resources focusing on helping people studying in English for whom English is a foreign language.

A highly enjoyable evening and congratulations to all the winners!