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Biodata:

Mario Rinvolucri has been with Pilgrims since its first
operational year, 1974. He currently works as a language
teacher, teacher trainer and writer. His latest books
include More Grammar Games, with Paul Davis, CUP 1995 and
Letters, with Gray, Levy and Burbidge, OUP 1996. He hopes
that a new book on student process will be out in a
year's time with CUP.

DESERT ISLAND ELT

by Mario Rinvolucri, Pilgrims, UK.

The group I have to teach on this desert island are 15 to
18- they most of them hope to escape the desert island by
learning English and so are quite highly motivated. Their
own language works in very short sentences but is very
complex because they have "reference particles
" that allow speakers to concisely refer back or
forward to sentences some way back in the discourse and
some way forward. This means that they think in very
large language chunks and find English very linear,
babyish and broken up.

What five books will be most useful to me ? They already
have dictionaries, I am told.

I certainly don't want loads of alien text to cram down
their throats, so let's forget the welter of current
coursebooks. These books are tedious and mendacious for
the following reasons:
          a) they largely misrepresent and lie about the
grammar of the spoken language while purporting to be
primarily teaching spoken English. McCarthy and Carter's
research has gone far enough to make this assertion a
very well-documented one.
          b) they are mishmash compromises in which many
hands have meddled, authors, editors, marketing people,
educational gerontocrats (for a fine line in these see
some of the German Land education ministries) and
others.
The mismash compromises drain them of life.

c) they are conscientiously organised to bore classes with ceaseless format repetetion.

The last thing those 15-18 year olds will be short of is text. My job will be to draw useful and relevant text from them through which they can learn English.

Well, maybe the views expressed above are a bit extreme. Where can I lay my hands on some external text that might be relevant to life on their small island? Ideally I want something written within their culture and translated into good English. Failing that I might take a moving, simple, sociologically real text about a similar small island archipelago. The Islandman, that descibes life on the Atlantic Islands off Kerry, Eire might be just the job.

For my own reference I want to take the firmest piece of work I know so far from the computational linguists which is the Co-Build Grammar, as this gives me the grammar of the word, not just syntactic grammar. I would not be without this book which has, over the past few years, given me a reference security I never had before.

Vital in this new situation to take a couple of inspirational books with me. One is Teaching Myself in which Bernard Dufeu explains the difference between HAVING the exponents of a language on the one hand, and BEING in a language, on the other. I want his book with me because he sets my mind into creative mood, not just by what he says but by what he IS. I think that, for me, Teaching Myself is the major book to have come out this decade in EFL. It might be better in its original French: Vers un Pedagogie de l'Etre. Bernard certainly swears it is.

Since I want to learn from the kids and adults I meet on the island I'll pack the best NLP book I know on modelling excellence in my bag: Tools for Dreamers, by Robert Dilts. In the book Dilts analyses exactly how geniuses work so that we can then imitate stretches of their procedures. And if I stay on the island 10 years I will certainly teach a few people with genius quality.

[Pause here and list the names of students you have met with outstanding qualities]

The fifth book I take with me will have 250 blank pages and will allow me to write my next teacher's resource book based on the marvellous things that the island students spark off in me and that I stimulate in them.

Oh , yes and I can choose two luxury items:

- the first is a photocopying whiteboard that allows me
to give the students a permament record of work they have
put on the board. (we have just got one of these
brillaintly humanistic machines at the Pilgrims Executive
English Centre)

- the second is a computer terminal linked to one of the
language data bases in UK, so I could get print-outs to
help answer my students' more difficult questions like "
what is the difference between THOUGH and ALTHOUGH? "

When can I be marooned? I feel quite excited.

THE ISLANDMAN, by Tomas O'Crohan, OUP, 1937, (translated
from Ers.)

COLLINS C0BUILD ENGLISH GRAMMAR, Collins, 1990

TEACHING MYSELF, by Bernard Dufeu, OUP, 1994.

TOOLS FOR DREAMERS, by Robert Dilts., Metapublications,
1990

IDEAS FROM AN ISLAND, by Mario, Possible Potential Press,
2001