

TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS DELIVERED BY: **MS ANNE GALLAGHER**, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, on 8 June 2011, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Education *honoris causa*, on **DAVID LITTLE**

A Sheansailéir, a mhuintir na hOllscoile agus a dhaoine uaisle,

Is mór an onóir agus an pléisiúr domh an tOllamh David Little a chur in bhur láthair inniu. It is both an honour and a pleasure to introduce Professor David Little to you today.

Born in Windlesham in Surrey, David George Little attended primary and secondary school in his native county, followed by four years at St Edmund Hall, Oxford where he was awarded an honours BA in German and French in 1965. The following year was spent as English Lektor at the Auslands und Dolmetscherinstitut of the University of Mainz in Gernersheim in Germany. He received a B Litt and MA from St Edmund Hall in 1973, by which time he had already been working as Junior Lecturer in the Department of German at Trinity College, Dublin for three years. He had also made the odd foray out as far as Maynooth, where he taught some German courses for the Department of Modern Languages under the stewardship of Professor Breandán Ó Doibhlín. He established the Centre for Language and Communication Studies in Trinity College in 1977 and became its Acting Director while remaining as Lecturer in the Department of German. In 1979 he was made Senior Lecturer and became full-time Director of the Centre for Language and Communication Studies, and, finally, Head of the School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Studies until his retirement in 2008.

Professor David Little, who was made a Fellow of Trinity College in 1995, has done more than any other individual to bring language teaching in Ireland into the modern age. All language teaching: Modern Foreign Languages, Irish, English for Speakers of Other Languages, Irish Sign Language. A trawl through his many research papers, a large number of which were produced in collaboration with his former colleague David Singleton and practitioners from several European countries, reads almost like a recent history of Applied Linguistics: the introduction of the communicative approach to language teaching, the use of authentic texts in language learning, new technologies in language learning, functional- notional syllabuses, tandem learning, learner autonomy, language awareness, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, the European Language Portfolio, English Language Support, language education policies, in other words, all aspects of the theory and practice of learner autonomy in second language education. Central to Professor Little's research is the language learner; the research is informed by the learner and is about empowering the learner. This learner-centred approach found an academic home in the language education work of the Council of Europe, which first introduced the concept of learner autonomy in 1979. Indeed, Professor Little has been one of the major contributors to the work of the Council since the 1990s, in particular to the development of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and the related European Language Portfolio, arguably the most important language learning resources of our time.

He has acted as consultant and contributor to various aspects of the Council of Europe's Modern Languages Projects since 1985, been consultant to the Council of Europe's European Language Portfolio Validation Committee, in which capacity he has written a series of discussion papers and short studies, since 2000, has been Coordinator of the Council of Europe's international seminars on the European Language Portfolio since 2001, has been a Member of the Council of Europe's European Language Portfolio Validation Committee since 2005. He has been a Member of the editorial board of ReCALL, the journal of EUROCALL (the European Association for Computer-Assisted Language Learning, founder member of DULC,

latterly AULC (Directors [now Association] of University Language Centres in Great Britain and Ireland) and founder member of CERCLES (European Confederation of Language Centres in Institutions of Higher Education) of which he was President from 1995-2000. Small wonder that, when attending applied linguistics events on the continent of Europe, when we say we are Irish, the response is usually, "Ah, David Little"!

In addition to establishing Trinity College's Centre for Language and Communication Studies, Professor Little was founder member and chairman of Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann's Modern Languages Project from 1978-83, Chairman of the Royal Irish Academy's National Commission for the Teaching of Modern Continental Languages from 1981-83, Trinity College representative on Department of Education's Syllabus Committee for Leaving Certificate German from 1983-85, Director of Integrate Ireland Language and Training (successor to the Refugee Language Support Unit), since 2001 and Convenor and Chair of the National European Language Portfolio Committee since 2001.

In Ireland, Professor Little's work has also taken him beyond the Pale. As part of Integrate Ireland Language and Training, he and his colleague Barbara Lazenby Simpson, worked tirelessly at grassroots level, travelling the length and breadth of Ireland, holding seminars for teachers on the use of their ground-breaking teaching and testing materials for the English language classroom. His work with the ELP Network involved meeting practising teachers on a monthly basis. Nationally, his seminal discussion paper produced for the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment on Languages in the Post-Primary Curriculum (2003) gave a very clear account of the challenges facing language education in Ireland.

David Little's output shows no evidence of diminishing in retirement, although, we believe that he promised in his retirement speech in Trinity College to stop working after four years and buy an African Grey Parrot, with a view to bringing it to level A1 of the CEFR in spoken English. He may even get time to read the book about talking frogs given to him at the age of five by a recent visitor to these shores, then known as Princess Elizabeth, and which he still has not read.

In any case, when considering his work until now, a common thread seems to be the notion of "empowerment". Empowering learners to learn, empowering migrants so that they may achieve full integration in the country which they have adopted, empowering the children of migrants so that they may participate fully in our education system and in Irish society, calling for a dedicated syllabus for native speakers of Irish so that they may achieve their full potential as bilingual citizens.

In a talk to the American National Council of State Supervisors for Languages in November 2010, Professor Little reminded his audience of the general aims of the Council of Europe: (I quote) "To defend human rights, democracy and the rule of law" He goes on to say that ... "fairly early in its history the Council of Europe recognised that implementation of this agenda depends on co-operation and exchange, and respect for linguistic and cultural diversity, but all of those things can't happen unless there's more widespread and effective language learning than has historically been the case" (end of quotation). In the Encyclopedia of Language and Education, he says "Of course, theory and research are useful only to the extent that they help to illuminate the challenges and solve the problems that we encounter in practice" (end of quote). This mission to foster more widespread and more effective language learning has been the driving force of Professor Little's work for over forty years.

We owe this Englishman, who has settled among us, a great debt of gratitude, something which we acknowledge here today in recognising a body of academic work of the highest calibre.

PRAEHONORABILIS CANCELLARIE, TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS:

Presento vobis hunc meum filium, quem scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneum esse qui admittatur, honoris causa, ad gradum Doctoratus in Arte Paedeutica, idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo, totique Academiae.