GROUP FACILITATION IN LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION (to go on the cover)

The starting point

We believe that in order to make the most of the potential of any learning group, teachers need a thorough understanding of group dynamics, familiarity with different modes of working, and a number of key qualities and skills. Above all, though, successful facilitation of learning in groups depends on deeply held attitudes and values related to the aims of education, the roles of teachers and learners, and the educational climate that a teacher helps to create in his/her classroom.

What this publication offers

The aim of this publication is to provide you with an introduction to what working with groups in a facilitative mode involves. As facilitation is closely bound up with attitudes and personal qualities, you cannot learn to become a facilitator just by going through the material provided here. What we set out to do is to give you an overview of what we see as the main issues related to facilitation, to provide you with plenty of food for thought, guidelines for observation, triggers for self-reflection, and some practical tools which you can adapt and try out in your own practice.

Who it is for

As the title suggests, this publication is intended for mentors and trainers working with groups of language teachers. In particular, as some of the materials grow out of an ECML workshop organised for teacher trainers interested in running their own courses on facilitation, you will find a number of tasks and activities which can be used on training courses focusing on group facilitation. However, as there are strong parallels between training rooms and classrooms, some of the activities and ideas can also be adapted and used by teachers for their own development in the area of group facilitation.

How the material is organised

Although the material is sequenced starting with *background and principles* and moving on to *practical application*, you can pick and choose from it based on your interests, needs, and past experiences with facilitation. It is divided into eight sections and is organised around eight thematic areas.

Sections:

1 Video extracts
2 Key quotations
3 Short articles
4 Reflective diary entries
5 Stories
6 Activities
7 Checklists
8 Further reading

Thematic areas:

1 What is facilitation?
2 Facilitation: background
3 Group life
4 Facilitation: qualities and skills
5 Facilitation: toolkit
6 Questions and questioning
7 Feedback
8 Developing as a facilitator

INTRODUCTION (to go on the CD)

The starting point

Facilitation differs from other modes of training in many ways. Based on our understanding, one of the key differences is that facilitative training is not seen as simply passing on knowledge and skills by giving lectures, for example. Instead, it is viewed as a complex process in which group interaction, reflection and sense-making play a central role. This involves tapping into the group as a learning resource. In order to make the most of the potential of any learning group, trainers need a thorough understanding of group dynamics, familiarity with different modes of working, and a number of key qualities and skills. Above all, though, successful facilitation of learning in groups depends on deeply held attitudes and values related to the aims of education, the roles of teachers and learners, and the educational climate that a teacher helps to create in his/her classroom.

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We would like to stress, though, that this is not a comprehensive manual, or a step-by-step guide to facilitation. It is a resource tool covering various aspects of facilitation made available in non-linear form to anyone who would like to explore for themselves what it means to facilitate groups.

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For complete newcomers to the notion of facilitation, it may be advisable to start with the video extract of Margit working with her trainees and then to listen to what she and Rod have to say about facilitation (Section 1), before moving on to other parts of the publication.

How the material is organised

The material is designed for dipping into rather than as a linear read. You can pick and choose from it based on your interests, needs, and past experiences with facilitation. It is divided into eight sections (referring to different types of material) and is organised around eight thematic areas.

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1 Video extracts
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Thematic areas:

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2 Facilitation: background
3 Group life
4 Facilitation: qualities and skills
5 Facilitation: toolkit
6 Questions and questioning
7 Feedback
8 Developing as a facilitator

Video extracts

Introduction

We decided to include a short video extract of an actual training session in this publication in order to anchor the issues and principles raised in the other sections in a tangible training-room reality. The session extract is taken from an in-service teacher education context in Hungary and is intended as a practical illustration of facilitation in action (which might be useful for discussion) rather than as any kind of model, the more so since facilitator styles are a matter for each individual. The post-session discussion gives a reflective analysis of the short extract.

The other two video extracts are short interviews with Rod and Margit. They serve as a kind of introduction to some of the key issues in facilitation.

Title:	*Thematic area:*
1 Facilitation in action	What is facilitation?
2 Post-session discussion	What is facilitation?
3 Interview with Rod	What is facilitation?
4 Interview with Margit	What is facilitation?

Key quotations

Introduction

There is no carved-in-stone definition of what facilitation is. This section will provide you with different views and interpretations. Considering the ideas of trainers from different parts of the world, and reflecting on some key quotations will hopefully enable you to explore facilitation for yourself and to come up with your own interpretation.

Title:	*Thematic area:*
1 Practitioner perspectives on aspects of facilitation	What is facilitation?
2 Group facilitation: quotations with thinking questions	What is facilitation?

Practitioner perspectives on aspects of facilitation

(contributed by Margit Szesztay)

This section will provide a rich picture of what facilitation means to teachers and trainers working in various contexts in Europe. The quotations have been put together based on a questionnaire survey which was sent out to the participants of the ECML workshop on Group Facilitation in May 2006.

There are a number of different ways in which you can use this material:

For your own reflection
Read and respond to each of the following questions below. Then compare your responses to that of the other teachers and teacher trainers who responded to the survey.

As a group activity during a training workshop
Ask group members to respond to one of the questions below. Then ask them to read or listen to the relevant survey responses. I usually put the responses on slips of paper and ask group members to read them out one at a time. This way we can actually listen to the various teacher voices. The richness of perspectives usually triggers an interesting discussion.

Survey questions related to facilitation:

1 Please say in your own words what *group facilitation* means to you.

2 Do you think it makes sense to use the word *facilitator*? If yes, why? … If not, why not?

3 What do you find most challenging about group facilitation?

4 What do you think is the best way to become a better facilitator?

5 Is there anything which makes it difficult to put group facilitation into practice in your own context?

1. Please say in your own words what *group facilitation* means to you.

"It means helping the group find their way towards learning." (Eleni, Greece)

"Etymologically in my language "faciliter" means make things easier, free from difficulties or obstacles to help the group achieve its own objectives." (Andrée, France)

"Group facilitation means enabling (making it possible for) and helping a group of people to function as a learning community. For me it is an essentially human process." (Cheryl, UK)

"For me facilitation is the art of successful group management." (Anna, Armenia)

"Learning in groups in democratic ways, learning together from each other, encouraging contributions, using the potential of each member." (Marijana, The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)

2. Do you think it makes sense to use the word *facilitator*? If yes, why? ... If not, why not?

"Yes, why not? If we do not use this term and work on it, people involved in teacher training might never realise this role they have to play. They might keep on providing their groups with input and recipes and will not bother a) activating their already existing knowledge and experience, b) making use of the potentialities of groups with all these different backgrounds, and, c) finding the best ways for learning**."** (Eleni, Greece)

"Yes and no. …Yes, because a special set of skills is being emphasized. No, because it sounds like an 'inflation' of words – an attempt at glorifying the word teacher, and making that somewhat mundane word gain a more elevated meaning." (Eva, Iceland)

"Yes, I do, definitely. I do agree with the underpinning educational philosophy totally. Introducing teacher trainees to this new technical term with its specific meaning is easier (subconsciously) than trying to change traditional teaching approaches. So it becomes a natural part of educating and training teachers of 'new generation'"(Gabriela, Slovakia)

"Yes, I believe it makes sense. "Group facilitation" puts an emphasis on the importance of understanding group dynamics in order to create an environment where productive cooperation can be achieved." (Laura, Ireland)

"Yes, if it works in one's own language. In Hungarian this term sounds alien. It is used as a buzzword in business coaching, but it is unknown in general education." (Andrea, Hungary)

"If we keep in mind that our role is to ease up / create the favourable conditions for learning, it does not matter very much if we call ourselves facilitators or plainly teachers. The quality matters more than the label." (Adriana, Romania)

3. What do you find most challenging about group facilitation?

"With adults: breaking cognitive stereotypes and helping them rediscover themselves and the pleasure to learn.
With teenagers: planting seeds of questioning (not doubt, that to me is kindred to confusion)." (Adriana, Romania)

"It is always challenging to make students participate who are either shy, lazy or reluctant to do so. It is very difficult to find the right time and the right words to appeal to them." (Andrea, Germany)

"Creating a climate where even the most reticent and shy participants can feel at ease. The biggest challenge I find is sometimes trying to reach a balance between active participation by all involved and respect for those who feel less inclined to speak out in public." (Laura, Ireland)

"To disentangle the knots in a group and establish relationships within the group that would take into account: processes (agenda, problem-solving processes, information sharing processes, and ongoing assessment.), roles (decision making, behavioural), and goals (long term, short term, here and now)." (Andrée, France)

"Having an overview of aims and means. Monitoring progress and simultaneously providing feedback and stimuli." (Eva, Iceland)

"'Stepping outside' of the teaching and learning interaction and taking responsibility for group facilitation - it's a bit like chairing a meeting, where it is very tempting to get involved in the discussion at the expense of your chairing role - learning to balance your roles as teacher and group facilitator is for me the most challenging." (Cheryl, UK)

"Dealing with conflicts, assessment of students working in a group, feeling the pulse of the group." (Anna, Armenia)

4. What do you think is the best way to become a better facilitator?

"To challenge one's own cognitive stereotypes and learn...learn." (Adriana, Romania)

"Reflect upon my teaching/ training approach, study the current views on how adults learn and find ways to show trainees the way." (Eleni, Greece)

"To concentrate on processes." (Andrée, France)

"Asking for feedback and evaluating the outcomes of group work." (Eva, Iceland)

"I guess different things work for different people - personally, I think the best way will be for me to 'just do it' and then use tools like video or feedback from others to help me reflect and learn from the experience - over time, I imagine it will be helpful to work alongside a more experienced facilitator." (Cheryl, UK)

"If you reflect on your own work, your successes, problems and difficulties and share your experiences with colleagues. Something we certainly did during the workshop." (Andrea, Germany)

"Study more about all the skills, functions of the facilitator and consciously develop the needed skills, strategies, reflect on the process, be sensitive to subconscious feedback and purposefully ask for feedback, which must be a small "stepping stone" to the further development. But the very first thing is to believe in it, the endeavour to become a 'true' facilitator." (Gabriela, Slovakia)

5. Is there anything, which makes it difficult to put group facilitation into practice in your own context?

"The belief that experts know all. Trainees are not trained to be facilitated and trainers adopt gladly the ex-cathedra training approach." (Eleni, Greece)

"My context!" (Andrée, France)

"The constraints of time and pressure to fit in with the same content as my colleagues in other subject areas." (Cheryl, UK)

"The process of facilitation should start as early as the lower classes of primary school. If our primary and secondary school children were prepared in that new way now, our work would be much easier in the future. Thus, I can understand now how dissemination of the ideas developed during the workshop is important. But still, there is a question – How to get more support for GroupLead facilitation at the ministry of education and other institutions?" (Anna, Czech Republic)

"First, the fact that the term 'facilitation' is almost unknown in Hungary and it is not used in professional practice makes it very difficult to introduce the concept. It should first be 'Hunglisised' ie. 'domesticated'." (Andrea, Hungary)

"Students are not used to this teaching strategy so it takes time and a lot of energy and enthusiasm to "infect" them. Once they have switched to this way of working, it is great, effective, challenging... However, a term lasts only three months at my university, which is just the time they start to appreciate it and we could benefit from it. Unfortunately the term is over and again new students come who are again not used to it ... It is really very tiring work. It would be great if more and more colleagues worked like this. Hopefully the time comes soon." (Gabriela, Slovakia)

Group Facilitation: quotations with thinking questions

(To find the references for the quotations, go to the 'Bibliography'.)
(Contributed by Margit Szesztay)

Stepping back

"Teachers must learn to trust their own senses, their own observations. They must recognise the realities of group life, as well as the complexities of individual personality. … Like the artist who steps back frequently to observe more clearly an emerging work … the teacher needs to stop, to observe and to listen." (Luft, 1984:182)

Thinking questions:
Are you able to participate and observe at the same time when you are a member of a group? What helps you to do this?

An idea latent in the group

"Sometimes you may find that you are about to raise a question, but someone else brings it up. In such a case, that thought is probably latent in the group as a whole, implicit. One person may say it, and then another person may pick it up and carry it along."
(Bohm, 1996:39)

Thinking questions:
Has it ever happened to you that someone in a group said exactly what you were about to say? ... If yes, why do you think this happened? How did that make you feel?What does this experience tell you about group interaction?

Minute details

"If you know a person really well, you may pass him on the street and say, 'I saw him'. If you were asked what the person was wearing, however, you may not know, because you didn't really look." (Bohm, 1996:40)

Thinking questions:
What are the things about groups that we may not notice? ... What can help us to notice these things?

Shallows, rapids and clouds

"Conversation leaders can marshal a group through the shallows of trivia, the rapids of argumentation, or the clouds of abstractions. "
(Stanfield, 2001, The Art of Focused Conversation)

Thinking questions:
What do you think Stanfield means by the 'shallows of trivia', the'rapids of argumentation', and the 'clouds of abstraction'?
Which of these three do you find most difficult to deal with as a group leader?

Short Articles: Introduction

In this section we have included three articles, each of which relates to the topic of facilitation in a different way. Susanna Soler's article is a case study of on-line facilitation of professional learning with some rich data from real exchanges between mentor and mentee. Margit Szesztay, in her article, probes deeply into the anatomy of classroom discussion and uses a transcript of a professional discussion as a basis for her own thinking. Rod Bolitho looks into the nature of talk in the language classroom and points to ways in which it can be made richer and more meaningful for teachers and learners alike.

Title:	*Thematic area:*
1 One-to-one facilitation in a virtual context (Susanna Soler)	What is facilitation?
2 Understanding classroom discussions (Margit Szesztay)	What is facilitation?
3 Teacher talk and learner talk (Rod Bolitho)	Facilitation: background

The article which follows was written by Susanna Soler Sabanés, one of the participants of our ECML workshop on Group Facilitation. It focuses on the mentor-teacher as facilitator in a virtual context, which is becoming more and more widespread in our electronic age.

It should be interesting for the reader to draw some parallels between facilitating the thinking-learning process of a group and helping the thinking-learning process of someone in a one-to-one context.

ONE-TO-ONE FACILITATION IN A VIRTUAL CONTEXT

Introduction

This article focuses on the abilities and techniques developed by a teacher trainer as a facilitator within the frame of a training programme for secondary teachers of foreign languages in Catalonia (Spain).

The programme's main aim is to raise and develop teachers' consciousness about their own practice through careful observation, sharing these observations with colleagues, bridging the gap between personal practice and theoretical background and, finally, finding out new and innovative ways to retrace pedagogical and methodological action in class, so as to achieve better results with students of foreign languages.

The training course consists of ten sessions of three hours, from October to May. Teachers in secondary schools working nearby are grouped together under the supervision of another teacher who acts as their coordinator-trainer. In Catalonia trainers are part-time teachers and teacher-trainers, as staying close to classroom reality is considered a key point.

The members of the group within a training course can keep up communication with each other and follow the development of the contents in the programme, from session to session, with the help of a cooperative virtual space (hosted by Moodle). The virtual space is used to work together, share experiences and even write documents together (wiki project). It's also used to show what everyone is doing in his/her own classroom (materials, live 'shooting' of classroom sessions) and to communicate whatever is needed: information, feelings, reports, etc, with the help of the forum.

On some occasions, this virtual space helps to keep the teachers who missed a session on track. In such circumstances the session can be experienced through the virtual environment.

Setting the scene

The text presented here is the transcript of a chat between one of the teachers enrolled in the training programme described above and myself as his trainer. The teacher was ill and missed the second session of the group training. The first three sessions are dedicated to setting the personal goals for improvement: teachers are asked to observe themselves with the help of a logbook and to ask themselves a question that will start the process of deep reflection and building up of an action plan for improvement.

The opportunity to use the written transcript of the chat to revisit the whole experience and be able to model my own performance as a trainer was not to be missed. Some of the abilities or techniques I used were conscious but I knew I could dig much deeper, learn much more if I looked closely at the unconscious ones. Do I really put my educational values into practice when training?

After reading the whole conversation several times, I decided to divide it into eight chunks according to the natural flow of the dialogue. I'm going to describe what happened but especially HOW it happened and pull out the abilities, techniques, and strategies underneath.

Modelling the chat

CHUNK 1: Monday, 30th October 2006, 18:04 - Monday, 30th October 2006, 18:32


18:04 Jorge M.: hello


18:06: Susanna Soler has just entered this chat


18:06 Susanna: hi Jordi!!!!


18:06 Jorge M.: here I am


18:07 Jorge M.: how are you?


18:07 Susanna: let's see if **we** could manage this! Let's start!


18:07 Jorge M.: ok


18:08 Susanna: first of all I'm going to ask you to write on a piece of paper the research question you wrote on the portfolio again and also to write it here for me.


18:08 Susanna: **we**'ll have to work slowly, **we** can't do anything else

18:09 Jorge M.: the question or the answer to the question?


18:09 Susanna: sorry, only the answer.

18:10 Jorge M.: ok

According to Dr. Albert Mehrabian, an expert in non-verbal communication, the weight of words is only 7%, or put another way, 93% of the communication process is not the words we use but vocal qualities (38%) and body language (55%). This means that in a virtual dialogue we should be especially careful with the words we use because there's no other way to convey meaning.

In this first moment of the conversation my main objective was to welcome my trainee to a comfortable space, to build an environment where he felt secure and free. The only way I could do it was through words, so I used the pronoun "we" and the plural forms on several occasions to break any possible distance, to reassure him that this was going to be a shared process; he was not going to walk alone.

My second objective was to fix his attention on the work we were going to develop so I asked him to write the question. Although we were in an oral process of communication, I used this technique to concentrate his whole attention on the question that, on the other hand, was HIS question. We were starting from him, from his doubts, from his questions. The process of writing helps the writer to choose among hundreds of possibilities and pushes the teacher to get his/her priorities right. It also creates an "object" (the question) that is outside both, teacher and teacher trainer, and can be observed and manipulated.

CHUNK 2: Monday, 30th October 2006, 18:10 - Monday, 30th October 2006, 18:12

18:10 Jorge M.: so, what I'd like to change is among other things my dedication to diversity

18:11 Jorge M.: I feel that sometimes I have my students a little bit uncared for.


18:11 Susanna: now underline the words that you consider KEY words in the question that you have written. Don't think too much: instinctively, which ones would you choose?

18:12 Jorge M.: dedication, diversity,

18:12 Jorge M.: uncared for

18:12 Jorge M.: this one is very important

A second main aim in this process is to be able to go deep to the point where there is confusion, trying to clear away all pre-conceptions and other beliefs that can hide the real worry and be able to set it afloat in a clear way. To achieve this I asked him to underline the words he considered key words. For a second time, highlighting some words and ignoring others, *he* was making his mind up, *he* was choosing priorities.

This piece of conversation lasted three minutes, but I only talked for one. I let him answer in a free way. I did not interfere in the natural flow of words. He had entered a part of the talk that is more a dialogue with himself, with his inner self. He was pondering deeply and I was there just to gather up his thoughts. Silence is a great tool for teacher trainers, it leaves space. Not always easy to keep!

CHUNK 3: Monday, 30th October 2006, 18:12 - Monday, 30th October 2006, 18:21


18:12 Susanna: I have also underlined DEDICATION and UNCARED FOR.


18:13 Jorge M.: well


18:13 Susanna: now let me explain to you why I have underlined these words.


18:13 Jorge M.: ok


18:15 Susanna: they are like two antagonist words: dedication is the opposite of uncared for, isn't it? ... I've also been surprised because both talk about you ... on the other hand the word DIVERSITY is kept on a second place, the word that refers to the students. What do you think?


18:16 Jorge M.: one moment


18:17 Susanna: don't worry, this is slow, I'm here waiting peacefully.


18:17 Jorge M.: perhaps I think too much on myself!


18:17 Susanna: is that what you think?


18:17 Jorge M.: I'm not the important one, the students are


18:17 Jorge M.: no, I have not finished


18:18 Jorge M.: diversity is part of life, it has always been, although now it's somehow extreme


18:18 Jorge M.: I'm used to work with homogeneous groups

 18:19 Susanna: a VERY IMPORTANT thing!!!!!! I'm not saying with my words that what you say is wrong or right. We are not judging anyone, ok? Don't worry about "doing it in the correct way"

 18:19 Jorge M.: but I'm talking about me again

 18:19 Jorge M.: well yes, I say what I think

 18:19 Susanna: well done!!!! And who says that you mustn't do it?

 18:20 Jorge M.: nobody

 18:20 Susanna: we are only searching for what really worries you

 18:20 Susanna: only if we discover this and we define it very well you'll be able to search and achieve a small change

 18:21 Jorge M.: ok

 18:21 Susanna: do we go back?

 18:21 Jorge M.: yes

This third chunk begins with a change: my own very clear intervention. First I let him know I'm 'taking command', signalling my intervention at the beginning *"Now let me explain to you why I have underlined these words"*, then once I've taken over, I am able to lead him to see his words from another point of view, mine. If at first it was very important in this process to connect the teacher to his inner consciousness, now he should be pushed outside and further on. Seeing things through another person's eyes helps to redefine them too. The way to do it is to share opinions among colleagues; in this way, teachers can collaborate to help each other. Strong links are built among the group then. They should be given the opportunity to have a say about each other's questions. In this case it was only *my* point of view, which seems like a weakness in this virtual model; it works much better within a group of colleagues. More eyes, more new visions. The vision is also seen differently, depending on whether it's the trainer's or the colleagues'.

The process should never be seen as coming to an end when the trainer speaks. My aim here was to let him know I was not judging him or stating the truth. One of the values on which this training programme is built is respect for the teacher as a professional: s/he will able to find out her/his own answers. It doesn't consider the trainer as the "one who knows" but just as the facilitator of the process. To reinforce this last image I used open questions after nearly every statement. My aim was to open new doors, not to tell him what to do or to confine him to just one option.

CHUNK 4: Monday, 30th October 2006, 18:22 - Monday, 30th October 2006, 18:27

 18:22 Susanna: are you worried for the way you behave in front of group with diversity?

 18:22 Jorge M.: of course, homogeneous groups ask for little dedication

 18:22 Jorge M.: but now I have very diverse groups

 18:23 Susanna: what do you want to change SPECIFICALLY in your DEDICATION?

 18:24 Jorge M.: the orientation of this DEDICATION

 18:24 Jorge M.: now it's oriented to the good or average ones

 18:24 Susanna: what does "orientation" mean for you?

 18:24 Susanna: do you think you don't care for those who need it?

 18:25 Jorge M.: no, I do, I promise you

 18:25 Susanna: so? ...

 18:25 Jorge M.: I have to find tools to have more time

 18:26 Jorge M.: we have to find all the tools

 18:26 Jorge M.: I mean, we have to teach in a way that everyone finds his place

 18:27 Jorge M.: with the entire group is difficult!

 18:27 Jorge M.: perhaps I can begin in the classes with fewer students

In this part of the conversation the teacher somehow 'walks in circles' trying to find an answer, a possible way out. Although I was aware of this, it was very important to allow him to do that (it's only from "chaos" that new answers will spring), I didn't want him to get lost in his own perceptions so I used a question again. Questions have been broadly studied as educational tools and according to Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP) they move the mind. Statements close, questions move forward. In this occasion the question was the tool to focus on the target, the words that carried this function were "*what*" and "*especially*". Immediately the answer was something more precise but there was still a vague word: "orientation". Words convey different meanings according to who says

them, they are not neutral, they are the reflection of the way we represent the world. I was following HIS process so I was obliged not to interfere by insisting on my own meaning of the word, of the world! I refused to give a meaning for his word; my use of language had to be especially careful, nearly transparent here, just to help him go from generalisation to detail within his own interpretation of the situation. My question was like a small bridge *"then"?*

Something happened here that is also worth looking at: he started to use one of the devices I had used before; he used the plural forms to widen his world, to explain what was happening including himself in a group, him, me and all the secondary teachers in the same group. He was talking about something that not only happened to him, but to many people. It's easier to tackle problems when we are not alone. This also carries with it the danger that the individual dissolves in the group and does not face reality or start any real change. In this case he didn't do that, shortly afterwards he changed to the singular form "*perhaps I can begin in the classes with fewer students"*, he included the pronoun "I", he didn't avoid anything.

CHUNK 5: Monday, 30th October 2006, 18:27 - Monday, 30th October 2006, 18:48


18:27 Susanna: now we're going to do another exercise: write down your question in the middle of a sheet of paper; on the right draw a circle and write down the answer to the question: "with this question" what am I going away from?


18:28 Susanna: can you open the mail now? I'm sending you the diagram.


18:28 Jorge M.: ok


18:28 Susanna: I've sent it


18:29 Susanna: calm down, we are not in a hurry, fill in the diagram and send it to me please


18:30 Jorge M.: coming


18:31 Jorge M.: what question?


18:38 Susanna: working?


18:39 Jorge M.: yes, I've done it


18:39 Susanna: ok, one minute

18:39 Jorge M.: it's difficult this, isn't it?

18:40 Jorge M.: are they too simple answers?

18:42 Susanna: it's PERFECT! You have re-written your question on you own. Now I'll write to you for a long time, wait for me!

18:42 Jorge M.: ok

18:44 Susanna: Look, what you say is, you go away from "EXPERIENCE and BAGGAGE". We talked about that the first day. You already said then that you had been "granted a privilege". You had been granted a privilege working in a EOI[1] and you added that now things were different. They are, of course, but if you continued working but in a different EOI school, wouldn't it also be different too? Second thing, you approach a "DIFFERENT METHOD OF WORK"

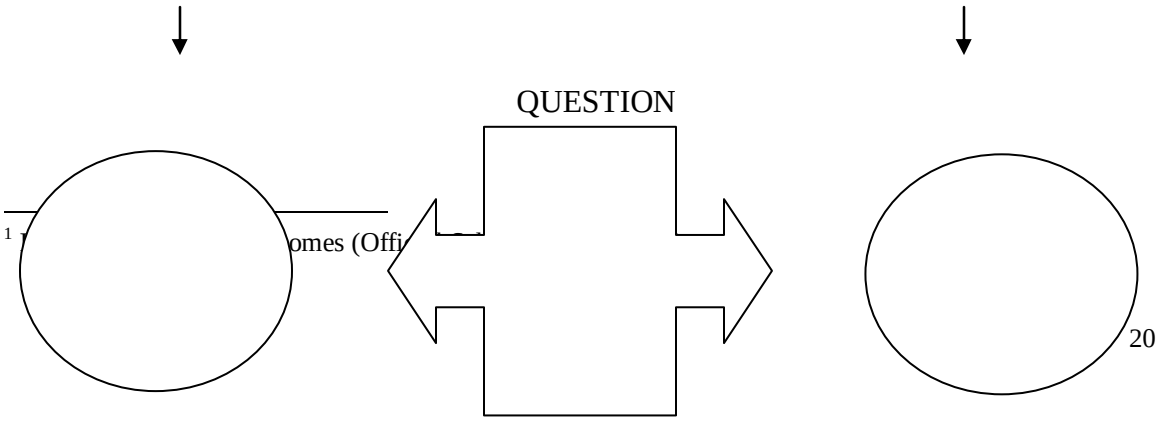
18:46 Susanna: that is interesting, isn't it? You have already defined that what you want is a different METHOD. You should not blame yourself ... that before you were ... that now you are ... and before ... and now ... LET'S LEAVE THAT! You are where you are now and you want to find out a new METHOD, WELL DONE!!!!!!!!!!!!! What do you think?

18:46 Jorge M.: you are right, in another EOI things could go in a different way, even in the same school

18:48 Jorge M.: of coooourse!!!!! I open a new door every day, as we talked in the first session. What I did I did, what I need to have crystal clear now is what I want to do from now on

A first step had been achieved; the question had been formulated in a clear way. Now it was the moment to anchor it and the technique I used here was to fill in the following diagram from NLP:

WHAT AM I GOING AWAY FROM? WHAT AM I APROACHING?



[1] [illegible] omes (Offi

With this diagram we are giving movement to objectives, in this case I was giving movement to his question and helping him to realize where all this came from: beliefs and attitudes. What he said he moved away from was his "experience and baggage" and what he said he was approaching was "a new working method". I had a lot of information from these answers because according to Abraham Maslow, who suggested a hierarchy of needs, he was going away from the need for security, belonging and self-esteem, to something a step further up the pyramid. He said he wanted to approach a new behaviour, a new way of acting, the top level, the need for self-actualization or realising one's full potential (Psychology for Language Teachers, pp. 34). This drew a movement that was going from left-bottom to right-up in the diagram above, the movement of improvement in occidental culture.

Also a very important thing was that he was doing it on his own, he was working towards professional autonomy being able to find his own "new door to open". I only had to reassure him, to encourage his improvement.

CHUNK 5: Monday, 30th October 2006, 18:48 - Monday, 30th October 2006, 18:57


18:48 Susanna: let's go back to your question: we have to define it very well. Your "dedication", when? In what activities? Which un-cared students? Level, class, you can even give some names, you can try a change with some of your students


18:49 Jorge M.: 3rd ESO students


18:50 Susanna: very well, what activities? We can change EVERYTHING in your teaching method


18:51 Jorge M.: I have a couple of students that come from Russia, they don't speak a word of English

 18:51 Susanna: how many 3rd ESO courses have you got?

 18:51 Jorge M.: one speaks a bit of Catalan

 18:51 Jorge M.: the other one Spanish

 18:51 Jorge M.: I have them together

 18:51 Susanna: do you want to work with these students?

 18:52 Jorge M.: there are more

 18:52 Susanna: are they all in the same class?

 18:52 Jorge M.: another girl that doesn't understand anything

 18:52 Jorge M.: yes, they are all in 3rd.

 18:52 Susanna: in what class?

 18:53 Susanna: oh, sorry! You've already told me! 3rd A

 18:53 Jorge M.: this is Catalan

 18:54 Jorge M.: she doesn't follow me in any way

 18:54 Jorge M.: she gets distracted with a fly

 18:54 Susanna: how many are there who would need a NEW METHOD?

 18:55 Susanna: that about the fly made me laugh!

18:55 Jorge M.: and another one still, Nic, from Georgia, he can speak fluently English, but he doesn't work and

 18:56 Susanna: this is not a class! This is the United Nations!

18:56 Jorge M.: look! I still have more ... a girl from Morocco and an English girl

18:57 Jorge M.: South American boys

 18:57 Susanna: do you want to investigate what to do with these students?

18:57 Jorge M.: .....

18:57 Jorge M.: with different levels

18:57 Jorge M.: yesssssssss

18:57 Jorge M.: with the rest of the class is perfect

Here the flow of the teacher went on and as a kind of monologue. The arrow of confidence acted as an opening of the inner worries. He didn't pay attention to my questions that were trying to bring him back; he just went on and on. I used empathy and my sense of humour but he didn't stop or go out of himself. He needed time. At the end of the chunk, being allowed to be free from his burden, he himself opened his eyes to the whole class. He moved from the individual students who worried him to the whole class. This is the moment I asked him to go back to our work, but he was really overwhelmed by what was happening to him and the negative flow started again.

CHUNK 6: Monday, 30th October 2006, 18:57 Monday, 30th October 2006, 19: 12


18:57 Susanna: ok! Look back at your question and add the specific detail you feel necessary

18:59 Jorge M.: How can I make my dedication better with foreign students and also with the native ones who don't want to work, just because they don't understand anything or because they are no capable of, or because they have to much of it and play with me

18:59 Jorge M.: ?

19:00 Jorge M.: I give them extra material

19:00 Jorge M.: I give them advice every day

19:01 Jorge M.: I ask them every day in class


19:01 Susanna: eps!!!!!!!!!! You're running too much!!!!!!!! Do you really know that they are "not capable"?

19:01 Jorge M.: but it doesn't seem that they improve


19:01 Susanna: "it doesn't seem" ... good point ...

19:01 Jorge M.: ok, ok


19:02 Susanna: now what we are going to do is to INVESTIGATE if our initial INTUITIONS are right or not

19:02 Jorge M.: well actually they don't do


19:02 Susanna: the question we have to re-write it again ...

19:02 Jorge M.: ok

19:04 Jorge M.: do I have to re-write it again?


19:04 Susanna: Jordi, look at what you have written before ... read it all again ... you do A LOT OF things and your students “DON’T IMPROVE AT ALL"? ...

19:05 Jorge M.: I answer

19:05 Jorge M.: I give them work but they don’t do it


19:05 Susanna: ok

19:05 Jorge M.: they don’t care a straw about my suggestions, sorry for using the expression


19:06 Susanna: we all, teachers of ESO, say the same

19:06 Jorge M.: when I ask them, silence, till another person answers


19:06 Susanna: NOBODY does ANYTHING? NOBODY cares about ANY advice?

19:06 Jorge M.: yes I know my problems are very usual problems


19:07 Susanna: NOBODY?

19:07 Jorge M.: the problem is this is a very extreme situation, I’m serious


19:07 Susanna: ok but..... NOBODY?

19:08 Jorge M.: Nic follows me


19:08 Susanna: and? ... who else?

19:08 Jorge M.: and Pavel, a Russian boy, from time to time he does something


19:08 Susanna: and? ... who else?

19:09 Jorge M.: but Elena, a Russian girl whose grandfather is Catalan, from those children who had to leave and go to Russia, she leaves works blank, and she says she doesn't know


19:09 Susanna: I've asked WHO DOES SOMETHING!!

19:10 Jorge M.: Nic and Pavel


19:10 Susanna: and?

19:11 Jorge M.: isn't it enough?


19:11 Susanna: answer ...

19:11 Jorge M.: Pavel's motivation is zero

19:12 Jorge M.: Nic is good, but he plays with me


19:12 Susanna: JORDI!!!!!!!! From ALL the students in 3rd.A, who DOES SOMETHING?

19:12 Jorge M.: all others work so very well, they are 25

There are many strategies that do appear here again, use of silence, empathy, use of questions, using the research question as a neutral space where we both go when the conversation comes to a standstill. But I'd like to point out two strategies that I have not mentioned before: one is the use of capital letters to "speak louder", a use that is more direct than other strategies and can be also more harmful. In this chunk I somehow felt I was losing him again, as he entered in the whirlpool of his own brooding sensations.

The second strategy is repeating or paraphrasing the teacher's words, taking them and delivering them back to the speaker. It works like an echo that helps him/her to listen to his/her own mind and makes him react. Some authors talk about this as "shadowing ":

"*Repetition sends a message of rapport between the communicators, who thereby experience that they shared communicative conventions and inhabit the same world of discourse*" (Debora Tannen in Tim Murphy's' *Exploring conversational shadowing*. Language Teaching Research, 2,5 (2001) pp. 128. 155).

I like to see it as well as an innocuous leading command, I did not add anything from my own world, but I took his and helped him go on.

Again, as in chunk 5, he finally opened up to the whole vision. The disproportion between the 25 students who worked very well and the two whom he constantly mentions, Nic and Pavel, was overwhelming. He was clearly seeing things through a biased pattern. I felt I had to push him out and so I dared to call his attention loudly: "*JORDI!!!!!!!!!!! From ALL the students in 3rd.A, who DOES SOMETHING?*" The use of a straight command was not judgmental but technical, it had to come to a stop and I could only do it with words.

But the following chunk shows how careful I as a trainer have to be: the conversation moves to personal regret; I had to re-establish the feeling of community, of shared, collaborative work.

CHUNK 7: Monday, 30th October 2006, 19:13 Monday, 30th October 2006, 19:14

19:13 Jorge M.: sorry

19:13 Jorge M.: I'm not answering what you're asking me


19:13 Susanna: UFFFFFFFFFFFFFF.....

19:13 Jorge M.: I thought you were asking me about the ones who give me problems

 19:14 Susanna: there's nothing to say sorry about!!!!! Read all our conversation again, the one you can see on the screen and tell me what you think about it

19:14 Jorge M.: ok

CHUNK 8: Monday, 30th October 2006, 19:19 Monday, 30th October 2006, 19:45

19:19 Jorge M.: I think that I get too obsessed about what I do for them and perhaps I do not do so much as I claim I do, sometimes I think I have them uncared for, that was my first doubt, but I don't leave them so uncared About

19:20 Jorge M.: I have to find a new method, because I'm dealing with new students, and the method I used in EOI schools is worthless here

19:22 Jorge M.: the group works very well, but if I think of these students my perception changes, the perception I have of the whole group

19:23 Jorge M.: I keep going around and around the theme of what I do, and what I have to do is to start thinking about WHAT I HAVE TO DO

19:23 Jorge M.: better said, what WE HAVE TO DO

19:26 Jorge M.: I have to devote more time, and see what I have to do to make them devote more time

19:26 Jorge M.: this is my reflection

19:27 Jorge M.: tomorrow I have a small group, I'll start to work seriously

 19:27 Susanna: now I'm going to write for a long time, ok?

19:28 Jorge M.: if I ask for advice to the other teachers the answer is, give them some homework and let them do it, what do you think about this answer?

19:28 Jorge M.: ok

 19:31 Susanna: look, we have achieved a question that can be like that: HOW CAN I IMPROVE MY METHOD OF DEALING WITH DIVERSITY with those students who do not follow in class 3rd.A? Do you feel comfortable about it?

19:31 Jorge M.: a lot

 19:32 Susanna: PERFECT!!!!! Now you have to pay me a lot of attention....

19:32 Jorge M.: yes


19:34 Susanna: you are so worried about the situation of 5 or 6 boys and girls, the other 25 you say that they follow you well, don't you? You worry because you want to do it well because you care about students and you believe in the work you have in your hands.


19:34 Jorge M.: yes


19:34 Jorge M.: you've said that so well


19:35 Susanna: this ... let me tell you with this word: this makes me hold you in high honour. ...The important thing now is that we are able to change your WORRIES for ACTION PLANS. ... do I make myself clear?


19:36 Jorge M.: crystal clear


19:36 Susanna: what we can't change.... well it's worthless to complain about, to lose time. ... What we CAN change, then go ahead. ... let's see HOW we can work it out


19:37 Jorge M.: as I've told you, I'm going to start brand new tomorrow at 8 in the morning, I have half of the group 3rdA


19:38 Jorge M.: first of all we'll try to change our common perception of the class, I mean, I'll change the one I have of them, and they'll change their's about me, and all together we'll change the perception of the subject English


19:39 Jorge M.: I'll tell you how it works


19:39 Susanna: wait a moment!


19:39 Jorge M.: ah, ok


19:40 Susanna: well, I mean yes


19:40 Susanna: that is what I was going to tell you


19:40 Susanna: keep your question and bring it along for the next meeting


19:40 Jorge M.: ok


19:41 Susanna: take your logbook and when the next session with 3rd.A is finished, write the answers to the questions you have in the logbook, ok?


19:41 Jorge M.: yes, of course


19:42 Susanna: and that's enough for today! Thanks a lot for your dedication!


19:42 Susanna: see you on 22nd and we'll talk much more!!! You've done very well, really


19:42 Jorge M.: thanks to you, the truth is that it's been very rewarding, although I feel a bit dull today


19:43 Jorge M.: yes? Well, let's see if it gets better


19:43 Jorge M.: see you on the 22nd


19:43 Susanna: a last advice: when you feel really worried with the group 3rd.A, LOOK at those students who are doing it all right


19:43 Susanna: a big hug


19:44 Jorge M.: one for you too, see you on 22nd


19:44 Susanna: bye!


19:44 Jorge M.: bye!!


19:45: Susanna Soler has left this chat


19:45: Jorge M. has left this chat

Again significant things happened here: the teacher started speaking using the plural form, as I had been doing during the whole conversation. He kept the plural to produce the outcome of the dialogue. He himself was creating his own community from a collaborative point of view. If something had to change, it was not he alone who was able to change it, but all the persons (students) involved in the process. He was also aware that a change of perception was needed, but I had not told him so in a direct way. He got to that point on his own. He stopped feeling that he was the only one to blame and he also stopped seeing certain students as the only ones to be blamed. He moved towards a collaborative perspective on his own action research. This view of change as being a collaborative process is very well echoed by Goswami and Stillman's (1987: preface) in the book Collaborative Action Research for English Language Teachers (Anne Burns, pp16).

"*They collaborate with their students to answer questions important to both, drawing on community resources in new and unexpected ways. The nature of classroom discourse changes when inquiry begins. Working with teachers to answer real questions provides students with intrinsic motivation for talking, reading, and writing and has the potential for helping them achieve mature language skills.*"

I talked a lot in this piece of conversation because I had two important things to do as his trainer: first of all, to praise him for his hard work, secondly to show him how to go on. The way to do both was through the use of positive language. Giving positive interpretations is a key ability for trainers, the ability to open new paths, new possibilities from a basis of self-assertion.

Finally, the technique I pointed out to him was using a logbook as a way firstly to describe and secondly to observe, what was going on in his class. Although he had made a big step, we were still moving in the conscious mind, in the theory of what was happening, in his representation of it. We were in the first phase of research, now we should look for more evidence; make observations with the use of instruments to help us be more objective. The logbook would be that first tool.

Conclusions

I've summarised the conclusions of this article in the following chart:

SUPPORTING	WHAT DID I DO?	HOW DID I DO IT?
• The teacher and his/her classroom is at the centre of the process. • The teacher is first of all a human being and the emotional side should be respected and cared for: deep worries rest deep inside. • The teacher's job is very important. • Expectations of a teacher's potential should be maintained at a high level.	1. I placed the teacher at the centre of the situation. 2. I built a safe and collaborative environment and showed empathy. 3. I followed his doubts and worries to make him aware there was also a positive side. 4. Use of SILENCE.	1. - Shadowing (repeating, paraphrasing) his words, sentences. - Use of linking words to bridge communication: then, so, etc. 2. - Use of plural: "we" "us". - Use of fun & laughter. - Creating a neutral space (outside us as persons) to talk about it: the question of research 3. - Use of positive language: words to praise and encourage him. - Use of questions to check if what I said was

		what he wanted to mean. - Use of questions to broaden his vision of the issues
• The only possible starting point to achieve significant changes and improvement is rethinking your own practice: getting inside the classrooms, observing, sharing observations and reflecting on it all. • Method should be coherent with contents.	5. I helped him to rethink his practice. 6. I led him towards a process of autonomous learning. 5. I pointed out the importance of collaboration and starting from reality.	5. – Making him write at certain moments in the process. - Use of written language to stop action and provoke meditation. - Use of the technique of underlining key words to help focus. - Making him read his own words to restart thinking when stuck. 6. - Use of open questions to move the thinking process 7. - Use of plural forms - Not accepting his forgiveness. We are equals, working hand in hand.

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Rex Sikes ultime NLP Home Study Course

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Susanna Soler Sabanés

Vilanova i la Geltrú, 10th December 2006

Understanding classroom discussions

By Margit Szesztay

Background

This article highlights some of the challenges and benefits of learning through group discussion. More specifically, it looks at the kinds of questions, which might trigger and sustain a discussion, different types of group interaction, and the learning benefits, which may be derived from them.

The main body of this article is based on a conversation among three US public school teachers and myself, a Hungarian trainer of English language teachers. In my role as visiting teacher/researcher at the School for International Training (SIT) in Vermont I became involved in the School's Teacher Knowledge Project (TKP). The Project focuses on understanding and promoting reflective professional development. It has been running seminars for practicing teachers for four years now, and has been building a network of teachers committed to reflective practice. Through the many face-to-face and on-line conversations around reflective professional development seminars, and through on-going research aimed at documenting and understanding reflective practice, a valuable body of teacher knowledge has accumulated. Looking at discussion transcripts from TKP seminars and stimulated recall interviews with participating teachers, I was struck by the many insightful comments and revealing classroom descriptions.

I was particularly interested in teachers' reflections on using group discussions in their classrooms. Before coming to SIT I had completed a four-year doctoral research project into the learning potential of group discussions in language teacher education contexts. Seeing what school teachers found challenging about using group discussion in their classrooms helped me to realise that the main issues related to group interaction cut across subject matter boundaries, cultural and institutional contexts, and age differences. It seemed to me that dialogue among professionals who use discussions as a teaching tool and who come from various contexts can help to build a many-sided picture of the way group discussions work.

It was to this end that I invited teachers who in their previous project involvement had shown interest and commitment to the discussion method to join me for a discussion on group discussions. In order for all of us to focus our thoughts before we got together, I sent out a number of quotations taken from TKP interviews in which teachers described what they saw as the key features, benefits and challenges of group discussions. These quotations provided a starting point for our conversation.

What follows, then, is an extract from our 90-minute discussion. To me, the way ideas are expressed in the following extract is just as revealing as the ideas themselves. My intention was to capture the process of group dialogue, as much as to express ideas about this process. There is immediacy to a real, face-to-face discussion that can only be captured by this very medium, I believe. Ideas emerge, develop, and crystallise, through the back and forth of listening and responding. In order to help the reader follow and

keep track, I've highlighted what I consider to be the main emerging themes with some key words on the right hand side of the page. While I hope that these will act as useful signposts, I realise that depending on the reader's background, interests and familiarity with the discussion mode, emerging themes might be formulated differently.

In addition, the transcript is followed by some comments drawing attention to some key aspects of discussions, which are highlighted in what follows.

Discussion on discussions

David:
I've always found discussions to be very amorphous. Chaotic. You never know what principles are going to come into play in advance. Who's feeling good, who's sort of alert, who's connected with the material, what's going to spur people on. It's a dynamic situation and it's always been hard for me to try to quantify it, or to formulate some rules or principles around it.

Nancy: *trigger questions*
One of the things that seem to influence the way a discussion goes in my classroom is the question that triggers it. Discussions tend to be better if the starting point is a real question. Let's say, there is a topic around which I have a real question, I don't know the answer to it and I can't find the answer myself, I need the students' response.

David:
Are you talking about a discussion around a community concern, an in-class topic, or are you talking about discussions around some learning content?

Nancy:
I'm talking about an in-class topic that comes out of our being a community and interacting together. These discussions feel far more real to me. Students seem far more engaged when we're talking about a concern that affects all of us than they are about a particular content.

David:
Yes, those are definitely the best.

Nancy: *Focusing questions*
Yeah. And we do seem to be able to come to some resolution, probably because I'm in the background saying, "OK, we've got five more minutes, so what are we going to bring out of this? How is this going to change what we are going to do tomorrow?" These discussions have been really powerful in terms of community life.

Margit:
I was just thinking that it would be really good if learning content could be

turned into a community concern somehow, if students could be as involved in content as they are in classroom issues.

Ellen:
I was thinking … what grades do you teach?

David:
Well, I was just going to ask you the same thing. I teach 5th and 6th grade.

Nancy:
I teach at the high school, 9th and 10th grade.

Margit:
In the past couple of years I've been teaching mostly in higher education.

Ellen:
OK, I teach 3rd grade and so when you were talking about in-class issues I was thinking some of this is true for 3rd graders, there are some hot issues, which will definitely, get them into the discussion.

David:
Yeah, teasing.

Ellen: *questions which engage*
Yeah, teasing, or it could be something like, "How come all our pencils are disappearing?" It can be something pretty mundane. But it's not mundane to them, it's a big issue that they can't find their pencils or whatever. And they get pretty engaged in those conversations. But they can get equally engaged in questions about … I guess what I would call content. Something that they are wondering about, and it might come out of what we are doing in the curriculum. Some of the memorable discussions to me have been about things like how the world started. The origins of things and how the different stories that they have heard about that stuff fit together. In particular, where the religious story fits with some of the things they've heard scientifically. They can talk about this forever.

And when I think about what topics really grab them, I think it's partially what you were saying, it's something they're genuinely wondering about. So there is an *element of speculation* in those conversations and they are often about things that I would say are really big questions.

I feel like science probably of all the content areas has been the richest for discussion. Literature is harder for them, though in small groups they've had some really good discussions about literature, as well. I'm thinking of one discussion this fall in a group of three kids when one of the kids raised a question, which had to do with perspective. They'd realized that they

were actually looking at the story slightly differently, that there wasn't just one way to understand the story. And every time that group met, they kept adding on to that. And the three of them could sustain that kind of real focused inquiry into a book.

David: *types of discussion*
I'd be interested to hear how you've reacted to some of the quotations that Margit sent us. There is one in particular that I would be interested to hear what you all felt about, it's in the section on 'What do you find most challenging about leading discussions?' (reads out the quotation):

Eliciting without manipulating

"It's so hard to do this questioning thing because it can start to come across as 'I know the answer and I'm being tricky and elusive about it and so you have to figure out what's in my mind'. So I wish that I could make the situation in my questioning be more like, 'I'm interested in how you're thinking about this'. Instead of, 'I know the answer and you have to try to figure it out'. What I wish is for these questions and answers not to be a test but just an engagement in thinking about the phenomena." (Eric)

When I read this first I thought, 'No, that's not good to do, I don't want to do that', but then I thought, 'Well, I DO do that'. And I think it's OK to do that, as long as this is not the only kind of conversation that takes place in my classroom. So this led me think about different kinds of conversations. … The other day we were talking about geography in class, we were talking about photo-period, you know, why it is now getting lighter here in the Northern Hemisphere. And we had discussed before the notion of 'latitude', so I knew that they know 'latitude', and as we were having this conversation I wanted someone to say 'latitude', because I felt that if someone had said that, the 'Eureka!' would have been spread around, a connection would have been made. … So reading Eric's comments, I found myself questioning the role of this kind of *fishing conversation*.

Ellen:
Well, I think that I do that too, and I feel that it may lead to something productive, but it doesn't generally lead to a productive discussion. I'm creating another kind of form, which also involves give and take, but it's not a discussion. And I think students can tell the difference, they know when I'm asking a real question, and when I'm asking a *teacherly question*, that I actually already know the answer to, and I'm asking the question to get them thinking about something.

David:
So could we say that the Socratic thing is not really a discussion, there's something else that's going on?

Nancy:
I think of a Socratic question as a 'real' question, perhaps bringing a new lens to a topic, but not one where the person asking the question already knows the answer. […] I prefer the term 'teacherly question' when I actually do know the answer and I'm fishing. […] And I think that there are times when I need to go fishing, but I think that it's important for me to recognise that, to be aware of these different types of conversation. And I agree with you Ellen that students respond to teacherly questions in a very different way. And I think it's probably important to make this conscious for students, as well.

Margit: *perception gap*
Yes, I think for me that's the key, to be aware of what we are doing when. 'Teacherly questions' can take the conversation in a certain direction, and then it can be hard to move out of there, to regain the openness dimension of a real discussion.

When I read this quotation I was thinking that even when I think that I'm asking a 'real' open-ended question, which I hope will lead to exploration of an issue, students might perceive this as a teacherly question. So there might be a perception gap between students and the teacher here. Students might expect me to have 'the answers', on issues where I feel there are no final answers.

Nancy:
Certainly in my high school classes students often think, "We know there is an answer, she wants a certain answer, so if we wait long enough she'll just tell us." … So I have to watch out for this too.

Ellen:
Sometimes my kids will just ask me if they're not sure, they'll say, "Do you know?" It's like they're trying to figure out where we are at, what's the real meaning of my question.

David: *purpose of discussion*
There is something about this that I'm still not settled with, but I don't know what it is. … I mean, doesn't it all depend on the purpose of the discussion? … Sometimes a teacher just has to be like a referee, make sure that everyone gets a chance to speak, but the more difficult aspect of it has to do with content, the teacher's role in developing understanding of content. … I'm not really sure what I'm asking. I guess I'm still going back to Eric's quotation and trying to figure out the nature of a discussion based on content and not about social things, or theoretical things about content. In literature it's easier, I think, because there is more space for interpretation, but in subjects like science, I don't know. I don't know.

Ellen:
I guess I've never really thought about … I mean I'm sure I've thought about the aim of a discussion, but I've never had the question like, in front of my face, but as I'm thinking about it now, one of the aims for the kids, or for myself when I'm involved in a discussion is … it's *a way of making knowledge* about something. … Like right now we're trying to pull together things we know about discussions and by making knowledge it's like creating some new edifice … Edifice is probably too solid an image. Some new understanding of what a discussion is, that we can carry forth and then mull over some more, and maybe talk about with some other people and then write about, or read about. It's the active side of learning, the making part. And I see that with the kids, too, when they're having those discussions, they're trying to put together bits of information, ideas, hearing what somebody else thinks and thinking more about that, does that fit, not fit, do they agree, does it make sense to them. They're taking the stuff that we are working with and molding it. ... And David, you know what you were saying before that it's not quantifiable, I can't imagine a script that would tell you how to have a good discussion.

Nancy:
Although they're out there.

David:
Or a rubric.

Ellen:
Yeah, I'm sure someone has created it, but I can't imagine that they would ever lead to a good discussion, because there is something that's …

David:
Artificial …

Ellen:
Well, artificial about the script, but there is something that. ... It's just *unscripted.* You don't know what people are going to bring up, what connections someone might make, what surprises might happen.

David:
That's the dynamism that I was referring to …

Nancy: *parallel with town meeting*
I see a parallel between town meetings and class discussions. I used to think that you go to town meeting so that you can say your piece, but these days I think you go so that your understanding of a controversial question will deepen. So when you speak out at the town meeting you have an obligation to add to the understanding, the joint understanding that's being created,

and when it comes to voting, we can all vote in a more informed way. And I guess if I'd ever thought long enough to make the connection, I would hope that that's what happens in my classrooms, too. We *deepen our understanding by having different points of view* on something, and when we walk out the door after the discussion, we see things differently from when we came in.

Margit:
Going back to David's point, I fully agree that a discussion is not something you can control, but still I think that if you observe it and are able to describe it then maybe you become more aware of the factors, which influence it. And then you are in a better position … not to manipulate it, but to shape it.

Commentary

While you are in the process of discussing it's hard to be fully aware of what is happening. Discussion transcripts can help you to become more aware of what goes on during group interaction as they make it possible for you to analyse the various contributions, and patterns of emerging thought. Below are a few points, which I think are well illustrated by the above discussion transcript.

Ideas often get developed in a cyclical way

David starts out with the idea that 'discussions are amorphous' and we return to this point when Ellen notes that discussions are 'unscripted', and then later again when Margit says that 'a discussion is not something you can control'.

Discussions usually have transition points

When a particular idea has been fully explored, somebody needs to move the discussion into a different direction. In a classroom context it is usually the teacher, who asks another question or gives the group a follow-up task. However, in an open discussion where participants feel involved and take the initiative, anyone can take on the leadership role. The extract is taken from a discussion where participants shared the responsibility for moving on the discussion. For example, David takes the discussion into a new direction when he says: "I'd be interested to hear how you've reacted to some of the quotations that Margit sent us. There is one in particular …"

The dynamics of the group influences the content of the discussion

In this case, although some members knew each other from before, there were no strong links or friendships prior to the discussion. However, all four members were united by a common set of values and beliefs about learning, and there was evidence of this in the fact that we all considered group interaction to be a powerful tool for learning. There was a strong feeling of collegiality and a kind of shared excitement that comes with talking about professional issues, which are perceived to be really important.

All members were attentive and picked up on and developed each other's points. As a result, the discussion seemed to 'flow', and to build up in a coherent way. There was a kind of creative coherence that emerged out of the ability to hold ideas loosely. The discussion was free-flowing; it was not restricted to any one aspect of group talk. Still, what helped to create the feeling of coherence was the sustained attention of all four members. They all stayed with it, were really listening to each other, and were open to following up emerging themes, ideas.

The level of ambiguity

This relates closely to the previous point. Exploration of ideas will happen to the extent that members are able to tolerate ambiguity and hold ideas loosely.

Teacher Talk and Learner Talk

Rod Bolitho

Abstract
This paper focuses on the purposes, nature, and quality of talk in a language classroom. We are all in the business of communication, and yet there is reason to believe that much of the interaction that takes place in language classrooms has little or nothing to do with real communication and that some of it tends to infantilise learners. I suggest some possible reasons for this and look at some ways in which the problem can be addressed, with reference to questioning, thinking skills, language awareness work and cross-curricular links in teaching and materials.

Some questions about classroom talk
Before you start reading the rest of this article, you may like to address the following questions with reference to your own routines as a teacher or teacher educator. Thinking about the questions and making a few notes on them may help you to get more out of reading that follows.

- ***What kind of talk goes on in your classroom?***
- ***Who initiates the talk?***
- ***Who decides who should talk?***
- ***Who asks most of the questions?***
- ***What about the quality of listening in your classroom?***

Some issues related to classroom talk
There is no doubt that plenty of talk goes on in modern, communicative language classroom. But what is the nature of this talk and on whose terms does it take place?

Quality vs. quantity: the curse of the speaking skill
Language teachers in many countries are now being trained to give more attention to the development of speaking skills in their learners, in part to compensate for earlier excessive preoccupations with reading and writing and in part because the spoken language is seen as such a vital tool in modern communication. Teachers, supported by many recent and current textbooks, have been encouraged to foster speaking through techniques such as role play, project work and dialogue practice, and to vary practice and interaction patterns in the classroom by making extensive use of pair work and group work as well as whole class sessions. In my experience of observing classes in recent years, this has led to a great deal of what I can only describe as low quality and relatively meaningless talk. All too often, the topics chosen are banal and trivial, perhaps making linguistic demands on learners, but certainly not stretching their capacity for critical thought. It may be (and this is just a thought!) that some course books are going in for the kinds of trivial topic that crop up time and again in our media: teenage magazines, soap operas and reality TV shows. It may also be that some learners (and teachers) feel 'safe' when they speak about uncontroversial topics and there is no doubt that political

correctness and good taste limit the range of topics which is acceptable as a vehicle for classroom talk. Equally, however, I have had secondary school intermediate-level learners in more than one context tell me that they would like to discuss 'real' issues and not just 'fill time' with talk at a superficial level which, to them, is neither interesting nor memorable. They also see that drilling and pronunciation exercises may contribute to the development of 'the speaking skill', but they don't see them as a substitute for real talk.

There appears to be potential for a 'trade-off' here: half an hour of *good quality* talk about a topic which genuinely interests learners may have far more impact than a couple of hours of 'jumping through the hoops' of role play and group work in order to fulfill the outward requirements of communicative teaching. On initial training courses, student teachers are often exhorted to find ways of cutting down on teacher talking time (TTT), as though it were a sin, and to ensure there is a proportional increase in learner talking time (LTT), as though this were a panacea. Nobody seems to mention the *quality* of the talk under scrutiny here. Here again we need to think of striking a balance: three minutes of good quality teacher talk can be of far greater lasting value to learners than twenty minutes of learner discussion about their favourite holiday pursuits.

The standard classroom exchange and the impact of 'routinisation'

Research has shown that the most common classroom exchange has three 'turns': (1) teacher asks, (2) learner answers, (3) teacher evaluates the answer. This sequence is repeated thousands of times a day in classrooms all over the world. It is what passes for teaching and learning. Morgan and Saxton question this assumption:

> "The classic concept of learning is that it occurs when the teacher asks the questions and the students can answer them, but the reality is that learning does not occur until the learner needs to know and can formulate the question for himself." (1991:75)

I shall return to the topic of questioning later in this article. In language classrooms the three-stage exchange referred to above has an extra, and for many learners rather sinister purpose. The purpose of a teacher's question is all too often not to listen to *what* the learner says, but rather to *how* s/he says it. Consider the following exchange, which I picked up from an unpublished classroom video:

Teacher: What did you do last weekend, Carla?
Carla: We went to the beach and then we drived to London again.
Teacher: 'Drove', Carla, 'drove'. It's an irregular verb, remember?

Here the teacher shows no interest in Carla's message, just in the language she uses to express it. The sad thing is that Carla is herself almost certainly a veteran of such routinised exchanges and she realises what the 'rules' are even before she speaks. By now she would probably even get a shock if the teacher showed any interest in her weekend activities for their own sake. This kind of exchange is not communication. In the classroom it is simply a pretext for learners to put their language up for scrutiny and for teachers to correct it. Outside the classroom the teacher's response would very probably be seen as socially unacceptable. And yet many of us call our classrooms communicative …

Who really listens?

You could argue that Carla's teacher is 'listening' to her in a way, but this is far from the kind of listening, which is typical of the give and take of real life talk. A teacher who really listens to what her students have to tell her is far more likely to get a positive response from them. Everyone likes to be listened to attentively and there seems to me to be no reason why this should be any different in a language classroom. A listening teacher sets the tone for the development of a listening culture in the classroom. If the teacher values what the students say, and shows them that she does, they are far more likely to listen attentively to her and, importantly, to each other. There are other reasons why the quality of a teacher's listening may not be as good as it could be, apart from this tendency to focus on errors. All sorts of things may be going on in her mind while a student is speaking: planning the next 'move' in the lesson, keeping half an eye on a student in the far corner who is not paying attention, groping round desperately for a board marker or a piece of chalk – all of this is quite natural teacher behaviour, but it prevents us from giving proper attention to the student whose turn it is to speak. It takes a good deal of determination and self-discipline to learn to clear our head of all this 'clutter' and to listen actively to student contributions. But on the occasions when we achieve it, the rewards are quickly evident in terms of student motivation and participation.

We all know that 'You're not really listening to me' feeling. Why should we inflict it on learners in a classroom?

Silence, dominance and the 'pecking order' in the classroom

There may be many reasons why a student elects to keep silent in a classroom: fear of making mistakes ('lathophobia' from the Greek), a desire not to 'stand out', a dislike of how s/he *sounds* in a certain language, a need to take time to think, or simply a bad day. Whatever the reason, language teachers seem to have been imbued with a collective fear of silence, as though it represents emptiness, or an unproductive use of time. Once again, this flies in the face of what generally happens during real communication outside the classroom. We choose when to speak and when to remain silent. Other than in other highly formal and ritualised situations such as meetings, courtrooms and so on, we don't expect someone else to determine when we should speak or remain silent. Accepting that the smooth running of a class requires that turn-taking conventions be observed and that no teacher, quite understandably, wants everyone to be shouting at once, or one student to be hogging all the talking time, there is still plenty of room for a more relaxed attitude to the classroom as a communicative social community.

There is plenty of evidence that good quality talk often includes thoughtful silences (as opposed to empty silences or embarrassed silences). If a teacher chooses to put a good question 'into the air', students are likely to need time to consider and formulate an answer, rather than to rush out with something because the teacher shows signs of impatience and wanting to get on to the next question because she is behind with her lesson plan. The kind of silence that can grow after a good question is educationally valuable because it promotes thinking, and if it happens frequently students will come to

understand it and make use of it as a time for them to order their thoughts and to find the right way of expressing them.

Dominant and overzealous students are often the first to 'break' this kind of silence and a teacher may need to hold them in check for a few moments to allow others the space they need to put their thoughts in order. Far from interrupting talk, this kind of silence is an integral part of it. Morgan and Saxton put it like this:

> "Quality thinking time is filled with the energy of curiosity which will be balanced by the energy of thinking and feeling. Active silence speaks as loudly as words. An interrupted silence is equal to interrupting a speaker; thought is part of verbal expression and exchange." (1991:80)

Surely this ought to be even more the case in a language classroom where learners will often need even more time to work towards articulating their ideas.

The nature and purposes of 'real' talk

Van Ments (1990:20) identifies four different kinds of verbal communication: *phatic*, referring to 'light-hearted social discourse' with 'no agenda and no objective'; *cathartic*, denoting a 'highly personal form of speech whose main purpose is to release emotional tension'; informative, which involves sharing ideas and knowledge and is 'the basis of educational talking'; and *persuasive,* defined as 'talk as an instrument to change attitudes and produce decisions and actions.' These distinctions are useful at one level, but I prefer to take them a little further in order to forge a link with the key ideas in this article.

Talk as a means of learning

Everyone uses talk for this purpose but the sad reality is that this kind of talk is not always encouraged in classrooms, of all places. Listening in to any child-parent conversation will sooner or later reveal the way a child uses talk to gain knowledge and understanding. I noted down this exchange between a child of about four and her mother on the train from Liverpool Street to Stansted Airport:

Girl:	Look Mum, the sea!
Mother:	That's not the sea, darling – it's a lake.
Girl:	Why isn't it the sea?
Mother:	Because it isn't big enough. The sea is really big.
Girl:	So a lake is like a little sea …
Mother:	Yes, I suppose it is really

In the classroom, the favourable child: adult ratio illustrated in this short exchange no longer applies, and this kind of enquiring talk is less easy for a teacher to handle. However, it is far from impossible. One of the best primary school lessons I have ever seen was one in which the teacher sat on a low stool with the children cross-legged on the floor in a semicircle all around him. He produced a piece of quartz, held it up for everyone to see, said nothing and just waited for the children to make the first move. After a hesitant start, they began to bombard him with questions and remarks until they had found out everything they could about the glistening stone, which was in the

meantime passed around for everyone to see and feel. The sense of wonder and fascination in the room was palpable and the children were eager to get on with the next stage of their project, which was to go to a beach and collect different kinds of stones and fossils for close examination and classification. The lesson for me was that good quality classroom talk does not have to be highly structured but that it does need to be initiated in a thoughtful and imaginative way. In language classrooms we are often so much concerned with skills and language systems that we too easily forget about the potential of this kind of learning-oriented talk.

Another feature of 'real' talk that distinguishes it from the sometimes artificial exchanges that take place in the classroom is that when we ask a question we do so because we want to know the answer. That was what motivated the primary children in the example just quoted. Compare it with the exchange between the teacher and Carla, in which the teacher had no obvious interest in the learner's answer, and with the (literally) hundreds of questions that teachers ask each week to which they already know the answer – *What's the past tense of 'drive'; What's the capital of the USA?; What is the formula for common salt?* – behaviour which, if transferred to the world outside, would soon have people doubting their sanity. In my experience of observing in classrooms around the world, the proportion of this kind of 'low-challenge', knowledge-seeking question a child is confronted with on an average day at school is very high compared with the type of question which provokes deeper thinking and a more considered response. Bloom and Kratwohl's (1965) work on the classification of thinking skills into lower order and higher order can help us here: they define 'lower order' thinking skills as oriented towards *knowledge*, *comprehension* and the *application of knowledge,* and 'higher order' thinking skills as being concerned with *analysis, synthesis* and *evaluation.* One of the most demotivating things about routine classroom exchanges for many learners is that these three higher order skills remain underdeveloped, particularly in the early years of education, leading to a gradual diminution of curiosity and interest. In language classes, reading lessons all too often stop once comprehension has been checked and a grammar class may be almost entirely knowledge and application-focused. The opportunity to ask more challenging and interesting questions is all too often missed.

Talk as a means of transferring meaning

We all need to 'get a point across' to others at one time or another whether this is at a family gathering, in a formal meeting or in a classroom. Equally, we know the feeling that comes when our interlocutor fails to 'get' the point we are trying to put across. In such cases, meaning has to be negotiated between speaker and listener, to make sure that unilateral understanding becomes shared understanding. Sadly, these kinds of conventions of negotiation apply all too seldom in teacher-learner interactions. In many educational contexts, knowledge and meaning are 'transmitted' without any obvious attempt to ascertain that the 'message' has been 'received and understood'. Learners are expected to digest a teacher's 'meanings' without question, and many are reluctant to 'swim against the tide' by asking for clarification when they need it. In some cases, this kind of behaviour by learners is even actively discouraged or seen as disrespectful; they either accept a message on the teacher's terms or not at all. The resultant half-understandings and misunderstandings only become evident when a learner hands in a

piece of work or takes a test, and the teacher sees underperformance or error as the fault of the learner and not of any earlier, failed classroom communication. In the language classroom, our preoccupation with teaching techniques and methods has until recently led to a neglect of the learner's perspective, thereby causing an opportunity for rich and meaningful classroom talk to be missed. And while we seem to be very good at developing learners' fluency in social and everyday situations in terms of the initial level of communication (*'Can you tell me the way to … ?'; 'How much is ... ?'; 'I'd like a cup of black coffee, please'*), we seem to be less good at helping them with the language needed to explore meaning or clear up misunderstandings which is ultimately equally or even more important to successful interpersonal communication beyond the confines of the classroom.

Talk as a tool for reflection and making sense

This kind of talk takes place in many 'real-world' situations - when we have watched a film with someone and talk it through afterwards, after a meeting or a discussion in which interesting ideas were bandied around, when a child has 'learned a lesson the hard way' and is asked by a parent to think about it – there are so many everyday instances. Some people seem to thrive on this kind of talk while others get impatient with it (I have a colleague who falls into that category) and are anxious to get on to the next task or a new challenge. In educational settings, this is the kind of talk, which is most associated with experiential learning, where learners 'talk down' the experience of a shared activity, often 'deconstructing' it and then recreating it through talk. In language classrooms, there is usually plenty of 'shared activity' through group work, role play etc, but too often (the curse of the speaking skill again!) the activity is seen as a vehicle for activating language, and therefore an end in itself, rather than as a point of departure for reflective talk or lively discussion where opinions might differ and there might be a reason for learners to listen to each other and an opportunity to take part in talk that develops organically rather than being orchestrated within strictly defined parameters by a teacher whose objectives are stated solely in terms of language skills without an educational dimension. As a reader your response to this point may well depend on the extent to which you see yourself as an educator as well as someone who imparts useful skills and knowledge; to me, it certainly seems like another opportunity missed. With curricula all around the world now laying particular emphasis on critical thinking, isn't it time for us as language teachers to make a more effective contribution?

Talk for social purposes

I will always remember a student in my *English for Graduate Chemists* class at a German University saying to me (in German, over a post-class beer!) that he found it strange that he was able to put together and deliver a conference paper in his own special field, but that he couldn't understand a joke in English, or keep up his part in a conversation with English speakers at a party. The curse of ESP, at work this time, perhaps! Social talk, the type identified as 'phatic' by Van Ments, can be every bit as difficult to master as other types of talk for language learners, and it is also the area in which talk-related cultural conventions are perhaps at their most prominent. Speaking skills classes usually take care of the purely functional side of social talk, but all too rarely attend fully to these cultural dimensions. Despite all the current focus on social constructivism in learning (cf

Williams and Burden 1997), implying a view of the classroom as a social as well as a functional community, finding time, space and motivation for social talk is not easy. In classes with a common L1 this is especially difficult, as phatic communication seems unnatural in anything other than the mother tongue. Yet the experience of my German graduate chemist is a reminder of its importance for future if not present communicative purposes.

Self-talk and inner talk

'Talking to yourself again?' – how often do we hear this apparent reproach from our friends and families? There is no doubt that talking to oneself within earshot of other people is viewed as socially unacceptable and even deviant in many cultures, and yet we all do it quite happily when there is no-one around. It is so common that it must have a positive function, and while this certainly differs from one individual to another, it probably serves purposes such as issuing reminders and injunctions to oneself, arranging one's thoughts after exposure to new ideas or before expressing oneself in a more public way, or rehearsing what one wants to say in a 'set piece' of some kind, in order to listen to oneself and see what it sounds like. These are all, equally, functions of 'inner talk', which may remain unuttered but is nonetheless a talk 'genre' which is extremely valuable to most of us. In many ways, it is the bridge between thinking and speaking. Speaking is for many people an outcome of thinking, but the converse can also true: articulating ideas also gives rise to further thought. Vygotsky (originally in 1934) put it succinctly: "Thought is not just expressed in words; it comes into being because of words". Drawing on his experience of being brought up by a German mother and an Irish father, Hugo Hamilton saw the relationship between talk and thinking and meaning with a strong cultural overlay:

> "(My mother) says German people say what they think and Irish people keep it to themselves, and maybe the Irish way is sometimes better. In Germany, she says, people think before they speak, so that they mean what they say, while in Ireland, people think after they speak, so as to find out what they mean. In Ireland, the words never touch the ground." (2003)

Years ago, I had a Russian teacher in Düsseldorf who used to tell us to mutter to ourselves for 60 seconds before trying to respond to a question in our very basic Russian. It made for a short period of what seemed like comical chaos at the time, but I now finally understand why she did it – it loosened our tongues, helped us to overcome our inhibitions and encouraged us to find a 'Russian voice' in ourselves, something which I still have, 40 years later.

Institutional culture and learners' experiences

There is no doubt that children as learners are to a large extent conditioned by their environments at school and at home. In this section I look briefly at some of the factors, which influence learners' (and teachers') attitudes to talk.

School Culture

Schools and other educational institutions can be characterised by a talking culture, a culture of silence or shades in between. I have worked in institutions at both ends of the spectrum – one which was all talk and no action, and another in which a lot was done in

isolation without any obvious sign that talk played a significant part, and where people actually struggled to give each other the time of day. The happiest place I ever worked in was one where there was talk between colleagues at many levels – social, informative, negotiative and even self-talk, as well as a commitment to listening, all in a spirit of mutual learning and respect. It was, I'm sure, what Hargreaves (1994) described as a 'collaborative culture'. All of this very visibly 'washed down' to classroom level, where students of English were regularly engaged in meaningful talk activities of one sort or another.

Peer Culture

Teachers of teenagers will need no introduction to the notion of peer pressure and its influence, for better or worse, on learners' classroom performance and on levels of involvement. If the consensus in a particular group is that it's 'cool' to talk, the teacher will have little difficulty in getting a lively discussion off the ground. This was the prevalent class culture in many of the secondary schools I have visited in Romania, for example, and I believe it is one of the reasons for the high standards of proficiency in English achieved by many Romanian state school students. If, however, the accepted culture is to be 'strong and silent', the teacher will have a tough time trying to squeeze contributions out of adolescents whose image with their peers is more important to them than the teacher's view of them. This kind of culture is frequently all too evident in British secondary schools, and along with our traditional disdain for foreign languages, is almost certainly a reason for the massive underachievement by British school pupils in foreign languages.

Home Culture

Many kids in our modern 'push-button' age are deprived of opportunities for talk in the family circle. Mealtimes are often rushed to enable kids or parents to catch the latest episode of a soap opera or a reality TV show, and significant chunks of free time are spent in front of a screen of one sort or another. Family discussions, along with other oral traditions like storytelling, bedtime stories and 'parlour' games, seem to be dying out, though magazines and Sunday supplements exhort their middle-class parent-readers to regard the TV, the Internet and computer games as stimuli for talk. By contrast, some primary school teachers complain that children in reception classes arrive with little or no idea of how to engage in talk or other social activity, and school may have to compensate for this.

Creating opportunities for talk

Against the background I have outlined up to this point, I believe that we as language teachers need to look at our practices and to find ways of promoting talk almost as an educational imperative in our classrooms. If we, in the 'front line' of the business of communication, don't do it, who will? In general terms, we need to:

- ☞ show that we value talk and that we listen to *what* our students have to say as well as how they say it
- ☞ promote a 'listening culture' in our classrooms

- ☞ ask more challenging questions to engage higher order thinking skills and be ready to accept unexpected answers
- ☞ allow silences and time for thought
- ☞ challenge and change stultifying routines such as the three-stage classroom exchange
- ☞ plan and build in meaningful tasks to encourage productive talk
- ☞ encourage students to ask questions, initiate talk and to seek for meanings
- ☞ involve students in decision-making
- ☞ help learners to 'find a voice' within the language

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Reflective Diary Entries

Introduction

Keeping a diary, as most of us know from the guilty looks our learners and course participants give us when we ask them how their diaries are going, is not everyone's cup of tea. Sometimes it just feels like too much at the end of a busy day; sometimes there are more attractive options than the confrontation with a blank page; and, let's face it, not everyone is in love with writing. However, as trainers, we have frequently found it useful to keep notes on our work with groups, particularly when we want to 'unravel' an event and make sense of it, or when we want to understand why a particular session has gone especially well or badly. The extracts in this section represent ways of reflecting-on-action and include trainee and participant perspectives as well as that of a facilitator.

We have decided to include these extracts, as there is only so much you can express about facilitation in general. Reflecting on your own experiences, which are always situated in a particular situation, allows you to do deeper. Through the personal voices in the extracts, which follow, we hope to take you straight to the heart of what it feels like to be involved in a group either as a facilitator or as a participant.

Title:	*Thematic area:*
1 Each group is unique	Group life
2 Trust and honesty	Group life
3 Managing the different voices in the group	Group life
4 Reflections on a difficult moment in a difficult day	Group life
5 Feeling straitjacketed	Facilitation: qualities and skills

In this extract, which speaks largely for itself, Margit reflects on two very different encounters in her working day as a facilitator.

Each group is unique

Wednesday afternoon, just came out of class. First I taught 2nd Year Methodology, and then 1st Year Skills Development. I think back to the two classes I had this morning ... [....]

The first thing that I note is that I'm different with these two groups. My 1st year group brings out the best in me. I can really be myself with them. I can be strict, encouraging, demanding, patient, and so much else, and somehow it all feels right, I'm me in all these different roles. There is so much trust within that group, trust for each other, and trust towards me. And this trust is coupled with excitement and investment. We're working really hard together, they're (nearly always) attentive, interested, and active, all 17 of them. ....

2nd Year Methodology. A very different group. Individually, I like all of them. They usually prepare for class, pay attention, and do whatever needs to be done, or think about whatever needs to be thought about. But there is a general feeling of... of what? Lack of excitement. Of stiffness. People participating only about 50 percent. The rest of them are somewhere else. Dormant. ... Yes, there are moments when we all wake up, suddenly there is a spark and eyes open up a little bit wider, we are all more expressive, suddenly what someone is saying or doing becomes important, I can feel that attention is being paid from all corners of the room... and then it all goes away. People go back to their shells, and involvement drops. And when involvement drops boredom creeps in so easily. [...] My presence is very different in these two groups. It mixes and mingles with the presence of a dozen or so others. (Margit)

Reflective Diary Entries – trust and honesty: the trainer's perspective

Today's class went really well. There are so many things I can think of, so many reasons to justify why it went well. I think the most crucial among them is trust. There just seems to be a real trusting, open atmosphere and open relationship emerging among the group. This is what helps content to develop, and to draw people in.

I guess it would be useful to pinpoint what helps to establish trust within a group. I think honesty is part of it. If the initial good-will of people to do something meaningful is there, then honesty of contributions can help to build on this initial trust. (Margit)

Reflective Diary Entries – trust and openness: trainees' perspective

Quotation A
I appreciated your openness, which created a relaxed and friendly atmosphere in the lessons. Owing to this feeling of togetherness, we were quite ready to talk even when our discussion was recorded. (I have to confess that at first I was extremely scared ...) We caught ourselves sharing some very personal things with each other sometimes but it came naturally somehow. (Nóra)

Quotation B
I think our courses are well organised and very well built. I like my groupmates and I like working with them. I think the group works very well together, and what is very important, we respect each other. (Dóra)

Commentary:
In the two extracts the trainer's perspective is complemented by the voices of two trainees from the same group. From my trainer's perspective I mention honesty of contributions as one of the factors, which can build trust in a group. In Quotation A Nóra writes: 'We caught ourselves sharing some very personal things with each other sometimes but it came naturally somehow.' I think this quotation highlights that being honest during a group discussion does not only mean saying things which one perceives to be true. Honesty is very closely related to openness and to being personal. In certain situations being honest might mean talking about one's failures or expressing one's confusion and uncertainty, and therefore it can put one in a vulnerable position. It is perhaps worth noting that Nóra, the writer of Quotation A, was a very shy trainee with an introvert personality. She often remarked to me during informal chats that she herself was really surprised that she was able to open up and share quite personal things about herself. Her phrasing in the extracts also indicates this: We caught ourselves sharing some very personal things.
(Margit)

Reflective Diary Entry: managing the different voices in the group

Reflective writing doesn't always take the form of a diary entry. The short message below was written by Simon Borg at the end of a short residential course for teachers. Here the course tutor is reflecting on the way the group worked together, and what he is taking away from the experience. (Margit)

Dear Alex, Alexandrs, Betty, Bhikul, Emily, Mauricio and Svetla,

Here are some thoughts about our work together I'd like to share with you before you leave.

I can sum up my feelings about the whole experience in one word - "challenging" – and I hope that you too have all felt challenged in one way or another. Challenged to reconsider assumptions we've always held to be true about language learning, challenged to think.

This has been a key feature of our work.

All in different ways, you have contributed to the life of the group. Alex and Bhikul silently observing and listening, but deep in thought; Svetlana and Alexandrs full of enthusiasm for debate; Emily and Betty with their soft-spoken but very meaningful comments, and Mauricio, whose openness about the novelty of much of our work provided a valuable perspective throughout our discussions. Attempting to manage the different 'voices' you presented is an experience I have learned a lot from. I, too, was a learner on this course.

I have tried to stimulate you without pushing you too far; to guide without being assertive, to respect your knowledge and experience without appearing condescending. I would be naive to believe I always succeeded in doing so, but the frankness with which you were ready to share with me your feelings about our sessions has provided me with valuable insight into my work. I hope that the feeling of mutual respect, which existed among all members of the group, is something that you too have learned a lot from.

If I had to choose one idea I'd like you to take away with you it would be that teaching is all about interacting with and relating to people. Keep that in mind when you return home.

Good luck,
Simon

Reflections on a difficult moment in a difficult day

One of the most challenging things I have been involved in over the last few years has been to function as a consultant to a number of national curriculum and materials development projects. The work has invariably involved training writers and facilitating their progress through the writing process, which usually includes the preparation and discussion of several drafts, piloting and feedback, during regular in-country visits. This task is often delicate as writers sometimes become defensive when their materials are under scrutiny. This diary entry is concerned with what I saw as a critical incident during a recent workshop with a team in a former Soviet republic developing materials for an INSET programme for teachers of English. Names have been changed to preserve anonymity. (Rod)*

Saturday 10th March

Materials writing is not an easy ride for anyone concerned. I finished the day absolutely wiped out and I need to think back over it in order to understand why.

It strikes me that this team has been together for over two years now and they've had very few breaks from the process of writing. It has become a bit of a grind for them, and some of the early pleasure and excitement of writing seems to have been lost. They also show signs of impatience with each other, particularly Marina* and Vladimir*, who are anyway as different as chalk and cheese when it comes to beliefs and principles. One incident today, towards the end of a long and difficult session, seemed likely to bring things to a head and I felt I had to intervene. Vladimir was talking us through a training session he had written, and as is often the case with him, he was pursuing his own interests through the material instead of trying to put himself in the position of the INSET course participants. Marina was ostentatiously ignoring him on the other side of the room, and it fell to another team member, Olga*, to challenge Vladimir with a question aimed at getting his feet back on the ground. Instead of listening carefully and responding, Vladimir glossed over the question quickly and returned to his theme. At that point, I interrupted and asked him to address Olga's question. He claimed not to have understood it properly and returned quickly to his own topic. Olga shook her head, Marina tut-tutted and I thought I had better intervene again. In fact, I took a bit of a risk in what I said to Vladimir. As far as I can recall at the end of a long day, I said something like: "I really have to stop you. Instead of addressing Olga's question, you have simply brushed it aside and moved the discussion back on to your territory. Will you please address the question you've been asked?" At this point, he said again that he hadn't understood it (in fact it was a really straightforward question and he simply hadn't listened because his head was full of his own stuff). I looked across at Olga, who shrugged. Marina and the others in the group just sighed in resignation, and so I decided to give Vladimir one more chance by paraphrasing the question to him. Olga and the others were plainly grateful for this but I was a bit worried that I had exceeded my role as a facilitator and had caused Vladimir to lose face. In fact, he did try to focus on the issue Olga had raised, though without making any real concessions in terms of the material he had drafted. I was left wondering whether they are all too deep in their own trenches, and too personally adversarial to contemplate shifting their ground.

I understand their tiredness and the strain they are all under to meet deadlines. They've done a remarkable job so far in difficult and pressured circumstances. But I wonder, when I'm here on one of my visits, whether they don't just sigh with relief, gratefully hand over responsibility and let me take the strain. The co-coordinator, Tanya, had a word

with me at the end of the session and thanked me for intervening, but I'm still not sure that I did the right thing.
And I wonder whether I'm also getting a bit jaded and am sending out that message too, without realizing it. They are under too much pressure now for me to raise all this with them, but I'm wondering whether we should review the whole experience more thoughtfully in the final project workshop, so that they gain something more positive from the process side of the project. It's such a small group and I sometimes feel that I'm almost too close to them and their concerns to see a way forward.

In this diary extract, Margit gives us an insight into a view from a different perspective that of a frustrated participant in a workshop facilitated by someone else. On the one hand it shows us how difficult it can be for a skilled facilitator to be a participant in a training session, yet it is also a reminder of how important it can be for anyone in the business of facilitating to take regular opportunities to see things from the other point of view!

Feeling straitjacketed

The workshop on active learning was off to a good start. The first task got me personally involved, and it also made me curious about what was to come. We were asked to pick a room in our flat and say why we like it or dislike it. [...] It was interesting to listen to others and there was a feeling of expectancy in the air. How is this related to the topic of the workshop, active learning? [...]

Next, Robert, the facilitator of the workshop, introduced different categories for various learning styles. I was beginning to feel a bit lost. I didn't understand his categories. He asked us to hold on to our questions for a while. In the meantime, we were given further tasks to carry out in small groups. I was feeling increasingly uncertain about where we were going. I found it difficult to retain clarity without asking some clarification questions, without relating his categories to my past experiences. I felt as though someone was pushing me in a certain direction without allowing me to have a look at a map of where we are.

As the workshop proceeded I felt more and more straitjacketed. [...] Later there was a chance to ask questions, but Robert gave off signals of being edgy and irritated by our questions. What he presented through a series of structured activities had an internal logic of its own. However, our questions probed deeper and he would have needed to move outside of the framework he was presenting. He was holding on desperately to his categories, repeating parts of his presentation and giving clear signals of being annoyed with us. (Margit)

Stories

Introduction

We believe firmly in the value of metaphor in teaching and training. It often enables people to see familiar events and behaviour patterns differently, and it frequently releases energy in group discussion. Stories, particularly oral stories, are a valuable source of metaphor, and the ones we offer here are from our own 'fund'. They are presented in different ways and they may of course be interpreted in different ways, but we have found that all of them have potential in training contexts when we work with groups.

It is worth noting here that there are other starting points for working with metaphor: verbal (when a trainer asks a group to say what their metaphor for a classroom is, for example), visual (as for example when participants are asked to sketch their metaphors, or to consider images provided by others) or visualisation (where a trainer may ask participants to close their eyes and paint a mental picture of a particular imaginary scenario).

Title:	*Thematic area:*
1 The old man and the travellers	Facilitation: background
2 A Siberian tiger story	Facilitation: background
3 The cocoon and the butterfly	Facilitation: background
4 The beautiful blue butterfly	Facilitation: background
5 Rocks, pebbles, sand, and beer	Facilitation: background
6 A Sufi story	Facilitation: background

The Old Man and the Travellers

There was once an old man who lived in a village in a mountain valley. He had worked hard on his farm all his life and now he was content to hand over most of the work to his children and the younger ones in his village. His days were now pleasant and leisurely. Most of all, he liked to climb up the mountainside behind his village and to sit on a bench there, smoking his pipe, dozing from time to time, but also contemplating the village, the fields, the people and the animals that he loved so much in the valley below.

One sunny summer's day, as he sat there smoking his pipe, he heard footsteps approaching along the mountain path, which passed by his bench. It was a young man with a heavy pack on his back.

He walked up to the old man and said, "Do you mind if I sit down and rest a while?"

"No, of course not, make yourself comfortable," replied the old man. It was a hot day and the young man was clearly tired because it took him a while to catch his breath.

After a few minutes, he turned to the old man and asked him, pointing down to the village below, "Is that your village down there?"

"Yes," said the old man. "Why do you ask?"

"I was wondering what the people are like there," the young man said.

The old man thought for a while, pulled on his pipe, and then answered with another question. "What are the people like in the place you've just come from?"

"Oh, that's just it," said the young man, pulling a face. "I don't even like to think about them. They were all liars, cheats, thieves and drunkards. That's why I've left. I'm looking for a new place to settle down and your village looks nice."

The old man looked at him sadly and said, "I'm afraid you'll find that the people in my village are liars, cheats, thieves and drunkards, too. This is no place for you."

With a sigh, the young man picked up his pack and went on his way.

A few days later, when the old man was sitting on the same bench, dozing in the summer sun and smoking his pipe, another young man approached along the mountain path, carrying his heavy pack on his back.

He walked up to the old man and said, "Do you mind if I sit down and rest a while?"

"No, of course not, make yourself comfortable," replied the old man. It was another hot day and the young man was clearly tired and he closed his eyes for a while before taking a good look around him.

After a few minutes, he turned to the old man and asked him, pointing down to the village below, "Is that your village down there?"

"Yes," said the old man. "Why do you ask?"

"What are the people like there?" the young man asked.

Once again, the old man thought for a while, pulled on his pipe, and then answered with the same question. "What are the people like in the place you've just come from?"

A smile spread over the young man's face. "Oh, they are wonderful," he replied. "You couldn't wish to meet friendlier, happier more hospitable people. I've only been away a few weeks and I'm missing them already. But I wanted to see the world and to find out more about life. But I'm looking for a place to stay for a while and you village looks so nice."

The old man returned his smile and said, "Of course, you'll be welcome to stay. We could use some help with the harvest. You'll find the people in my village just as friendly, happy and hospitable as those you have left behind."

And the two of them made their way together down the mountainside to the old man's village.

*(This story is based on one I found in **A Guide to Student-Centred Learning** by Donna Brandes and Paul Ginnis published by Blackwell. I find it best to tell it rather than read it, so that participants can more easily visualize the scene and the exchanges it depicts. It is open to different interpretations but a key one seems to be about the effect of the expectations a teacher or a group member may have of a group or class, and the powerful influence each individual can have on group climate - Rod).*

A Siberian Tiger Story

A powerful old tiger, the leader of the pack, was preparing to go on a hunt. Gathering the young generation about him he said, 'We must go out in the plains and hunt as winter is coming. You, young fellows, must come with me, and we'll learn a thing or two together.'
The young tigers were pleased to hear this, as they were very enthusiastic about learning and developing.
The first day out, the Old Tiger spotted a herd of elephants. 'Here is your chance!' he said to the young tigers. 'Look at it as a challenge, remember what I taught you and do your best!'
The young tigers decided to follow their inborn instincts and use all the experience they had. And, of course, they all wanted to impress each other, and to show off a bit in order to gain popularity among their peers.
With a roar they rushed at the elephants that ran off in all directions. Some of the tigers used the new high tech claws and tail devices their parents brought them from abroad but they did not help either. The elephants all escaped.
'What a shame!! We could not do the job properly!' thought each tiger to himself, looking very upset.
The next day the tigers came upon a herd of buffalo. 'Are there any volunteers?' asked the Old Tiger. There was silence. 'It looks as though I will have to do the job myself,' said the leader philosophically. And so he did.
The young tigers lacked initiative, and they were also too embarrassed to ask more questions. They were all waiting for instructions from the Old Tiger.
One day, a little later, the Old Tiger spotted a big buffalo and crept up on him. But the buffalo tossed him to the ground and due to his old age he could not escape. The young tigers didn't know how to help.
That winter was very severe. Many young tigers died of cold and hunger.

I learned this story from Lena Volkova, one of my project team in Uzbekistan. I have used it for a number of different purposes, and it is always open to new interpretations by participants. However, recurring messages are connected with the gulf between theory and practice and the truism that there is no substitute for experience in learning. (Rod)

The cocoon and the butterfly

I have often used this short extract with groups of teachers and trainers as a starting point for discussion about the responsibilities of a facilitative teacher. It is open to interpretation by participants, but the most common message it seems to carry is an understanding that learning takes place at a speed decided by the learner and not by the teacher – it can be conceived of as a kind of 'organic process'. This message seems to apply equally to the speed of change or development in teachers.
(Rod)

'I remember one morning when I discovered a cocoon in the bark of a tree just as the butterfly was making a hole in its case and preparing to come out. I waited awhile but it was too long appearing and I was impatient. I bent over it and breathed on it to warm it. I warmed it as quickly as I could and the miracle began to happen before my eyes, faster than life. The case opened, the butterfly started slowly crawling out, and I shall never forget my horror when I saw how its wings were folded back and crumpled; the wretched butterfly tried with its whole trembling body to unfold them. Bending over it, I tried to help it with my breath. In vain.

It needed to be hatched out patiently and the unfolding of the wings needed to be a gradual process in the sun. Now it was too late. My breath had forced the butterfly to appear, all crumpled, before its time. It struggled desperately and, a few seconds later, died in the palm of my hand.

The little body is, I do believe, the greatest weight I have on my conscience. For I realise today that it is a mortal sin to violate the great laws of nature. We should not hurry, we should not be impatient, but we should confidently obey the eternal rhythm.'

From: *Zorba the Greek* by N. Kazantzakis

The Beautiful Blue Butterfly
(*facilitator notes in parentheses*)

Once upon a time there were two little girls *(pick out two in the audience to point to)* who were very curious. They were always asking their parents questions and their parents got very tired of it. So one summer they sent the two sisters up a mountain to live with a wise old woman *(or man if you like - point the person out in the audience).*

The woman knew the answers to everything and for a while the girls were happy. But they were also mischievous and they wanted to find a question that the wise old woman would get wrong. One day one of the girls ran up to the other cupping her hands and she opened them a bit and showed her sister, saying "Look, I have a beautiful blue butterfly (BBB). Let's go to the old woman and tell her we have a BBB in our hands and ask her "Is it alive or is it dead?" If she says it's dead, I will open my hands and it will fly away. If she says it's alive, I will squeeze it real quick and it will be dead.

The girls were very excited and so they went to the old woman and said "We have a BBB in our hands. Is it alive or is it dead?" The old woman looked at the two little girls, scratched her head and said, "The butterfly is…."
(Then take a sip of water and ask participants to retell the story and find an ending. Listen to their versions, and then finish the story.)

So there were the two little girls holding this BBB and the wise old woman was thinking about what to say … and finally she said "The butterfly is ... in your hands."
(Ask non-native speakers if they know the 2 meanings to "in your hands", physically in your hands and "responsibility", both of which are true of the two little girls.)

You can end the class/workshop by saying "And the information I have given you today, and the experiences you have had in the activities are now in your hands."

Contributed by Meg Einhorn
Notes by Tim Murphey --- Note that this is also told in Africa referring to a bird in the hands of a little boy.

Rocks, pebbles, sand and beer

A philosophy professor stood before his class and picked up a large, empty mayonnaise jar, which he proceeded to fill with rocks. He asked his students if the jar was full.

They agreed that it was, so the professor picked up a box of pebbles and poured them into the jar. He shook the jar lightly and the pebbles rolled into open areas between the rocks. He asked again if the jar was full. They agreed it was. The professor picked up a box of sand and poured it in and the sand filled up everything else. He asked once more if the jar was full. The students responded with a unanimous yes.

The professor produced two cans of beer and poured them into the jar, filling the empty space between the sand. The students laughed.

"Now," said the professor, "This jar represents your life. The rocks are the important things - your family, your partner, your health, your children - things that if everything else was lost and only they remained, your life would still be full.

"The pebbles are the other things that matter ... like your job, your house, your car. The sand is everything else, the really small stuff. If you put the sand into the jar first," he continued, "there is no room for the pebbles or the rocks. The same goes for your life. If you spend all your time and energy on the small stuff, you will never have room for the things that are important.

"Pay attention to the things that are critical to your happiness. Play with your children. Take time to get checkups. Take your partner out dancing. There will always be time to go to work, clean the house and fix the disposal. Take care of the rocks first - the things that really matter. Set your priorities. The rest is just sand."

If the 'Jar' represents the 'Group', what do the rocks, the pebbles, and the sand stand for?

This story can be found on many internet sites, e.g.: www.poeticexpressions.co.uk . We have made every effort to trace the author/original source but without success. We'd be pleased to include an appropriate acknowledgement in a future edition of this publication if anyone can provide us with details of the source.

A SUFI STORY (contributed by Susanna Soler)

The Sufi's have a story about time and pomegranates.

A young man desired to become a healer in a far away land of days long ago. He knew of a legendary healer who he wished to learn from. He therefore set out on a journey to find the healer and entreat upon him for the secrets to his practice. After a long and trying journey he finally found the healer and without hesitation approached him. The healer observed the boy's sincerity and decided to take him on as a student.

After long training, the two sat together on the porch of the healer's modest home. A stranger approached from the distance. He was bent over and hobbled in an odd and peculiar manner. The healer said to his student, "See that man approaching - he needs pomegranates." The young man observed as the healer listened to the patient tell an agonising tale of woeful experiences with his infliction, including the struggle to make the journey to the healer's doorstep. Finally, the healer put his hand on the patient's shoulder and spoke softly, "Yes, I can see you have suffered. I can see you are ready to leave your illness behind. My friend, I am certain that your disease is due to a shortage of a particular substance available in high concentrations in pomegranates. Eat three pomegranates a day for the next week and your health will return."

The patient left. After three weeks he returned, standing erect, with a basket of food, and deeply grateful blessings, for the healer.

Within another week another stranger came down the road to the healer's home. He walked in the same odd and peculiar manner and was also bent over. The student noticed the stranger and excitedly said, "What he needs is pomegranates!" The healer nodded without looking up from his chair. The student pleaded with the healer to allow him to treat the patient. Finally the healer agreed. The student went out to meet the patient. The student blurted, "What you need is pomegranates!" The stranger looked upon the student and said, "I came all this way for this nonsense! Pomegranates - rubbish! Some healer you are!" He turned and went away.

One moral to this story has to do with the expectation factor of the patient. The student did not understand the necessity of timing. The student entirely overlooked the afflicted person's expectation of the great healer and his ability to tell of his suffering and finally find relief. The student had taken only a mechanical learning from the healer. He assumed that pomegranates really held some substance entirely curative in and of itself. Perhaps both the expectations of the student healer and the patient met with disappointment.

The internet source is:
http://www.progressiveawareness.org/articles/Memory_Dependent_wellness.html

Activities: Introduction

While we see facilitation as a process, which develops differently and often excitingly with every group that we work with, there are some activities, which can help the process to be more effective and satisfying for trainer and participants alike. Some of the activities in this section are around a particular methodological topic while others are more reflective in nature. Most of them are offered here with post-use comments from the contributor, designed to help readers of this publication to understand and appropriate them for their own purposes. We also hope that the cross-referencing to key themes will help readers to see more clearly where it might fit into their own scheme of things.

Some of the activities have been tried and tested with experienced teachers on in-service courses (e.g. *The pleasures of a journey, Andragogy vs. Pedagogy*), while others come out of a pre-service context and were used with beginner teachers (*Talk and explanation*, *Promoting successful language learning*). We have also included activities which can be used in the foreign language classroom (e.g. *Building a team*, *My conflict, Global deadlines*).

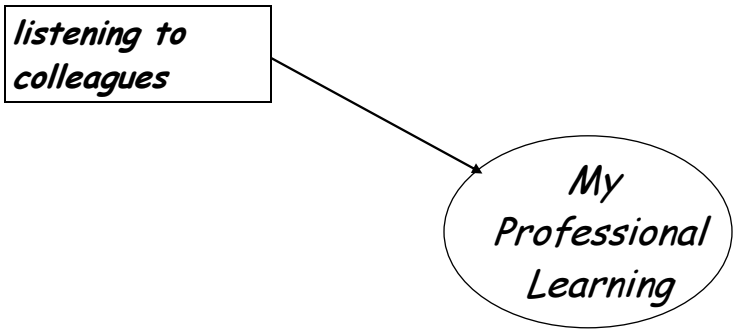
We believe that working in a facilitative mode in any context requires a collaborative learning culture. An important part of creating such a culture has to do with giving and receiving feedback – we have therefore included two activities on this very important area (*Giving and receiving feedback, Feedback on professional portfolios*).

Finally, the last two activities (*Moves of a discussion leader*, and *Group facilitation*: *towards working principles*) have been used on courses addressing the theme of group facilitation directly.

Title:	*Themes:*
1 The pleasures of the journey: processes in professional learning	Developing as a facilitator
2 Groups and me: a chance to reflect	Group life
3 Andragogy vs. Pedagogy	Facilitation: background
4 Talk and explanation	Facilitation: background
5 Questions in teaching, training and learning	Questions and questioning
6 Promoting successful language learning	Facilitation: toolkit
7 Building a team	Group life
8 Stages of group development	Group life
9 My conflict	Group life
10 Global deadlines	Group life
11 Giving and receiving feedback	Feedback
12 Feedback on professional portfolios and assignments	Feedback
13 Trainer notes for: 'Moves of a discussion leader' activity	Facilitation: qualities and skills
14 Moves of a discussion leader / Group A	Facilitation: qualities and skills
15 Moves of a discussion leader / Group B	Facilitation: qualities and skills
16 Group facilitation: towards working principles	What is facilitation?

The Pleasures of the Journey: Processes in Professional Learning
(Contributed by Rod Bolitho)

1. **Individually, think back over your career, including any training you have been through, and in particular all the things that you have learned along the way and which make you the professional you are today. If the centre of the web below represents the sum total of your professional learning, draw 'arms' with labels (use '-ing' verbs please) to show all the processes, which have contributed to this total. One example is already there for you but you can cross it out if you don't like it!**



2. **Now, in groups of 4/5, pool all the processes you have listed and categorise them using the table below. Clarify any processes you are unsure about as you go along:**

Individual processes	Processes involving you and one other person (e.g. a teacher)	Group-based processes

3. **Still in your groups, focus on each set of processes in turn and answer these questions:**

   a) What do the processes you have listed within each set have in common?
   b) Which kind of process seems to lead most smoothly to identifiable learning outcomes?
   c) When and how do you become aware of what you have learned?
   d) Why do we sometimes need other people to be involved in our professional learning?

   Report back in plenary on anything interesting that emerges from your discussion of these questions.

Individual thinking questions: ***Which of the three types of process has been more useful to you in your professional learning? Why do you think this is?***

Groups and Me: A Chance to Reflect

1. **Think of any kind of group you have belonged to which you really enjoyed and benefited from. Jot down some of the characteristics of this group, and the reasons why belonging to it was a positive experience for you. *Also make some notes, just for yourself, on how you behaved in this group and what you contributed to it.***

2. **Think of any group you have belonged to which you really didn't enjoy or which didn't function well. Jot down some of the characteristics of this group, and the reasons why belonging to it was a negative experience for you. *Also make some notes, just for yourself, on how you behaved in this group and what you contributed to it.***

3. **Now form groups of 4/5, share your experiences and draw up two parallel lists of positive and negative features of group behaviour. Prepare to present your findings on an overhead transparency.**

Thinking Question 1 ***(to make notes on during the presentations): What do successful groups have in common? What are the typical features of unsuccessful groups?***

Thinking Question 2 ***(to ponder on after the presentations): How far does individual behaviour contribute towards the success or failure of a group in achieving its objectives? To what extent does leadership make a difference?***

4. **Let's now shift the focus specifically to groups or classes with the specific purpose of *learning.* Think of a teacher or tutor who has really helped you to learn successfully in a group or class setting. Look at the pairs of characteristics below and put a cross on the continuum between each pair to show where this tutor was located. There's space for you to add more pairs of characteristics if you wish.**

dominant	⟷	**low-profile**
strict	⟷	**easy-going**
directive	⟷	**non-directive**
subject-oriented	⟷	**people-oriented**
remote, distant	⟷	**approachable**
a talker	⟷	**a listener**

5. **Compare your findings with others in your group of 4/5 and make a few notes on the different teaching styles you have identified. Discuss and be ready to report back on these questions:**

- *What are the essential differences between <u>teaching</u> and <u>facilitating learning</u>? Which is best suited to working with teachers?*

This is an activity intended to help participants to reflect on their previous experience of belonging to a group. I use it near the start of a course to start participants thinking and to help prepare them to talk and work together. The 'continuums' part of the activity is intended as a thinking tool at this early stage, no more, and definitely not as a basis for judgment or judgmental comment.
(Rod)

Andragogy  **vs. Pedagogy** 

Task 1
Think of something you have learned successfully as an adult (it could be a skill such as driving or word processing, a foreign language, a sport or game such as skiing or chess, or something more informal such as cooking or car maintenance). Then make brief notes about it in response to these questions:

i. What motivated you to learn this in the first place?
ii. Did you set yourself specific goals or targets?
iii. What steps or stages did the learning involve?
iv. To what extent did you set your own pace of learning?
v. What procedures did the learning involve? (e.g. trial and error, imitation etc).
vi. Were you taught or did you learn independently? What difference did this make?
vii. Were you in a group or class of some kind? If so, how did this affect your learning?
viii. Did you experience any problems or setbacks in the course of your learning? If so, how did you deal with them?
ix. How did you organise the time and space you needed for learning?
x. How and by whom was your learning evaluated?
xi. Compare all this with your learning at school as a child. What are the similarities and differences?

Discuss your conclusions in groups of 3/4 and report on anything interesting that emerges.

Task 2
Working individually at first, and then in the same groups of 3/4, state whether your experience leads you to agree or disagree with the following statements.

i. Adults generally prefer to choose their own way of learning.
ii. Adults don't need to be pushed to learn effectively.
iii. Adults usually have their own proven learning strategies.
iv. Adults are generally more open to new ways of learning than children.
v. Adults worry more about failure than children.
vi. Adults learn best when they work alongside fellow learners.
vii. Adults are generally good at listening during group discussions
viii. Adults are generally better than children at communicating effectively in large groups.

When training trainers, especially those whose experience is mostly at school level, I find it useful to make a distinction between the techniques and approaches appropriate to working with adults and those suitable for teaching children. This activity helps me to broach this distinction.
(Rod)

Talk and Explanation
(Contributed by Cheryl Mackay)

The hard part of figuring out how to teach is learning when to keep your mouth closed, which is most of the time.

Carl Rogers (1960)

- Possible thinking questions

What are teachers doing when they're not talking?

What are teachers doing when they are talking? What different things do teachers use talk to do?

- This then might lead to a focus on one type of teacher talk: explanation.

Linked to the above, we did a brief 'exploration' of 'explanation' – this took place before students had started their first teaching placement.
Very simply, in groups or 2-3, students were given 15 minutes to consider and complete a grid called 'exploring 'explanation' in the MFL classroom' (see below).
In the feedback, we discussed what they came up with in response to the first question: what do MFL teachers use 'explanation' to do? I was impressed with how many different explanation purposes they came up with – so it was helpful to have an open question for them to explore.
I intend to re-visit 'explanation' in the light of their first teaching placement – focusing on the other two questions.

Teacher Talk: further reading

Wells, G. (2003) *Dialogic inquiry: toward a sociocultural practice and theory of education.* Cambridge: CUP.

I would say this is a book for trainers/educators. It's quite a theoretical read - personally, I've only just dipped into it. The basic idea is that 'talk' is at the heart of learning/education. So if you're interested or like sociocultural theory, Vygotsky's ideas, Halliday's ideas, you'll love this book and I strongly recommend it. (Cheryl Mackay)

Exploring 'explanation' in the Modern Foreign Language classroom

→

What do MFL teachers use 'explanation' to do?	**Do teachers always have to do the explaining?**	**Is 'explanation' always necessary? What alternatives might there be?**

Questions in Teaching, Training and Learning

*"Let us make the study of the art of question-asking one of the central disciplines in language education." (*Postman 1979)

I. Some questions for you

1. Who asks most of the questions in your lessons/training sessions?
2. To how many of your own questions do you already know the answer?
3. How do you "receive" your students'/participants' answers?
4. What kinds of questions do your students/participants ask in class?
5. How do you react if you don't know the answer to a question put by a student/participant?
6. What is the relationship between the following in your teaching/training:
   a) questions and knowledge?
   b) questions and authority/discipline?
   c) questions and thinking?

II. Categorising questions

1. In groups of 2/3, select a range of questions from your own practice or from teaching/training materials.
2. Devise at least three ways of categorising these questions, and explain your rationale for each.
3. Compare your categorisation with the following taxonomy of thinking skills (based on Bloom & Kratwohl, 1965). Try redistributing your questions to these categories.

LOWER ORDER THINKING SKILLS

1. Knowledge-focused

2. Comprehension-focused

3. Application-focused

HIGHER ORDER THINKING SKILLS

1. Analysis

2. Synthesis

3. Evaluation

III. Follow-up Tasks

1. Using a text or topic as a starting point, construct a sequence of questions to use with a specified target group of trainees. Take account of one or more of the categorisations you have just devised.
2. Devise an activity or a sequence of activities to raise awareness of the importance of classroom questions in training course participants.
3. Make your own notes on the connection between questions and thinking skills.

IV. General Questioning Skills in Teaching and Training (adapted from Kerry, 1992)

- pitching language and content at the right level (according to age, experience, maturity etc)
- distributing questions around the class
- prompting and giving clues
- encouraging and praising students' answers
- reformulating and affirming learners' responses
- allowing silences
- sequencing questions ('closed' to 'open'; 'lower order' to 'higher order')
- using all responses (even 'wrong' answers) in a positive way.

V. Improving your Questioning Skills: Some Hints (after van Ments, 1990)

DO…	**DON'T…**
…ask questions clearly and simply	…ask 'multiple' questions
…ask lower order questions to check learning	…stop at that point!
…probe and encourage further thinking	…accept all responses at face value
…allow your students' answers to lead to more questions	…always insist on closure after a question has been answered
…ask your questions openly	…ask 'loaded' questions which may trap or threaten learners
…allow time for thinking and answering	…shoot questions like bullets
	…be afraid of silence
…allow your students' answers to shape your own thinking	…insist that your students follow your agenda in their answers
…listen to and affirm your students' answers	…hog the talking time
…ask fewer, better questions	…ask a lot of 'low quality' questions
…encourage your students to be questioners	…monopolise the role of questioner

VI. Further Reading

Bloom, B.S. & D.R. Kratwohl (1965) *The Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, The Classification of Educational Goals. Handbook 1: Cognitive Domain* New York: D. McKay
Brown, G. & E.C. Wragg (1993) *Questioning* London: Routledge
Dillon, J.T. (1988) *Questioning and Teaching* London: Croom Helm
Kerry, T. (1992) *Effective Questioning* London: Macmillan
Morgan, J. & M. Rinvolucri (1988) *The Q Book* Harlow: Longman
Postman, N. (1979) *Teaching as a Conserving Activity* New York: Laurel Press
Saxton, J. (1991) *Teaching, Questioning and Learning* London: Routledge
Van Ments, M. (1990) *Active Talk* London: Kogan Page

"There are more questions than answers,
and the more I find out, the less I know"
(Johnny Nash, reggae song)

Comment

I have been using versions of this activity with groups of teachers or trainers for a few years now, most recently with a group in Tashkent. I find that I need a text or a context to clarify Bloom's categories at Stage II, and participants need quite a bit of support with the task at Stage III. It gets a bit prescriptive at Stage V but participants seem to appreciate this as a kind of summary. It is still very much 'work in progress' and any suggestions for improvement would be very welcome.

Rod, November 2006

Promoting successful language learning
(activity contributed by Cheryl Mackay)

I got the idea for this activity from Barry Jones, Homerton College, Cambridge. I have been using it for several years now, adapting the content to reflect what typically happens in the languages classrooms I visit. I like to use this activity to stimulate discussion (sometimes heated debate!) during the early stages of learning to teach. It helps the learning process by:

- raising awareness of what it means to learn a language and what is possible in a languages lesson;
- providing a context for articulating and discussing beliefs about language learning and images of teaching;
- developing listening and other collaborative working skills.

Normally I would structure a whole session around this activity, as follows:

- Bridging in / setting the scene/ opening the file (5-10 minutes)

I normally do this by asking students to reflect on what it means to them to learn a language. This can be an opportunity to identify the different contexts within which students (all successfully) have learnt languages e.g. those who learnt languages formally (most of our students) and those who have acquired a language with or without formal instruction. It can also be an opportunity to start to explore the key differences between first language acquisition and learning Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) at school – what is different about learning a language at school?

This then leads into the key question: **what sorts of classroom activity promote most successful language learning?**

- Individual preparation (5 minutes)

I ask students to work on their own first, identifying their own top ten from the list provided – this should be done quickly without agonising! Normally, this doesn't take more than 2-3 minutes. At this stage I find it is important to stress that there is no one correct answer/ hidden agenda.

- The group discussion (20-30 minutes)

Before organising students into groups of 3, I would stress that this is a group discussion task and it is the process of agreeing on the best possible solution that matters. It is therefore important that each person has the chance to articulate his or her thinking and to be listened to. In other words, each person needs to not only identify their chosen activities from the list, they also need to justify that choice – say why. Listeners should be listening carefully to the reasoning and be prepared to engage, e.g. if they hear something that either challenges or confirms their own thinking. I'm not normally so directive!!! - it's just that in the early stages I find it pays to be this explicit until helpful routines/ ways of working are formed. Please note some of the wording is deliberately 'vague' to encourage different interpretations and exchange/ discussion of these.

- Plenary: Feedback (10-15 minutes)

The plenary is a chance for groups to feed back what they came up with in the time available and to discuss further, especially any issues that their group discussion may have raised for them. You can do this in different ways:

- A very quick show of hands to establish how many 'votes' each of the listed activities got – tally kept on OHP. This can then be used to focus a plenary discussion e.g. inviting comment on any surprising outcomes/ what they notice etc.
- Go round each group in turn, asking the group to feedback one of their agreed top ten and why – invite comments from listening groups
- Ask groups to feedback on items where they had the greatest disagreement and why and how they resolved any disagreement.
- Ask individuals to reflect on what conclusions they've reached about promoting successful language learning.

I don't always do the follow-up questions in the session – but they are good questions for interested individuals to reflect upon further.

- Plenary: Time for Reflection (10-15 minutes)

Remind students of what skills the group task involved. De-brief questions might include…

- How did you find the group task?
- What did you find anything easy or difficult? What helped you? Did you use any strategies that you found helpful?

Encourage students to think about how they might transfer what they have learnt from this experience to a school classroom. Questions might include:

- Do you think you could transfer this sort of task to the languages classroom? What topic/context? Etc.
- What would be important for the teacher to do when setting up the activity? If you were the teacher, what would you want to know?

Conditions for successful language learning: further reading

King, L. (2003) **Improving the Quality of Language Learning in Schools** http://www.cilt.org.uk/key/approaches.htm *In 2003, following the development of a National Languages Strategy, the then Director of CILT, Dr Lid King, wrote this article examining the question 'Can there be an agreed methodology for language teaching in order to raise standards and improve quality?' You should find it a helpful summary of what is currently known about the conditions needed for successful language learning – clear, readable and not long!*

Dörnyei, Z. and K. Csizér, (1998) 'Ten Commandments for motivating language learners: results of an empirical study', **Language Teaching Research,** 2:203-229.
One of the conditions for successful language learning which is uncontested (see King above) is motivation. Some would go as far as to say that if you can motivate them, you're more than half way there. So this is an important text by a leading expert in the field of motivation and language learning. It is especially useful for novice teachers because it makes a lot of practical sense and the style is accessible (not too lofty). Much of what is discussed might be considered good practice in any subject classroom.

Group Task[2]:

From observation, most language classes include some of the 40 activities, which follow.

- ***Which of these, in your opinion, promote most successful language learning?***
- ***Agree on ten, and be prepared to explain what influenced your choice.***

1. Role play
2. Learning phrases by heart
3. Answering the teacher's oral questions
4. Use of the target language
5. Doing exercises which everyone gets correct
6. Making mistakes
7. Working on your own
8. Exploring a topic
9. Imitating the teacher
10. Listening to grammatical explanations in English
11. Group work
12. Completing written exercises from a textbook
13. Responding to prompts on the OHP
14. Listening to tapes
15. The Internet
16. Using flashcards
17. Watching videos
18. PowerPoint presentations
19. Copying down vocabulary
20. Completing gap-fill exercises
21. Answering questions in English
22. Completing word searches
23. Translation work
24. Making up your own utterances
25. Correcting mistakes after a teacher has marked written work
26. Assessing your own work
27. Colouring in pictures
28. Drama
29. Learning lists of words
30. Reflecting on what you have learnt
31. Songs
32. Making up ways of remembering / memorising new language,
33. Matching pictures and captions
34. Learning grammar rules in English
35. Conducting surveys
36. Dancing
37. Discovering language patterns for yourself
38. Homework

[2] *Based on an idea from Barry Jones, Homerton College, Cambridge*

39. Reading aloud
40. Playing language games

Possible follow-up questions

- *Which of these do not promote language learning but may have a place in a languages lesson? Explain the circumstances in which they could be justified.*
- *Do any of these have no place in a languages lesson? Justify your answer.*
- *Is there anything missing from this list that you think belongs there? Explain your answer.*

Building a Team

(Contributed by Meg Einhorn)

A simulation exercise

1. **Goal**: to encourage students to discover something of the talent, skills and qualities they bring to a team to help them consider their adequacies and deficiencies as a team.

2. **Time required**: thirty minutes to one hour, depending on size of teams.

3. **Numbers:** it is better if several teams do the task simultaneously so as to provide a richer variety of understanding about group dynamics.

4. **Procedure**

(a) The tutor distributes the task and asks each team to keep to the time limit.

(b) After 20 minutes (the timing is flexible as the main point is to ensure that the teams can reach an agreement in the time allowed) invite the teams:

(i) to explain and justify their choice;

(ii) to describe how they went about the choice;

(iii) to talk about what the procedure described in (b) told them about their team and the different people in it;

(iv) to predict how they might best use their collective strengths and weaknesses as a team.

5. **Variations**

(a) The details of both the task and the profiles may be changed to suit the group.

(b) Teams can be invited to exchange members to enable each to achieve a better balance.

Task: You are working as a group of final year students in Community Studies on an educational project designed to examine the problems of teaching professional courses in the health/care field. The project is to be marked as a group task and you will also function as a tutorial group up to and including separate exams each of which will include a question in interdisciplinary studies.
Your team is short of one member. Various other students are interested in joining you and their profiles are given on the attached sheet. You have twenty minutes to choose by

consensus the final member of your team from these described on the profiles. You will then be asked to explain your choice and how you went about making it.

Profiles

Philip: A "mature" student, he has had a lot of experience in industrial management with a special interest in committee work. He actually likes writing reports and hopes to become an NHS administrator. Is married with a family of 4 children. In groups he tends to create a sort of safe and trusting atmosphere.

Yvonne: Is a very attractive blonde who matches her good looks in fine sense of humour. She is also very intelligent, is full of ideas, but does need a lot of encouragement to succeed. Yvonne tends to invest energy in her work only as long as promising results are just around the corner.

Mary: An interesting and caring girl with an unhappy home life, she seems to cover up for her problems by working hard and successfully. However, she does not return home every weekend, and is then not contactable. She is very critical of the way most systems are managed and her views on health and care tend to be very radical. In groups she has difficulties making her intentions understood.

Harry: Is a great raconteur who can make the most pedestrian incident sound fascinating. He writes well too, though his academic standing is low. He has however a lot of drive and is usually liked by all who work with him. Groups tend to depend on his presence, once he has established himself.

Gill: Is an excellent organiser. She achieves this through a mixture of charm, flirtation and sheer persistence and she would be the first to admit that she consciously manipulates people when it suits her. She is good at directing the attention of the group to its own process and likes to talk openly about personal behaviour.

Geoffrey: Is very conscientious and particularly good at searching out and piecing together detailed information. He has, however, a stammer which makes him embarrassed to contribute to discussion and he would probably rather work on his own. His work is however also completed with great diligence.

Winnie: An acerbic partner for anyone, she has developed a fine critical intellect which frightens many people away. She gathers many admirers but has few if any close friends. She is much respected by the tutors and will probably stay on to do research. She is often valued for the intellectual discipline she exerts on a group.

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Managing Group Process and Solving Problems
Harry Webne-Behrman, Quorum Books, Westport 1998

Stages of Group Development
(contributed by Meg Einhorn)

"Many times a day I realize how much of my own outer and inner life is built upon the labours of my fellow men, both living and dead, and how earnestly I must exert myself in order to give in return as much as I have received." ***Albert Einstein***

Groups, like all living things, develop over time. The groups may begin as a collection of strangers, you have come together for a common purpose, but before long, uncertainty gives way to conflict, which in turn gives way to cohesion as members become bound to their group by strong social bonds.

a. Have participants form small groups and discuss the following five questions

1. What is ***group cohesion*** for you? Can you give examples?
2. What are the positive and negative consequences of cohesion?
3. Does ***team building*** enhance group productivity? Why?
4. What stages have the groups you have known well in your career passed through as they developed over time?
5. In what ways do groups change over time?

b. In what ways do groups change over time?

Study the long-term development of a group to which you currently belong or once belonged. Select a group that has a history that you can document, rather than one that has only recently formed. Classes that meet for a semester before they disband, sports teams, project teams at work, and informal friendship cliques are just a few types of groups you can imagine.

- Begin by describing the group in detail, as it existed when it first formed. Give examples and anecdotal evidence when appropriate.
- Describe any changes that took place in the group over time. Make note of the extent to which the group experienced (a) an orientation stage, (b) conflict, (c) increased cohesion and changes in structure, and (d) a period of high performance or high energy.

c. A model of group development

Look at this description of a well-known model of group development, and decide to what extent it matches the stages in *your* group's development.

The most widely quoted model of group development is the one first suggested by Tuckman in 1965. He surveyed all the studies of small group development he could find and suggested that there was a common pattern: small groups go through the following stages in the following order:

- Orientation: (forming) stage: members experience tentative interactions, tension, concern over ambiguity, growing interdependence, and attempts to identify the nature of the situation.
- Conflict (storming) stage: members express dissatisfaction with the group, respond emotionally, criticise one another, and form coalitions.

- Structure (norming) stage: unity increases, membership stabilises, members report increased satisfaction, and the group's internal dynamics intensify.
- Task performance (performing) stage: focus shifts to performance of tasks and goal attainment. Not all groups reach this stage, for even highly cohesive groups are not necessarily productive.
- Dissolution (adjourning) stage: the groups disband. A group's entry into the dissolution stage can be either planned or spontaneous, but even planned dissolution can create problems for members as they reduce their dependence on the group.

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d. Music to illustrate the stages of group development

Heron (1999) uses the metaphor of the four seasons to illustrate the stages of group development. Here one can introduce this to our groups by using PowerPoint, or overhead transparencies to illustrate the four seasons, accompanied by the music of Vivaldi's 'Four Seasons' and a voiceover description of each stage.

THE FOUR SEASONS OF GROUP DEVELOPMENT

Season	Stage	Explanation
Winter	The stage of defensiveness	Trust is often low, anxiety is high. "The ground may be frozen, and the weather stormy."
Spring	The stage of working through defensiveness	Trust is building, anxiety is reducing, and a new culture is being developed. "New life starts to break through the surface crust."
Summer	The stage of authentic behaviour	Trust is high, there is openness to self and others, risk-taking, caring and sharing. "There is an abundance of growth and the sun is high."
Autumn	Closure	Participants gather to examine the fruits of their learning and to transfer it to

		their own lives. There is a celebration and sadness in farewells. “The fruit is harvested and stored, the harvesters give thanks and go their way.”

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Hogan, C. 2003. *Practical facilitation: a toolkit of techniques*. London. Kogan Page.

My Conflict

(Contributed by Meg Einhorn)

"My Conflict" is an activity designed to increase personal awareness of one's role in conflict. The primary purpose of this activity is to explore what works well in working through conflict and what needs to be changed. Participants probe underlying assumptions, attitudes, and beliefs about conflict, as well.

First, participants are encouraged to relax and clear their minds of extraneous thoughts. Taking a couple of deep breaths, stretching, or shaking out one's hands and feet can encourage them to recreate in their mind's eye a recent conflict (Note: they should be informed that the conflict chosen should be one they feel comfortable sharing with a partner or others in a group discussion.) Participants are guided through remembering the conflict and encouraged to create a vivid visual recollection of the conflict. They are given the following verbal cues from the facilitator:

1. ***What did you see in the environment?***
2. ***What did the other person look like (e.g., clothing, body posture, facial expression)?***
3. ***What did you hear (e.g., what the other person was saying, what you were saying, tone of voice, peripheral noise)?***
4. ***What were you feeling (e.g., excited, scared)?***
5. ***What were you thinking (e.g., "This is a great opportunity," or "I hate this")?***
6. ***How was your body feeling (e.g., relaxed, muscles tense, butterflies in stomach)?***

***What the trainer/facilitator might say*:**
"Think about an interpersonal conflict you have recently experienced. Try to recreate, in your mind's eye, where the conflict occurred, who was present, and how you were feeling (both physically and emotionally). Consider what you were thinking just before, during, and after the conflict. Take your time to create a complete mental image, and then answer the following questions:"

My conflict – record sheet

• **How did the conflict start?**
•
• **How did I contribute to it?**
•
• **What did I do during the conflict?**
•
• **What consequences did I experience as a result of this conflict?**
•
• **Is this a common pattern for me in conflict?**
•
• **What attitudes or beliefs do I hold about conflict? What parts of my belief systems contributed to this conflict unfolding as it did?**

Allow participants about five minutes to reflect. Encourage them to record their responses on the accompanying “My Conflict” sheet.
After participants have completed the “My Conflict” sheet, ask them to discuss their conflicts with a partner (ten minutes): then seek insights from the larger group, analysing individual scenarios using the following questions:

- Identify or describe the problem.
- What were the external consequences?
- What were the internal consequences?
- What would I do differently?
- Is this how I usually behave when in conflict?
- What are some of my personal attitudes and beliefs about conflict?

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Global Deadlines

(Contributed by Meg Einhorn)

Global Deadlines is a powerful tool for teaching conflict resolution skills. It has been adapted from another exercise developed by the Stanley Foundation (Teachable Moments 1989), using it as an activity in dialogue and negotiation. It is best employed when all the participants have had an opportunity to get to know one another and have previously worked together on listening skills. It is important to allow time for participants to evaluate the effects of this activity on them. It is recommended for groups or sub-groups of six to nine members. The instructions are as follows:

1. List all of the global deadlines on the board so they are easily read (some suggested deadlines are listed at the end of this exercise). Ask participants to look over the list and silently choose one global deadline that they feel is the most important and deserves immediate attention. In reviewing this list initially, be sure to point out that each issue has merit. (1-2 minutes)

2. Ask participants to mill around, looking for people with similar viewpoints. In other words, they should form clusters of people who are in agreement about which deadline should receive first priority. You may offer the option to anyone who find themselves alone at this point to either go solo or join a group with a second-best alternative. At this point, people are already beginning to view this as a competitive exercise. (2 minutes)

3. Have participants identify up to three compelling reasons why their deadline is the most important and most deserving of immediate attention. Be sure to emphasize that all group members should be prepared to defend their choice. (5 minutes)

4. Form a circle of chairs for the next phase of this exercise. If the numbers justify, have the group break into subgroups. Try to have as many different positions represented in each subgroup as possible, with proportional representation of each cluster. Give the instructions that:

    ⇒ Each position is to be presented in an order determined by the group. One person per position should present the three compelling reasons as concisely as possible. Continue around the circle until all positions have been presented.

    ⇒ In proceeding from one person to the next, it is each presenter's responsibility to restate the previously presented position to that person's satisfaction. This ground rule should be honoured until all positions have been presented (the first presenter restates the last).

    ⇒ After all positions have been laid out, it is the task of the group to reach consensus regarding the one global deadline that is the most important, deserving immediate attention. Consensus is interpreted here to mean that all group members find the decision

acceptable; if one blocks agreements, this must be honoured and respected. In conducting this phase of the discussion, all members are free to speak in any order. They are encouraged to retain the restating rule, making sure that people feel understood.

⇒ Discussion continues either until consensus is reached or time expires. 40-60 minutes are recommended for this effort to reach consensus, including time for initial presentations of positions. Additional time could be allocated, if group size warrants it.

⇒ After the discussion ends, ask each member to spend a few minutes evaluating the process: *Did I feel heard and understood? Were my ideas respected? How did the restating affect the process? What do I mean by consensus?*

Evaluation and Synthesis

Global Deadlines is a highly conflictive exercise that reflects the personal values and experiences of the participants. It is important that it be debriefed with sensitivity and respect. Typically, a few participants will become oppositional and dominate the discussion for a time. Often, some will fall silent, uncomfortable with the conflict. It is also common for some members to play a facilitative role, assisting the group in its search for underlying interests that exist in common. This results in a redefinition of the problem and often results in consensus.

We emphasize that consensus is not merely an outcome; it is a way of being. How people behave with one another, that is the process of their decision-making, is far more important in the long run than any short-term conclusions. “Global Deadlines” assimilates collaborative problem solving, integrative negotiation, mediation, and communication skills in one exercise.

Global deadlines change over time. One can generate one’s own topical list.

Some issues / problems linked to global deadlines:

Atomic power production
Pollution
Water distribution
Diseases
Medical support in developing countries
Extinction of certain species
Economic debt
Climate change
Renewable sources of energy
Religious conflict
War
Terrorism
Demographic problems

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Global Deadlines – How it worked

Exercise done with a small group December 11 2006

Advanced Technical English Module 3

F2a, b Micro technical department

Facilitator: Meg Einhorn

Six students participated in this exercise. First, we had a very brief introduction to group work and consensus finding. Students were asked to think for a few minutes on some of the most important and urgent deadlines to be considered.
They came up with the following list:

Atomic power production
Power production
Pollution
Water distribution
Food distribution
Diseases
Medical support in developing countries
Extinction of certain species
Economic debt
Meteorology and climate change
Renewable sources of energy
Religious conflict
War
Terrorism
Demographic problems

Secondly, students started to form pairs for their choices.
Pair 1) came up with pollution
Pair 2) came up with water distribution
Pair 3) came up with food distribution

Thirdly, the pairs were asked to give arguments for their choices.
Pair 1) *pollution*
Argued that the plant ecosystem was unbalanced due to pollution
that we had more deaths due to pollution
there were far more natural catastrophes due to this fact
not enough drinking water

Pair 2) *water*
Argued that without water there was no life
certain areas are in urgent need of water.
human beings are made up of 80% of water

Pair 3) *food distribution*

food shortage in certain countries
too much food, bad eating habits in first world countries
illness due to poor, insufficient food

After the discussion, we evaluated the process together based on the following questions:

Did I feel heard?
Were my ideas respected?
How did the restating affect the process?
What do I mean by consensus?

On the whole students felt that their arguments were respected and each student had listened to the other one's viewpoint. They came to the conclusion that in fact *pollution* was the most urgent deadline.
They also thought that finding a consensus is always a give and take situation. In engineering you had to convince and also bring in results. In their field one could not live without an open mind and the willingness to collaborate is also essential. It was also interesting to observe the facilitating role everyone took. It was without doubt a group that functions well, and this was also pointed out.

Giving and Receiving Feedback

I. Feedback in the Classroom

1. Please make a few notes here on the part feedback plays in your teaching and/or training.

Discuss your notes with a neighbour, and compare them with the list below:

- to help us to understand how others see us
- to stop us from jumping to hasty conclusions and to correct wrong impressions
- to share responsibility with students
- to encourage students to reflect and to think about their learning
- to encourage us to reflect on our teaching
- to help learners to be more aware of their progress
-
-
-

2. How do you get feedback on your teaching/training? Please make a few notes and compare them with a neighbour.

3. Three ways of getting feedback from your students.

A. *A very general way.* Ask your students to complete the sentence:

A good language teacher……

Then (if you are brave enough!) read their responses and reflect on what they are telling you about yourself!

B. *A more specific way.* Give out slips of paper to your students in two colours. One colour for one thing they liked about your lesson(s) and the other for one thing they didn't like. They should give a reason in each case. Take all the slips home and read them. Then (if you are brave enough!) make a display of the slips in your next class and discuss everything thoroughly with your class. This activity is really useful for the purpose of a mid-term review of your course as well as for a single lesson.

C. *A humanistic way.* At the end of a lesson or even a course, ask your class to stand in a circle, and invite people to state individually how they feel. Allow people the right to silence if they don't wish to contribute. This activity gives you valuable feedback on the emotional climate in a group. It is quite high-risk and you should be prepared for the unexpected!

D. *More ways.* Space here for other suggestions from the group.

4. What do you do with feedback when you get it? Do you:

- act on it?
- think about it?
- get upset about it?
- hope it will disappear down a black hole?
- give feedback on feedback?
- react in any other way?

How can I move forward if I don't know which way I'm facing?
(John Lennon)

This is an activity I find useful to open up the issue of feedback at classroom or training level. It usually gives rise to a reflective and thoughtful session and raises issues, which can be taken up in subsequent sessions.
(Rod)

Feedback on Professional Portfolios and Assignments

1. Work individually. Study the following transcript of a conversation between participants on a professional development course. If their tutors could see it, what messages about their own feedback practices would they get from it? Make notes and be ready to share your ideas.

Sara:	*Hi, Leo. I haven't seen you for a while. Have you had your portfolio back yet?*
Leo:	*Yes, and I'm not too pleased with the feedback, to be honest.*
Sara:	*I thought something was bugging you. Whose group are you in?*
Leo:	*I'm with Marina. How about you?*
Sara:	*I'm in Paul's group. He's been really good to work with so far. What's bothering you about the feedback you got from Marina?*
Leo:	*Well, she seems to think she's addressing one of her students, not a teacher with 15 years experience.*
Sara:	*How do you mean?*
Leo:	*She wrote stuff like "I'm surprised at you for jumping to conclusions!" …. You know… with exclamation marks all over the place.*
Sara:	*Maybe she just wanted to grab your attention…*
Leo:	*Well, she certainly managed that. And all that red ink! I felt as though I was a naughty schoolboy again!*
Sara:	*I wouldn't like that either. If Paul makes a comment in the margin of my work, he uses pencil – I can even rub it out if I don't agree with it.*
Leo:	*That's a lot better. Does he write much?*
Sara:	*Not a great deal, but I like the way he uses questions to make us think.*
Leo:	*Questions? Sounds interesting. Marina just seems to pass judgment in a few words, and that's not much use to me. I thought this course was about professional development not judgment!*
Sara:	*Well, it's supposed to be…*
Leo:	*And another thing …. She does that thing that I used to hate when tutors came to observe us on teaching practice …. you know …a few good things are mentioned first, and then there's a great long list of things that are wrong, according to her at least. She even missed the point with some of her remarks…. made me wonder if she'd really read everything properly!*
Sara:	*Can't you talk to her about it? She seems quite approachable?*
Leo:	*Fat chance! She gave us her mobile number but it's always switched off when I ring. And I haven't set eyes on her for weeks.*
Sara:	*Can't you e-mail her?*
Leo:	*I suppose I could, but it would be a long message. There's so much I'd like to talk out with her.*
Sara:	*I can see why you're feeling sore.*
Leo:	*Thanks…. You know I put so much work into that portfolio. It took me ages to get it all together and I was quite proud of myself when I handed it in.*
Sara:	*Leo, don't let it get you down. I'm sure you're a good teacher when it comes to the classroom. You have so many good ideas.*
Leo:	*Right now, it doesn't feel like that to me. I feel as though I've missed the point in so many of the things on the course …. otherwise she wouldn't have been so critical, would she?*
Sara:	*Come on, you're taking it too much to heart. Let me get you a cup of tea.*

2. In groups of 4-5, compare your findings and then draw up a list of recommendations to include in a set of guidelines to tutors giving feedback on portfolios and other written assignments in the context of a professional development programme.

This activity is based on a real conversation that I overheard in a college refectory. I wrote down an approximate version of it immediately after I got back to my desk. I was interested in it because of its rich messages to the trainer concerned. All the names have been changed to ensure anonymity. Every time I use it on a trainer development course it gives rise to a great deal of productive discussion.
Rod

TRAINER NOTES for
'Moves of a discussion leader' activity
(Contributed by Margit Szesztay)

This activity can be used for individual reflection or as a group activity during a training session.

Used for individual reflection
Simply think through each leadership role in light of the questions listed at the top. You might want to take some notes under the 'comments' section.
The aim of the activity is for you to think about your own leadership style, in particular to see what leadership functions you feel comfortable with and which might be the ones for you to work on in the future.

Used during a training session
Handout A and Handout B show five different leadership functions. Divide the group into As and Bs and ask them to do the reflective task individually taking some notes under the 'comments' section. Next, As and Bs form pairs and discuss their comments.
Finally, bring everyone together to get a whole-group perspective on how the various discussion roles and functions are viewed in the group.

Please note:
The discussion functions on the two handouts by no means constitute a final list. There are many more functions and moves and it might be a useful task to ask group members to think of further roles and functions.

Moves of a Discussion Leader - Group A

Have a look at the functions, moves of a discussion leader listed below. For each one think about and make some notes on the following:

1 Is it clear to you what the function is referring to?
2 Can you think of a specific example for each one?
3 How easy – difficult is it for you to take up this role?
4 Is this a function – role that your trainees take on sometimes, as well?

FUNCTIONS / MOVES	My comments:
1 INITIATING Focusing on main question(s); suggesting pathways	
2 MANAGING CONTRIBUTIONS Encouraging contributions; linking contributions; ensuring no views are ignored/cut off	
3 STRUCTURING Sequencing, sorting out information (E.g. "Let's hold on to this idea and come back to it later.") dealing with 'side-tracking' comments; giving/asking for a summary	
4 MOVING TOWARDS CLARITY & KEEPING DISCUSSIONS ON TRACK Reflective listening by restating the essence of a contribution; asking participants for clarification	
5 PERSONALISING Asking members to tap into personal experiences; disclosing personal information	

Moves of a Discussion Leader - Group B

Have a look at the functions, moves of a discussion leader listed below. For each one think about and make some notes on the following:

1 Is it clear to you what the function is referring to?
2 Can you think of a specific example for each one?
3 How easy – difficult is it for you to take up this role?
4 Is this a function – role that your trainees take on sometimes, as well?

FUNCTIONS / MOVES	Your comments:
PROVIDING / IDENTIFYING DIRECTION Redirecting attention to main questions; suggesting pathways	
MOVING LEVELS Identifying/ eliciting issues, underlying themes/ providing/asking for specific examples	
PROBING CONTRIBUTIONS Asking for specific examples Eliciting reasons, evidence, causes or comments about implications; discriminating between fact/ opinion ~between description & interpretation; probing or challenging assumptions	
DEALING WITH CONFLICT Allowing conflicting views to surface; identifying differences of opinion; depersonalising; reconciling differences at a higher level; defusing friction/ tension by a humorous comment	
COMMENTING ON PROCESS Stop and draw attention to distracting factors; reminding participants to consider the point of view of others	

Group Facilitation: Towards Working Principles

(Contributed by Margit Szesztay)

The eight statements below can be used as discussion triggers to open up some of the key issues related to facilitator roles and responsibilities. They can be used in a variety of ways depending on the size of the group, the time available, and the specific aims of the trainer. For example, they can be put on slips of paper (one statement on each slip) and passed around to serve as triggers for a quick, 'respond to the statatment' pairwork activity.

The statements are likely to elicit a 'Right! or Wrong!' type of response from the participants, asking them to take sides. It is important that this kind of right-or-wrong way of thinking is followed up by open-ended discussion which makes a more in-depth exploration of issues possible.

1 The facilitator needs to remain neutral, s/he should not take sides or express his/her own opinion.

2 Silent members of a group should be allowed to stay silent – some people learn best by observing.

3 If a group member is monopolising the floor, the facilitator needs to intervene in the interest of the whole group.

4 If someone strays off the topic being discussed, the facilitator needs to intervene and bring the discussion back on track.

5 Maintaining a positive, supportive atmosphere is more important than achieving group goals.

6 If there is conflict between two members of the group, the best thing is to ignore it and move on.

7 If one or two people give visible signs of switching off and not listening, the facilitator needs to remind them of the ground rules of working in groups.

8 Ultimately, the facilitator is responsible for the success or failure of a learning group.

Checklists

Introduction

The checklists in this section are offered as a 'mixed bag' of resources for the trainer to refer to. They aim to map out an aspect of facilitation trainers might want to focus on for their own development, or use with groups of teachers to trigger joint reflection. They can help to open up an area for further exploration (e.g. *Types of questions*), serve as a guideline for self-observation (e.g. *Which of these question types do I use?*), or simply act as a reminder of the options available to us as group leaders (inventory of training tasks).
They are by no means comprehensive. Our aim was not to list, for example, all the reasons why group members might keep quiet (see Reasons why people don't contribute during discussions); instead our aim was to list some relevant reasons in the hope that readers will start interacting with the checklist and come up with further examples based on their experience.

Title:	*Thematic area:*
1 Inventory of activity types for working with groups	Facilitation: toolkit
2 Group facilitation: self-reflection checklist	Developing as a facilitator
3 Types of questions	Questions and questioning
4 Reasons why people don't contribute during group work	Group life
5 Specific functions / moves of a discussion leader	Facilitation: qualities and skills

Inventory of Activity Types for Working with Groups
(Contributed by Rod Bolitho)

This list contains descriptions of a number of different activity types and formats, which are useful for various purposes and at various stages in working with groups. Some activities are described in terms of their** purpose **whereas others will be recognisable as generic** types. **Many of the standard training and teaching resource books contain examples of the activities listed here.

A. Activities relating to group climate and the interpersonal dimensions of group life
Activities in this section are strongly oriented towards process rather than content and they may be novel to those participants who see the value of a course in terms of the knowledge and information it offers. In this sense, they should all properly be seen as means to an end.

- Icebreakers - **Activities useful at the start of a group's life to help people to get to know each other and feel at ease in the group. They may also contribute to building trust. Icebreakers can have a personal or a professional focus but should not require participants to take risks or to disclose anything from their private domain if they don't wish to.**

- Warmers - **Activities that can be used at the start of a session to get a group interested in or focussed on a topic or on being together as a group. They are particularly useful when a group has not been together for a while or when they come together from different spheres of activity or from a preceding session on another topic.**

- Establishing Ground Rules - **Even in the most ostensibly mature adult group, there is potential for tension and conflict, as pet ideas and differing world views are put up for scrutiny. For these and other reasons, time spent on negotiating a set of agreed ground rules almost always pays off. Ground rules can cover formal issues like punctuality or keeping deadlines and agreements, but may also include a commitment to listening, proper turn-taking etc. A 'pyramid' discussion is a commonly used mechanism for this type of activity: starting with individual ideas, which are then pooled in groups of four and finally negotiated in a whole group session. The rules, once agreed, can be displayed on a poster and can remain there for the entire duration of the group's life. This activity, properly handled, also contributes to trust-building in a group.**

- Energisers - **These are usually short, snappy activities which are most useful in mid-session when energy and motivation levels may be flagging and perhaps when participants have been sitting and concentrating for too long. For that reason, energisers often involve doing something physical.**

B. Activities for opening up and drawing on participants' existing ideas and experience

In order to facilitate a group successfully, a trainer needs to know what ideas and beliefs exist among participants. The activity types described in this section are aimed at this process of opening up and making past experience available as a group resource.

- Analysing needs - **Advance questionnaires about needs often fail to reveal anything useful or may require further elaboration. It is usually helpful to give participants a chance to state their own needs and expectations at the start of a course. This can be done orally, with the facilitator recording needs in a public way, or more effectively in writing, following an instruction such as *'Note down the three things you would most like to cover in this course, then get into groups of four and come up with a shared list of three.'* These group lists can then be shared and consolidated to help establish an agenda for the whole group. This allows for every voice to be heard but also acknowledges the need for compromise over needs and expectations in a group setting.**

- Brainstorming - **This is an activity type, which draws on all the ideas and experience available in a group as a whole. The facilitator may ask for ideas on a topic and will then take contributions as they are called out at random by group members. The starting point may be verbal, an image or even a call for metaphors representing a particular issue or topic. All ideas are valued at this stage and the facilitator will acknowledge them and record them e.g. on a mind map or in a list on a board or flipchart. This type of activity is particularly valuable as a means of 'opening up' a topic, of identifying areas of concern/interest/past experience or of diagnosing needs.**

- Stories - **Teachers' stories are usually told in the privacy of a staffroom or a sitting room at home. Yet they are a rich source of experience and, if shared, may form a valuable basis for professional learning. They can refer to classroom incidents or to any other aspect of professional life, and they can be told in small groups, in plenary if trust has been established, or written down as 'data' for thinking, questioning or analysis. Many teacher participants have reported that the act of telling, of articulating a story has been an essential first step towards understanding an incident more fully.**

- Autobiographical activities - **This kind of activity, as is the case with stories, may help a teacher to stand back from her/his routine and think more openly about professional development. It is often useful for professionals to have an opportunity to retrospect on stages in their career and to share them with a colleague or colleagues in a secure environment. This type of activity may begin with an instruction such as '*Think back over your career and identify two or three significant turning points*' and it may typically involve visualisation ('*What is the strongest image in your mind from that stage in your career?')* and even visual representation *('Draw images to represent the turning points you have identified').* Activities like these are particularly suited to the intimacy and privacy of individual and pair work. They will wake things up in the minds of participants and there may be no need to share them publicly.**

C. Activities for working with ideas

Ideas generated in a group, e.g. through a brainstorming session are in many ways the most valuable resource a trainer/facilitator has to work with. Brainstorming will put ideas up for scrutiny, but the process seldom ends there. The activity types described here are all designed to probe a bit more deeply and to encourage critical thinking. They are often useful in mid-session, as a group 'gets its teeth into' a topic and curiosity and motivation levels are high. Most of them are suited to small group work and to the production of an end-product such as a poster, a written or oral report or an OHP presentation.

- Sorting/categorising/grouping - **In this type of activity, participants are asked to 'create order' by putting ideas into categories or groups. Typically, they encourage further exploration of ideas and often also lead to a clearing up of misunderstandings.**

- Prioritising - **An activity type which leads to agreement on the relative importance of ideas. Some are accepted as important while others will be rejected or given lower priority. A typical instruction might be '*Agree on the five issues that concern you most in your work*'. Very useful as a means of deciding what to focus on when time is limited.**

- Questioning - **In this type of activity, participants prepare questions on a topic (or perhaps on a professional article) to ask their peers or to discuss in plenary. In order to ask good questions about a topic, we need to think quite deeply about it, and the questions will in turn provoke new thinking in those responding to them. Questioning is a key skill for teachers and trainers and yet often little attention is paid to it in pre-service and INSETT programmes. Participants may need time and several practice opportunities before they are able to ask good questions consistently.**

- Analysing - **Going into an idea more deeply usually means breaking it down into its parts. This type of activity may start with questions like '*What are the main elements of reflective practice? How can we break it down?*' This process of analysis is often a useful way of getting to the real meaning of an idea which is being bandied about at a superficial level or which needs to be more thoroughly understood before working with it further.**

- Synthesising - **In one sense, this is the opposite of *analysing*. This type of activity calls for an ability to pull threads together, to identify common ground between ideas and concepts, and to use the parts to construct a whole. It is often used as a way of organising ideas more efficiently and of detecting and dealing with overlapping ideas. It may also be useful towards the end of a session when it is often important to work back from detail towards a bigger picture.**

D. Shared talk

Every group is likely to need 'plenary' time with the facilitator, usually when ideas are ready to 'go public' and to be subjected to wider scrutiny. Talk is the vehicle for this and it may be more or less structured in nature. The activity types, which follow, are 'whole group' activities, most often requiring careful forethought and facilitation.

- Discussion - **may be more or less structured in nature. It is an opportunity for everyone in a group to 'take the temperature' and to intervene with a personal contribution to the development of ideas and professional learning. Free-flowing discussion in the context of professional learning requires careful facilitation to ensure that voices are heard and ideas understood, that everyone's contribution is valued, and that points are properly captured and summarised where appropriate.**

- Debate - **Professional opinion, especially on emotive issues such as classroom discipline or the correction of error, is often divided. A debate is a classical, structured format, which allows for these differences to be aired and explored, and for talking time to be shared according to predetermined rules. Debates imitate procedure in a democratic parliament and they require an impartial chair to ensure that the rules are adhered to. It is sometimes useful to ask participants to speak in favour of something, which they are actually opposed to. By doing this, they are likely to get to understand the other point of view more thoroughly, which is usually far more instructive than digging themselves more deeply into their own 'trench'.**

- Rounds - **A round is an activity in which all the members of a group, including the trainer or facilitator, sit or stand in a circle and each one is invited to make a short statement on a given issue. The opening instruction may be something like '*What is on your mind at the end of the first day? No long speeches, just a ten-second statement on whatever is uppermost in your mind. Put up a finger when you're ready to speak.*' It is important to give individuals the right to remain silent if they don't wish to contribute. Rounds are a good way of taking the temperature by giving everyone an opportunity to say something. A closed circle, which many facilitators also like to use for discussions, is a powerful, non-hierarchical arrangement which emphasise that everyone in the group has an equal right to be seen and heard.**

E. Activities suitable towards the end of a course or a group's life

All too often, courses just 'fizzle out' as participants' levels of energy, enthusiasm and motivation begin to drop away and their thoughts turn to the routine matters that face them on their return to familiar home and workplace surroundings. This can often be a difficult time for a trainer-facilitator, and the following activity types may be useful to turn to then.

- Action Planning - **Most professional development courses are intended to make a difference to participants' lives and work. All too often however, the impact of events like these dissipates soon after the course as reality kicks in. An action planning activity which allows participants to contemplate this return to reality and to set themselves realistic goals, often helps, particularly if there is agreed follow-up six months later, perhaps by e-mail, by the facilitator and the participants themselves.**

- Group disbanding - **Just as it is important to give attention to group formation through ice-breaking and trust-building, it is usually helpful to participants in a group that has worked closely together to have an**

opportunity to mark the end of a group's life. It can be an emotional moment, especially on residential courses, where participants frequently become very close. There are many possible formats for disbanding activities, but a *round*, as described above, may be a suitable way of achieving this kind of closure, using a starter like *'I'm grateful to my colleagues for ....'*

GROUP FACILITATION – SELF-REFLECTION CHECKLIST
(Contributed by Margit Szesztay)

Below are a number of statements related to group facilitation.

1. *Consider the extent to which they are true for you and tick one of the three options in each case.*
2. *Discuss your findings with a partner*
3. *In the light of your reflections, think of one or two areas where you'd like to develop in the future.*

1 I believe in the learning value of group interaction.
___True for me ___Somewhat true for me ___Not true for me

2 I use a rich variety of learning modes and formats in my teaching.
___True for me ___Somewhat true for me ___Not true for me

3 I am not afraid of silence and give my students/trainees time to think and respond.
___True for me ___Somewhat true for me ___Not true for me

4 When faced with a challenging situation, I spend some time clarifying what the problem is instead of jumping to a solution.
___True for me ___Somewhat true for me ___Not true for me

5 I am aware of the way my learners see me and the effect I have on them.
___True for me ___Somewhat true for me ___Not true for me

6 I am usually light-hearted and able to bring my sense of humour into the classroom.
___True for me ___Somewhat true for me ___Not true for me

7 I am usually observant and able to 'read' the feelings behind student behaviour.
___True for me ___Somewhat true for me ___Not true for me

8 I believe that observation is an important part of learning, and help my learners to become better observers.
___True for me ___Somewhat true for me ___Not true for me

9 I am open-minded and strive to be non-judgmental in my attitude towards student learning.
___True for me ___Somewhat true for me ___Not true for me

1o I am sensitive to the changing energies in the group and have a number of strategies for influencing these energies so that they support group learning.
___True for me ___Somewhat true for me ___Not true for me

12 I regularly ask for and listen to student feedback.
___True for me ___Somewhat true for me ___Not true for me

13 In a whole-class discussion I'm usually able to remember what everyone says.
___True for me ___Somewhat true for me ___Not true for me

14 I'm good at summarising the main points of a discussion.
___True for me ___Somewhat true for me ___Not true for me

15 I am able to challenge student contributions in a sensitive way.
___True for me ___Somewhat true for me ___Not true for me

16 It is easy for me to be patient and encouraging with students.
___True for me ___Somewhat true for me ___Not true for me

Areas for future development:

……

……

Types of questions
(Contributed by Margit Szesztay)

1 High-yield ---------- low-yield	a Why aren't you paying attention? b When were you most engaged during today's session?
2 Open ended ---------- yes, no	a How do you feel about grades? b Are you motivated by grades?
3 General .....specific / personal	a What motivates people to study foreign languages? b What motivated you to take up English?
4 Asking students to recall information / text / story / joint experiences	a Who are the main characters? b How did it all start? c What happened next?
5 Asking for clarification	a What do you mean by that? b Can you paraphrase that?
6 Probing	a Can you think of an example? b What's the underlying principle there? c Why would you have run away? d Can you think of any exceptions? e Tell us more./ Can you expand on that?
7 Ask people to dip into – reflect on their experiences.	a Think of a teacher you liked a lot. What qualities made this teacher special to you? b When is the last time you had an argument with someone? Thinking back, what triggered it?
8 Inviting creative / lateral thinking	a What would you have done in her place? b What could schools do to encourage students to be more responsible? c How do you think the story will end?
9 Inviting critical thinking	b What does the writer of this article think about computers? c What are some of the potential problems with groupwork?
1o Developing empathy	Can you see how X might feel about that?

Reasons why people don't contribute during discussion / group work

(Contributed by Margit Szesztay)

1 A disbelief in the value of discussion.
"Ah well, talk never changes anybody's mind – why bother."

2 An attitude of detached observation.
"I just like to hear what other people have to say about these things."

3 A lack of confidence in one's ideas.
"It doesn't make any difference if I say anything or not because I never have anything original to contribute."

4 A lack of skill in verbalising ideas.
"The others can state their ideas so much clearer than I can so I would rather just sit back and listen."

5 Habitual shyness.
"Well, I never talk very much."

6 A solidified pattern of participation.
"Everyone in the group has got used to my not talking much so I feel uncomfortable when I do. People seem very surprised when I do speak."

7 Submissiveness to more aggressive members.
"Well, I can hardly get a word in edgeways so I'll keep quiet."

8 A lack of emotional involvement in the matter being discussed.
"I just didn't feel excited about the subject."

9 Fear of being rejected.
"I'm afraid that everybody will think that what I have to say is just stupid."

10 An inability to think quickly enough to keep up with the general pace of the discussion
"By the time I thought over the point long enough to have something to say on it, the rest of the group has moved on to something else."

11 Distraction to more personal problems.
"The reason I didn't talk today was because I was worrying about something."

12 A lack of sleep or general tiredness.
"I can hardly keep my eyes open."

In addition …..
In foreign language classes lack of sufficient language competence.

Based on: Francis, E. 1986. Learning to discuss. Edinburgh: The Scottish Curriculum Development Service

Specific functions/moves of a discussion leader – observation sheet *During the discussion you observe note down examples (in keywords) of the leader functions/moves listed in the table.*			
FUNCTIONS / MOVES	EXAMPLES	FUNCTIONS / MOVES	EXAMPLES

INITIATING Focusing on main question(s); suggesting pathways		**6 PROVIDING / IDENTIFYING DIRECTION** Redirecting attention to main questions; suggesting pathways	
2 MANAGING CONTRIBUTIONS Encouraging contributions; linking contributions; ensuring no views are ignored/cut off		**7 MOVING LEVELS** Identifying/ eliciting issues, underlying themes/ providing/asking for specific examples	
3 STRUCTURING Sequencing, sorting out information (E.g. "Let's hold on to this idea and come back to it later.") dealing with 'side-tracking' comments; giving/asking for a summary		**8 PROBING CONTRIBUTIONS** Asking for specific examples Eliciting reasons, evidence, causes or comments about implications; discriminating between fact/ opinion ~between description & interpretation; probing or challenging assumptions	
4 MOVING TOWARDS CLARITY & KEEPING DISCUSSIONS ON TRACK Reflective listening by restating the essence of a contribution; asking participants for clarification		**9 DEALING WITH CONFLICT** Allowing conflicting views to surface; identifying differences of opinion; depersonalising; reconciling differences at a higher level; defusing friction/ tension by a humorous comment	
5 PERSONALISING Asking members to tap into personal experiences; disclosing personal information		**10 COMMENTING ON PROCESS** Stop and draw attention to distracting factors; reminding participants to consider the point of view of others	

Group Facilitation

Select Bibliography (English Language)

Introductory Note
This bibliography has been assembled by the three of us as workshop tutors and is offered as a resource to users of this publication. Most of the titles carry a comment from one of the tutors, but we have also included some titles without comments where they have been recommended by others but are not known to one of us at first hand. The titles in this list are all in English. We have endeavoured to double check all the publishing information given under each entry, and apologise for any mistakes or omissions.

Arnold, J. (ed) 1999. *Affect in Language Learning.* Cambridge: CUP

An interesting and somewhat controversial collection of papers on the affective and humanistic dimensions of language learning. Contributors include Earl Stevick, Rebecca Oxford, Gertrude Moskowitz, Adrian Underhill, and Herbert Puchta (Rod)

Bee, F. and R. Bee, 1998. *Facilitation Skills*. London: Institute of Personnel and development.

This book has been written for facilitators working in a management training context, rather than for teachers and trainers. Still, it has really excellent chapters focusing on the processes of group learning, challenging group situations, and questions and questioning. (Margit)

Bentley, T. 1994. *Facilitation: Providing opportunities for learning*. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill.

A basic introduction to the skills and methods involved in facilitation with insights from first hand encounters with groups. Readable but with no real attempt to go 'deep' into principle. (Rod)

Bohm, D. 1996. *On Dialogue*. London: Routledge.

For me this was a very compelling and thought-provoking little book – though it does get complex and a bit concept-heavy at places. Bohm's central idea of dialogue is one of a free flow of meaning – there are no pre-set agendas, no immediate aims to be achieved. Participating in such open dialogue regularly, whole-heartedly and with full attention can trigger a change in perception and may lead to the transformation of human consciousness – Bohm claims. (Margit)

Chambers, R. 2004. *Participatory workshops: a sourcebook of 21 sets of ideas and activities.* London: Earthscan.

An easy-to-use book with a collection of ideas, a really good sourcebook to have for workshops, but can definitely be considered for classroom activities, as well. It also contains a chapter on forming groups that is particularly well done. (Meg)

Dillon, J.T. 1988. *Questioning and Teaching*. London: Croom Helm.

Dillon goes systematically into the dynamics of classroom questioning, with plenty of practical illustrations of good and bad practice. (Rod)

Dillon, J.T. 1994. *Using Discussion in Classrooms.* Buckingham: Open University Press.
An important book for educators which explores all aspects of discussion and has practical exercises that can be used in the classroom. (Meg)

Dörnyei, Z. & Murphey, T. 2003. *Group Dynamics in the Language Classroom.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Tim Murphey has a doctorate from the University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland where I met him. He has given many workshops including aspects of group dynamics. Zoltán Dörnyei has written extensively on motivation and group dynamics – often linking the two in very insightful ways. The book was very useful in preparing language courses and has references to theories as well as best practices. (Meg)

Douglas, T. 1995. *Survival in Groups.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Francis, E. (ed) 1986. *Learning to discuss*. Edinburgh: Scottish Curriculum Development Service.

This is an excellent little booklet on how to develop discussion skills with practising teachers, and in turn with secondary school students. (Margit)

Forsyth, Donelson R. 1999 *Group dynamics*. Belmont Ca.: Brooks/Cole.

Very good section on group formation and group stages. (Meg)

Hadfield, J. 1992. *Classroom Dynamics*. Oxford: OUP.

The book is aimed at the classroom teacher wanting to understand and exert a positive influence on various learning groups. It is a very practical book with activities focusing on group forming, trust building, maintaining a well functioning group, ways of increasing empathy, learning to listen etc. (Margit)

Hogan, C. 2002. *Understanding Facilitation: Theory and Principle*. 2nd edition. London: Kogan Page.

Hogan, C. 2003 *Practical facilitation: A tool kit of techniques*. London. Kogan Page.
This book is my all time favourite. There is a broad range of interesting multicultural techniques that are and remain stimulating to use and refer to regularly. (Meg)

Hunter, D., Bailey, A. Taylor, B. 1992. *The Zen of Groups*. *A Handbook for People Meeting with a Purpose*. Aldershot: Gower Publishing

This is an easy-to-use book that can be a start for discovering the dynamics of groups. (Meg)

Jaques, D.1992. *Learning in Groups.* London: Kogan Page.

Almost a 'standard work' on the dynamics, behaviour patterns, evolution and communication patterns in learning groups of all kinds. Plenty of useful theory too. (Rod)

Le Baron, M. 2003. Bridging Cultural Conflicts*:* A New Approach for a Changing World. *San Francisco: Jossey Bass*

This book offers a wide variety of creative strategies and functional tools. Michelle Le Baron has adapted these from her own work, and combined them with Western and Eastern approaches. I particularly like her "concept of cultural fluency" that goes

together with the concept of" conflict fluency". She speaks of internalising a new language, "a dynamic engagement to prevent intercultural conflict resulting in a new learning experience. This book is by far one of the most important tools in the area of conflict and culture. (Meg)

Luft, J. 1984. *Group Processes: an introduction to group dynamics*. Pal Alto, California: Mayfield.

The main focus of the book is on understanding interpersonal relationships within groups. The 'Johari window' is explained in detail, and other models are introduced for understanding changes in perception, awareness-raising and personality development. There is a good chapter on the relevance of group processes for classroom teachers: professionals who see themselves as facilitators of the group learning process. (Margit)

Michaelsen, L. K., A. Bauman Knight, &, L. Dee Fink (eds) 2004 *Team-Based Learning: A Transformative Use of Small Groups in College Teaching.* Sterling, Va.: Stylus Publishing

This book is very inspiring. It offers a new strategy in teaching that is team-based learning (TBL). The book distinguishes between "groups" and "teams". TBL can help lead small groups into efficient well-performing teams and be a good learning experience for teacher and student. (Meg)

Morgan, N. and J. Saxton 1991. *Teaching, Questioning and Learning.* London: Routledge.

A practically-rooted book which is thought-provoking for its critique of traditional approaches to classroom questioning, such as the 'Teacher asks >learner answers >teacher evaluates' paradigm and makes useful links to the thinking of Vygotsky and Bruner by examining the role of questions as 'scaffolding' and stimuli for critical thinking in the classroom. (Rod)

Reynolds, M. 1994. *Groupwork in Education and Training*. London: Kogan Page.

A basic introduction to using groupwork – not just in education. Has good sections on experiential learning and ways of observing group life. The overall tone is deeply psychological, and slightly philosophical at places. (Margit)

Richardson, V. (ed.). 2003 *Constructivist Teacher Education: Building a World of New Understandings.* London. Routledge Falmer.

An interesting approach to constructivist teaching, practice, theory and research. A good chapter on "teaching about thinking and thinking about teaching". (Meg)

Scannell, E. E. & J.W. Newstrom 1998 *Games Trainers Play* Columbus, Ohio: McGraw-Hill

Schön, Donald 1987. Educating the Reflective Practitioner*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass*

This is an excellent book for deepening our understanding of the kind of knowledge that teachers rely on in the act of teaching, and an exploration of the ways in which this knowledge can be developed. From the point of view of group facilitation, the central concepts of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action are particularly relevant. (Margit)

Stanfield, B.R. (ed) 2001. The Art of Focused Conversation: 100 Ways to Access Group Wisdom in the Workplace. *Gabriola Island, BC, Canada: New Society Publishers.*

The 'conversation method' is described along with sample conversations that can be used in many situations. It brings form back to conversations that lack direction. There are a lot of reflective parts in it. (Meg)

Stangor, C. 2004. *Social Groups in Action and Interaction* New York: Psychology Press.

Vella, J. 2002. *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach: The power of dialogue in educating adults* San Francisco: Jossey Bas

Vennix, J.A.M. 1996. *Group Model Building* San Francisco: Wiley
This book concentrates on team performance and on building system dynamics models when trying to overcome difficult situations to develop team learning. (Meg)

Webne-Behrman, H. 1998. *The Practice of Facilitation.* Westport ,CT: Quorum Books
A practical book that is recommended for teachers or trainers involved in administrative duties as well. It is not only based on the author's extensive experience, but includes a whole range of activities than can be used for classroom work and teacher training along with a good analysis of the varied role of the facilitator. (Meg)

Wells, G. (2003) *Dialogic inquiry: toward a sociocultural practice and theory of education.* Cambridge: CUP.

I would say this is a book for trainers/educators. It's quite a theoretical read - personally, I've only just dipped into it. The basic idea is that 'talk' is at the heart of learning/education. So if you're interested or like sociocultural theory, Vygotsky's ideas, Halliday's ideas – you'll love this book and I strongly recommend it. (Cheryl Mackay)

Wheelan, S. A. 1990. *Facilitating Training Groups. A Guide to Leadership and Verbal Intervention Skills* Westport, CT. Praeger Publishers.

Williams, M. & Burden, R. 1997. *Psychology for language teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

A general survey of the psychological dimensions of language learning, with an emphasis on social-constructivism, which lends it considerable relevance to the concerns of facilitators. (Rod)