

3.

An Instrument for Open-ended Training

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Mentors can be considered as learners when they engage in a training process. They are individuals actively involved in constructing meaning, i.e. in developing attitudes, skills and knowledge relevant to the task of educating language teachers in the particular context where they work. Raising awareness of their own beliefs about the training process, of their cultural and personal values and of their repercussions on their current practice is the first stage in this process. Thus, mentors reflect upon their own performance in the light of new ideas and make informed choices concerning the contents and the tools for teacher development. Ultimately, they develop their own training tools autonomously. In this way, the mentor is brought into central focus in the training courses.

Although mentors do not deal directly with pupils, they cannot ignore them. The teachers whom mentors train will in turn be in charge of promoting the pupils development of communicative and metacognitive strategies in order to discover how a foreign language and culture operate and how to communicate. Thus mentors must be aware of the strategies used at all levels, i.e. at the pupil's level and at the teacher's level. Consequently, the identification and analysis of the strategies as well as the development of specific training strategies are an integral part of mentors' training.

In order to reach this end, interaction with peers and instructors plays an important part. Language and communication are seen as powerful means of developing thinking and enhancing learning. Thus mentors must be given the opportunity to articulate their own views, compare their reactions and discuss their implications through collaborative activities when new information is provided. Only then will mentors be able to accommodate new ideas, appreciate the theory underlying them and understand their usefulness. If it is not the case, tensions may set up between new approaches and long-standing ones.

From this perspective an alternative to a top-down approach to training is to be considered. According to a client-centred approach promoted by Nunan, Freeman et al, syllabuses, materials and methods should be negotiated with the participants.

A tool for open-ended training, including a range of modules tutors can choose from and adapt, will encourage mentors to make their own decisions on contents, materials and procedures.

Thus, training programmes can be personally relevant to participants as they are derived from and reflect the problems they encounter in practice. They are based on the rationale that theoretical principles should be worked out by tutors and mentors and closely linked to their training experience and cultural context. Furthermore they recognise that there is not one best way of training.

The following questionnaire is a proposal of how to plan a mentor course after discussing the needs and special interests of participants.

Questionnaire

1 – I would like to have your ideas on the 4 themes below. Please rank your choices from 1 to....

– Mediation N° _____

– Interpersonal Approach N° _____

– Accuracy work N° _____

– Intercultural experience N° _____

– Other themes... N° _____

2 – Within the theme you have selected (N°1) I would like to know which fields you would choose to focus on in a training session. Please rank your choices from 1 to 3 or 4.

MEDIATION

In my training course, I most want

- | | |
|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | a) to make trainers/trainees familiar with the various stages of students' development and with the latest second language acquisition theories |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | b) to use the problems encountered in everyday teaching practice as a means of developing a reflective approach with trainers/trainees |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | c) trainers/trainees to be aware of self-evaluation as a tool for taking into account their strong points and building on them. |

INTERPERSONAL APPROACH

I think that

- | | |
|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | a) all training session should aim at a communicative approach |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | b) working in small groups is the best type of organization to promote interactive communication |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | c) what is at stake is identifying trainers/trainees' problems, meeting their real needs and demands through discussion |

ACCURACY WORK

I believe

- | | |
|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | a) accuracy work is an integral part of a trainer's role |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | b) trainers must provide trainees with criteria on who corrects, when and what to correct |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | c) the aim of accuracy work is promoting and facilitating communication in the foreign language |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | d) only errors hindering communication should be corrected |

INTERCULTURAL EXPERIENCE

In my opinion

- | | |
|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | a) getting to know the foreign culture is essential |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | b) getting to know another culture implies making the students aware of their own culture and values |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | c) cross-cultural comparisons provide topics for discussion in the L2 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | d) among many topics youth culture is a very important one |

