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Feeding, Leading, Showing, Throwing: Process Choices in Teacher Training and Trainer Training

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Introduction

I recently received a postcard from a German teacher trainer. His only comment on the course he had followed was the following:

> Personally, I profited more from the way in which you structured your 'input' than from the content itself. Surprised?

That reminded me of something said to me at the end of another course for teachers. As part of a plenary evaluation activity, each person had been asked to say what they felt they had gained from the course. Most people referred to the content of one or more specific sessions, but one participant said:

> It wasn't so much what you said or did, it was how you *were* with the class.

Now if we put these two comments together – and I am sure that over the years many experienced trainers have heard similar comments – they tell us something important: not only are teachers and trainers concerned about *how* they are taught, and the relationship between tutors and participants, this may have a more profound effect on them (or on some of them at a certain point in their careers) than *what* they are taught.

Given this little preamble, it will come as no surprise that my paper deals with what Wallace (1991: 29) refers to as 'modes' of teaching-learning and what Woodward (1988,1991) has termed 'process options', in other words the *means* by which trainers or trainer trainers seek to achieve their objectives.

More specifically, the paper is concerned with the relationship between ends and means. Some courses for teachers/trainers are designed following the sequence in Fig. 1, where objectives determine course content and processes are selected to carry this content. What I shall be proposing is the approach illustrated in Fig. 2.

What the second diagram is meant to illustrate is that awareness-raising in relation to process (and the relationship between objectives and process) might properly be seen as a course objective in itself. The double-

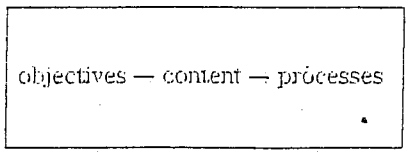

Figure 1

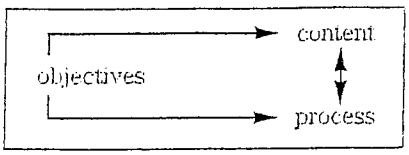

Figure 2

headed arrow between content and process indicates that content may be selected because it is a suitable vehicle for carrying process and not simply vice-versa.

Overview

The paper proper begins with an attempt to build a little logical edifice which represents a rationale for my own view of process. In the next and central section I propose a method of categorising processes that facilitates analytical examination of the relationship between process and course objectives in teacher education. The paper ends with a brief consideration of the importance of reflection and some ways of stimulating this.

A rationale and rationales

It has been suggested that every language teacher operates with a theory of language and a theory of learning (Richards and Rodgers 1986) – theories with a small 't' normally (assumptions, beliefs). It should therefore follow that every teacher trainer also operates with theories, among them a theory of learning. One difference between teachers and teacher trainers is that the latter are normally expected to be capable of being explicit about their theories.

Those involved in the design of trainer training courses ought, then, to be equally capable of being explicit about the rationale underlying their approach. The little task that follows therefore has two purposes: it is an invitation to the individual trainer on a trainer training course (or in this case the reader) to assess where he or she stands; it also provides a principled basis for the proposal made in subsequent sections. In each case, a statement is completed in a number of different ways; the task requires evaluation of these and encourages brainstorming on other possible completions. (An alternative way of handling the task would be to present just the statement (e.g. using an OHP) and ask participants to brainstorm possible solutions before giving those offered here. For discussion of possible disadvantages of this procedure, see the sections on *Leading* and *Showing*.)

Task 1 Each of the following statements has been completed in a number of ways. Which completions do you *not* agree with? How would you complete the statement?

1. Teachers teach as they were taught and trainers train as they were trained because . . .
   - that is how they learned (successfully)
   - they feel comfortable teaching in this way
   - they know of no other possibilities
   - they are expected to teach in this way
   - .....

2. But if trainers continue to train as they were trained, then . . .
   - standards are at best maintained and at worst fall
   - as far as teaching-learning processes are concerned, the profession stands still
   - .....

3. As far as training processes are concerned, the profession stands still unless trainers . . .
   - are made aware of other options
   - are prepared to try these
   - .....

4. Trainers are more likely to try out unfamiliar process options in their own training contexts if . . .
   - they experience them and
   - this experience is positive
   - they have an opportunity to try using them in a sheltered environment and
   - this experience is also positive
   - .....

5. However, the effect of such experimentation may be limited to an indiscriminate increase in variety within sessions unless trainers . . .
   - are aware of the key principle that determines the selection of process: fitness for purpose
   - select processes in a principled way
   - .....

It will be clear from my own completions that I see the following as key objectives of a course for trainers:

- participants will become aware, through experiential means, of a range of process options and of the purposes that might be served by these (to this end, in designing a course, tutors might start from a syllabus of process options as well as a syllabus of content areas);
- participants will have opportunities to practise choosing and using options with which they are less familiar.

The options

So what are these process options? Before we go into any detail, it may be helpful to distinguish between what I shall call process *categories* (the macro level) and process *options* (the micro level).

I think most training processes can be assigned to one of four macro categories. (The allocation of a specific process to a specific category might, however, be determined by the way in which the process is used on a particular occasion.) The four categories are: Feeding, Leading, Showing and Throwing (see Fig. 3). Examples (that is, process options) are given of each.

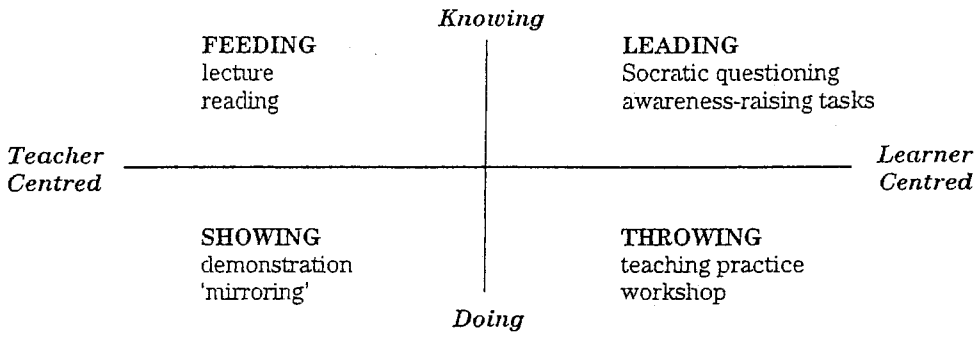

Figure 3 Process categories and process options

I shall briefly define the four categories and then come back to discuss each in turn, illustrating these with reference to possible options. By 'feeding' I mean the transmission of information or opinion about the language, teaching or a relevant theoretical discipline. This may be through the spoken word (for example, in the form of a lecture) or written text (a handout or set reading). 'Leading' refers to the process by which course participants are guided towards knowledge or awareness or towards a conscious or analytical understanding of what they already 'know'.

'Showing' involves the provision of models or examples of language, for instance, or teaching techniques. In 'showing' we say – or are understood to be saying – 'This is how it's done or can be done'. 'Throwing' or 'throwing in' is a matter of exposing participants to the realities of everyday life, in real or simulated situations, giving them an opportunity to perform one or other of the roles associated with teaching or training.

The categories are divided by axes. The vertical axis is labelled 'knowing'/'doing' to draw attention to the fact that the categories in the upper half of the diagram are basically *knowledge-oriented* and what participants are fed or led towards is knowledge about language, say, or teaching methods. By contrast, the categories in the lower half of the diagram are *action-oriented*: by dint of showing participants how to do things we assume we are laying a basis for skill-development, 'throwing' being the catalytic or cathartic experience which enables the participant to put it all

together, the final and most valid test – within the confines of the training programme – of what a participant can do.

The horizontal axis indicates that categories may also be more or less teacher- (or tutor-) centred. In the left-hand categories, 'feeding' and 'showing', the source of knowledge and the provider of data is the trainer. Participants may be relatively passive. In the categories on the right, 'leading' and 'throwing', participants are much more active. The data on which they work may be their own experience, and they will be capable in many cases of shaping the outcome.

Both axes are important because they encourage us to think about the relevance of our training processes to course objectives, albeit from different perspectives. Take the vertical axis. If course objectives are predominantly knowledge-oriented, it will be quite appropriate for training activities to be mainly located in the upper half of the diagram; if, however, the objectives are action-oriented, this should be reflected in the distribution of activities over the whole diagram (if practice is to be conscious, 'doing' needs to go together with 'knowing'). The horizontal axis is important because it raises the issue – important in any form of teaching – of the relationship between learner activity and learner choice. It would be strange, but by no means unknown, if a trainer were to put forward the case for self-directed learning, say, without offering that opportunity to course participants. (The issue is actually a broader one, of course, of congruence between what is said and done on courses.)

Let me now deal with each of the categories in a little more detail. My primary concern here is not so much to enumerate the *pros* and *cons* of the different categories but to emphasise the need for a selection which takes objectives (intended learning outcomes) into account.

Feeding

What I have been calling 'feeding' is otherwise known as the 'jug and mug model' or, less emotively, the transmission model. At best, it is a means by which a skilled and knowledgeable lecturer can economically and effectively offer an audience an introduction to or overview of some aspect of the field, or synthesise readings which are not easily available; such a lecturer can clarify what is unclear, create interest and stimulate reflection. A formal lecture may also be a thoroughly tedious experience for all concerned, either because the lecturer lacks the necessary presentation skills or because both lecturer and audience treat the event simply as a transmission exercise. To a lesser extent, the same may be true of reading if participants perceive what they are given to read as definitive, something to be 'learnt' and then subsequently regurgitated.

The disadvantage of what I am rather obviously caricaturing as a form of *spoon*feeding is that if participants are not engaged with course content, it may not be integrated into their existing knowledge frameworks; it may simply pass right through. And if they imagine that they are simply expected to absorb and accept content unthinkingly, this may encourage

dependence, as well as intellectual laziness. It also closes down options: participants might well have something relevant to contribute.

In a broader sense, moreover, feeding is strictly limited in its potential contribution to the objectives of a typical teacher education programme. It should certainly be used because, intelligently exploited, it can fulfil the sorts of objective referred to above (and on trainer training programmes can exemplify good practice – the breaking up of a monologue by means of interactive activities or the use of signposting and visual aids); overused, it may perpetuate the notion that this is what teacher education programmes ought to be like and that this is the best or only way to conduct such courses.

Leading

On the learner-centred side of the model – and still concerned with the development of knowledge or understanding – is 'leading'. As a means of facilitating the acquisition of knowledge, this approach has been criticised as uneconomical. It takes too long. It may also require a higher tutor-participant ratio than 'feeding' since products have to be elicited and discussed. Its proponents argue that this apparent lack of economy is irrelevant. What is important is that it is effective: participants arrive at their own understanding, and because they have done the preliminary thinking themselves and formulated their understanding in their own words the outcome is more meaningful, literally, and may be retained better (Stevick 1976). This is an important consideration since one of the problems with knowledge, as we all know to our cost, is that it is only too easily forgotten. Equally significant, however, in relation to the theme of this paper, is the fact that awareness-raising activities of the sort envisaged under this head can allow participants to *experience* the value and frustrations of working with others.

A potential problem with 'leading' which is not normally mentioned – and this may manifest itself as more of a problem the more removed one is from the language classroom – is that participants who are led towards what appear to be predetermined answers may resent being asked to read the tutor's mind, to find *the* word or *the* solution because they feel they are being manipulated, or led *by the nose*. The tutor who, when participants have finished a task and their solutions have been discussed, says, 'Now here's my answer' may not only put up the backs of participants but also do damage to 'leading' as a training process. If there is an obvious answer to a question perhaps it is a waste of time to get participants to look for it and then give it to them. Why not simply give it to them ('feeding') or give it to them but ask whether they agree that it is the right (or only) answer. Similarly, if the intended outcome is a list of some kind, why not provide a partial list, with the obvious points written in; this saves time and would ensure that everybody understands what is required. Let us move on now to the 'doing' cells.

Showing

As another teacher wrote after a course during which participants were taught at their own language level by communicative methods: 'It's one thing to know, but quite another thing to experience.' 'Showing' is designed to provide concrete experiences, to bring things to life. For me, it's the equivalent of the picture in the cookery book, which helps me to know what I'm aiming for.

What is 'shown' can be a model – for instance, 'Here are some useful classroom management phrases' or 'Backchaining works like this . . .'. When we supply models we expect them to be followed, but we need to be aware that, if unfamiliar, they may not become part of a participant's repertoire unless we also provide opportunities for sheltered practice (and feedback).

We also need to be explicit when what we are offering is not intended to be a model, but an example or sample, something which could be said or done in any one of a number of ways. Here too, however, we should remember that if participants wish to follow up the idea, they might value an opportunity for practice.

The difference between models and examples/samples is particularly important when it comes to what have been called 'demonstration lessons', by which I mean a lesson or part-lesson given by a course tutor to participants (or a group of learners) for the purpose of demonstrating certain techniques.

As an exchange between Wajnryb (1990) and Bolitho in *The Teacher Trainer* illustrates, the use of demonstration lessons and in particular the way in which they are received is an issue that merits careful consideration by a trainer. One of the questions we should be asking ourselves as trainers is whether the gap between ourselves and those we are training (in terms of skills and awareness) is so great that such lessons are unhelpful. Are they, in fact, a form of ego-tripping? Does 'showing' come close to 'showing off'? My own feeling is that the usefulness of a demonstration lesson lies less in the element of tutor performance and more in its potential as an illustration of the thinking that goes into lesson planning – the stages involved, the options within each stage and the reasons for the decisions taken. Post-lesson analysis of the kind that I have in mind, where the tutor is an informant on his or her own thought processes, can be interesting for participants and of value to both participants and tutor.

'Showing' can of course be handled in an equally deliberate but more subtle manner. What may be particularly appropriate at the level of *trainer* training is what has in relation to teacher training has been called 'mirroring' (Mugglestone 1979), 'learning through experience' (McGrath 1986) and a more sophisticated version of these ideas, 'loop input' (Woodward 1988, 1991). The underlying assumption of these approaches to showing is that, as Woodward puts it, 'learning about teaching can happen while you're being taught' (1988: 72).

Mirroring involves exposure to a process and awareness-raising in relation to the relevant features of that process. Mugglestone offers the exam-

ple of a group of trainees who are sensitised to theoretical and practical issues concerned with groupwork through groupwork tasks (experience) and discussion during their training sessions and then apply the resulting insights in their own teaching practice. In loop input, on the other hand, content and process are in perfect congruence. Woodward (1991) describes a jigsaw listening activity in which trainees learn about jigsaw listening through the content of the texts they are given while actually involved in a jigsaw activity.

At this point it may be appropriate to make brief mention of the value of negative experiences, what Woodward (1988: 16) has called the 'anti-model'. By putting on a show of ineptitude – or providing blatantly bad examples of whatever is under discussion – the trainer provokes discussion on why the example was 'bad' and what the characteristics of a 'good' example of the genre would be. (For trainer trainers, the idea can be extended to other cells of the model.) Alternatively, a 'good' example can be unpicked and its key characteristics isolated. Notice that if the trainer is carrying out the analysis this would be 'showing'; if it were a task for participants, it would be 'leading'.

Throwing

Finally, 'throwing'. In a positive sense, 'throwing' is a matter of giving participants the opportunity to *do*. Learning of various kinds can take place as a result of the processes we have discussed thus far, but *skill* can only be developed through practice. The emphasis in 'throwing', then, is on *rehearsal*, learning/getting better by doing.

One of the most obvious skills needed by a trainer is that of conducting a training session. If we assume that training is in some ways different from language teaching, then it requires preparation, practice and feedback. This kind of experience can be provided in the training classroom through peer-teaching tasks (McGrath, Nuttall and Trappes-Lomax 1989) but if arrangements can be made for tutors to observe novice trainers in the field this can be even more useful (hence the value now being attached to in-house apprenticeship and mentoring schemes – see, for example Marshall and Edwards in this volume).

Trainers (and teachers) need other professional skills – for example, the ability to deal with student problems and problem students. Some of these can be tackled through simulation (McGrath and Altay 1990); others through workshop activities or practical assignments (e.g. course design).

Throwing, then, covers a range of activities. At one end of the spectrum, these may be carefully graded and guided tasks enabling the participant to develop competence with confidence; at the other, we may have what is tantamount to throwing *in at the deep end*, where the deep end is a situation for which one is unprepared, and for which one's resources may prove unequal. Judgement is clearly needed as to the state of readiness of individuals and the potential for learning on the one hand and damage (to confidence, for instance) on the other.

Crossing boundaries

Thus far I may have given the impression that I have a conception of processes that are somehow watertight, that the dividing lines in Fig. 3 above are hard. On the contrary, it seems to me both possible and desirable that within a (trainer) training session there should be a movement from one process to another and that this movement should not always be predictable in its direction. Thus, one possible chain might be:

FEEDING (OR LEADING) → SHOWING → THROWING

and others would include:

SHOWING → FEEDING → THROWING
THROWING → SHOWING

Decisions regarding the ordering of processes would be influenced by the perceived needs or wants of participants or the topic being dealt with. What is important if skill development is involved is that the transfer from 'knowing' to 'doing' is not taken for granted. We might therefore do well to remember the adage:

I hear and I forget.
I see and I understand.
I do and I remember.

Shifting roles

On courses for trainers, 'doing' can actually involve participants in taking on the role of course tutor. Thus the 'feeding' can be done by a participant, primed to a greater or lesser extent by the tutor (Woodward 1988 credits John Morgan with this idea). 'Leading', 'showing' and 'throwing' can also be devised and fronted by participants. In such a case, participants are experiencing 'throwing' and the positive and negative aspects of this *as participants*, while having to think about feeding, etc. in their assumed role *as trainer trainers*. This is what Woodward (1991: 5) describes as moving between levels of 'the stack' (where pupil, teacher, trainer and trainer trainer are on different levels). For this approach to work well, it is obviously essential that tutors work closely with participants (in a relationship akin to that of 'clinical supervision').

The importance of reflection

I have already hinted at the importance of a reflective element in training, be it teacher training or trainer training (see for example the references to analytical discussion under 'Showing' and the awareness-raising element in mirroring and loop input). In fact, my view is that to be fully effective each of the categories of process I have discussed must be followed by (and possibly also preceded by) reflection. We might therefore wish to put a little reflective head into the centre of the diagram:

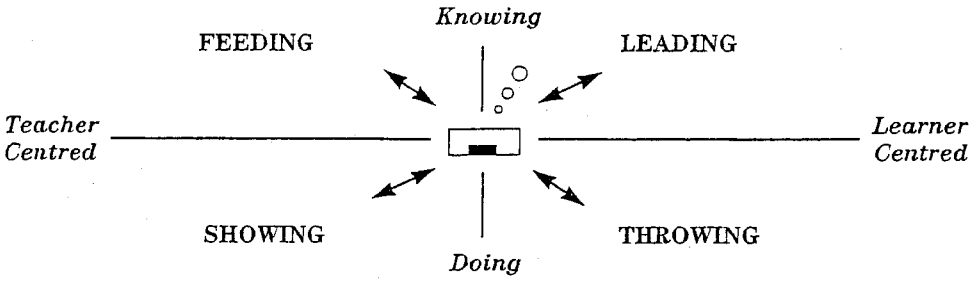

Figure 4

It may be helpful to give a few more examples of ways in which a reflective element can be incorporated into the use of these four categories of process. These are set out below in the form of another task. In a trainer training session, participants would be asked to extend this list. A hidden objective here might be a further check as to whether the concepts had been grasped and could be distinguished. The reader may also wish to do the task (the earlier part of the paper contains an example of 'leading', incidentally).

Task 2 Here are a number of examples of reflective tasks linked to each of the four categories. Try to add at least one more task option in each category.

Feeding

- interactive phases during lectures (buzz groups, etc.)
- task sheets for reading
- .....

Leading

- .....

Showing

- record keeping during sessions
- observation tasks (for different types of task, see e.g. Wajnryb 1992)
- .....

Throwing

- teaching practice logs (tutors' written responses can show that they too are reflecting)
- delayed feedback
- .....

Ellis (1986), Woodward (1991,1992), Parrott (1993) and the books by Gibbs and associates, e.g. Gibbs, Habeshaw and Habeshaw (1988) are further rich sources of ideas.

At the micro level of specific process options, reflection may make the difference between participants adopting or adapting; at the macro level of choices between process categories, it may well make the difference between process-selection as a matter of routine or administrative convenience (Wallace 1991) and what I have suggested might be principled process-selection.

Conclusions

It perhaps goes without saying that variety in classroom processes – in trainer training as well as in teacher training and teaching – is a good thing. This paper makes a different point: that to achieve particular purposes certain means will be more suitable than others. This may seem an equally obvious point, but there is scant evidence (especially in tertiary level institutions) to suggest that this awareness is translated into practice. The views expressed in this paper can therefore be summarised as follows:

1. If in training (trainers) we use only those categories of process or process options with which participants are already familiar, we cannot expect them to use other processes in their own teaching. We may even dull their interest in their own learning.
2. If in selecting processes we do not ask ourselves whether these processes are appropriate means of achieving our objectives (i.e. the intended learning outcomes), we may fail to achieve these objectives.
3. If we do

   - use a range of processes
   - select these in a demonstrably principled manner

   and participants feel that the resulting course is both interesting and effective, there is every chance that they will adopt the same approach when planning their own courses – and extend the range of process options still further.