

## INPUT-STYLES IN TEACHER TRAINING: LOOP INPUT

example: training session plan on "How to use role-plays in the ELT classroom"

## I. characteristics of loop input

Among various input styles in teacher training 'loop input', developed by Tessa Woodward, (see references below) has proved to be a specially effective one. It goes beyond 'learning by doing' in the way that the trainees not only experience activities stepping into the roles of their students, but in the authentic roles and situation of their training and at their level. They try an activity frame borrowed from the classroom but used directly for the purpose of the trainees' own syllabus. In the example that is demonstrated below they do role plays about role plays in the classroom and thus experience an activity while reflecting on its didactic and methodological principles at the same time; the process of the session thus exactly matches the content, and the element of reflection facilitates a later transfer to various materials and classroom situations.

## II. session plan (minimum of 3 hours):

1. *warm-up*

- one minute talk:

A: What I like/dislike about speaking in public

B: What I like/dislike about playing a role in a role play

The 'one-minute-talk' is done in pairs: 'A' talks for one minute without interruption and 'B' listens, then 'B' talks and 'A' listens; the speakers just express what comes to their minds not worrying about structure or mistakes.

2. *definition of role-play*

--> *students imagine a role (pretend to be a different person) and a situation  
unscripted (but possibly cued) dialogues or discussions in which the  
students are  
given roles to enact  
can be highly controlled, guided, very open*

*the students have to improvise: the situation is fixed, but the students make up the exact words as they go along*  
*differentiation from drama as, for example, prepared sketches or improvisations*  
*that are acted out for the rest of the class*

### 3. loop-input role-play

#### *preparation*

- forming of four groups (according to four role-cards, each member in a group getting the same role-card; see materials below))

- background explanations of procedure and instructions:

content: Four teachers meet in the staffroom; they are very different with regard to their age, character and teaching experience.

language: Try to speak to your colleagues in this role play as you would speak to colleagues in the staffroom, who are not necessarily your friends, whose viewpoints you might not agree with. Keep to polite language and social conventions.

task: Each group gets a role-card. Do not look at the other groups' role cards!

Prepare arguments for this role together. You may typify your character, but do not overdraw it. Try to feel for your character, even if she/he is s.o. you probably wouldn't particularly like.

- group work

#### *activity*

- second grouping: groups of four (each person having a different role now) alt.: observers (of language used; cf. role-cards)

- role-plays

(alt.: observers)

*evaluation : content and procedure*

- alt.: language (observers' findings)

content:

- collecting advantages of role-plays that came up, e.g.:

--> rehearsal for real life situations

in a friendly and safe environment

with a wide variety of experience and situations brought into the classroom

exploring language as it works in the real world

unpredictable as in daily life

no longer limited to the kind of language used by learners in the classroom

acting out a situation encourages the students to use natural expressions and intonations as well as gestures

teaching of social skills

increases motivation

develops creativity

promotes interaction

encourages peer learning

'learning by doing' is an extremely effective way of learning

some students are liberated

being provided with a mask helps them

they might find it easier to express themselves behind the mask of being s.o. else, communicate more freely if they have a role to hide behind

they no longer feel that their own personality is implicated

- collecting problem areas of role plays that came up, e.g.:

--> they create chaos in the classroom

-> careful consideration of classroom management necessary, the students have to be prepared gradually for this less formal type of classroom activity (pair work first, short role plays first)

they are inhibiting: some student are too shy to act

-> they don't have to perform, just play a part; emphasis on 'play' rather than 'role'; careful preparation

the students don't know what to say

-> they need help with ideas and language: warm-ups, preparation, role-cards; they have to be prepared for the concept of their roles gradually

the students don't really learn anything

-> analysis and evaluation of the language used necessary; practice of language they know in a free and uncontrolled way; role-play = active phase of learning

the students find it difficult to pretend to be s.o. else

-> careful preparation; student-generated role cards

they are too unpredictable

-> unpredictability is present in daily life, too; cf. shock of language students in real life situations

they take too much time to prepare

-> many ideas in coursebooks, in resources books; in student-generated role- plays preparation itself can be language practice already

the teacher cannot hear everyone

-> the students are distracted in full class form, too; the teacher cannot correct more than one student in full class forum either; delayed correction as one possibility

procedure:

- discussion on the aspects:

Did the role play work? Why? Why not?

What went well? What should be improved?

- mapping procedure in pairs

- evaluation:

one possible procedure with role plays

I. warm-up

II. role play

1. preparation content: context/background information

language: voc. / functions / register

task: instructions / time limit

preparation stage

2. activity participation: interaction

spontaneity

(observation)

teacher's role: organizer / counsellor

observer

3. evaluation content: follow-up tasks / discussion

language: voc. / functions / register

communicative abilities

delayed error correction

activity itself: procedure / success

participation / group process

#### 4. *characteristics and functions of role-cards*

- analysis of role cards with regard to basic characteristics and function (pair work)

- evaluation:

##### characteristics and functions of role-cards

giving necessary background information:

- situation/context

- persons: name, age, job/social status

personality

feelings/aims/beliefs ...

explaining the relationship to other people involved in the role-play

giving objectives/aims - indicating possible behaviour/actions

encouraging spontaneous interaction by 'information-gaps'

helping with language:

- vocabulary/functions

- register

--> students' cognitive, linguistic and emotional preparation for free role plays

#### 5. *loop input: cue-dialogues*

*preparation*

- discussion on the necessity of more controlled role plays for lower levels

- giving background information to this special kind of cue dialogue

*activity*

- cue-dialogue (text see materials below): two trainees demonstrate the cue-dialogue in front of the group

*evaluation:*

mapping content and procedure

### *6. further examples of cue-dialogues*

- introducing and practising various examples for different levels, e.g.

visual clues

verbal clues

allowing students' own phrasing

different registers

different functions

(for examples see Porter-Ladousse, Nolasco/Arthur, cf. references below)

### *7. characteristics and functions of cue-cards*

- analysis of cue-cards with regard to basic characteristics and functions (pair work)

- evaluation:

characteristics and functions of cue-cards

naming of situation and people involved

giving explicit instruction to what should be said:

- content

- language

encouraging spontaneous interaction by 'information-gaps'

considering different levels and linguistic skills:

- visual clues

- verbal clues

- a variety of suggested answers to choose from

- allowing students' own phrasing

- different registers

- different function

--> reduction of errors

directed practice of specific speaking skills

building confidence in using the English language

introducing students to free discourse

introducing students to pair/group work and student-oriented learning

possibility of varying level of difficulty

*8. alternative: devising role-cards and cue-cards for given scenarios*

### III. materials:

*role cards*

*role card 1*

You are a teacher. You have been teaching at your school for about 20 years now. You are used to traditional teaching methods, and you have never tried role-plays in your classes.

You had a tiring morning; the students in some of your classes were particularly undisciplined today. You meet three colleagues in the staffroom. You have, unusually, time to talk. These colleagues are not your friends, but you respect them as being good teachers.

One of these colleagues starts a discussion on using role-plays in class. You want to convince the others that role-plays are not useful in class. You might admit one or two positive aspects that role-plays could have in the learning process, but generally you are strongly opposed to all 'these new teaching methods' that take a lot of energy and preparation time.

### *role card 2*

You are a trainee teacher and an absolute beginner in the field of teaching English. You are anxious to cope with the amount of coursebook units and not to lose control over your students.

You had a stressful time this morning, because one of your teacher trainers observed your lesson. You meet three colleagues in the staffroom. You have, unusually, time to talk. These colleagues are not your friends, but you respect them as being good teachers.

One of these colleagues starts a discussion on using role-plays in class. You support one teacher's view that role-plays are not useful in class. Not long ago your teacher trainer asked you to try a role-play with one of your classes, which, however, turned out to be a disaster. You suddenly remember all the negative aspects and you cannot imagine ever using role-plays in your classes again; you much rather stick to other exercises the coursebook offers to you.

### *role card 3*

You are a teacher. You have been teaching English for a short time only, and you like trying new ideas.

You have just used a role-play in one of your classes and feel it was very successful. You meet three colleagues in the staffroom. You have, unusually, time to talk. These colleagues are not your friends, but you respect them as being good teachers.

You start a discussion on using role-plays in class telling your colleagues about the role-play you have just asked your students to do. You want to convince the others that role-plays are very useful in class. While admitting one or two problems that role-plays can bring about you are absolutely convinced that students learn a lot that way and you feel

very confident and enthusiastic because of the experience you have just made.

*role card 4*

You are a teacher. You have been teaching English for a couple of years already. You have just come back with lots of enthusiasm from two exciting weeks of teacher training in England.

You had an interesting morning, because you tried some new ideas from the teacher training course. You meet three colleagues in the staffroom. You have, unusually, time to talk. These colleagues are not your friends, but you respect them as being good teachers.

One of these colleagues starts a discussion on using role-plays in class. With missionary zeal you want to convince the others to use student-oriented speaking exercises on fluency such as role-plays much more often.

*role cards 1-4:*

Since you have this talk in a break, the language you use can be informal to some extent. Defend your view, but try to show respect, tolerance and understanding by being polite, even in situations of strong disagreement.

Here are some language functions you can use: introducing one's opinion ( examples: ...), asking for other people's opinions (examples: ...), showing disagreement (examples ...), taking a turn (examples: ...), interrupting (examples: ...).

Cue-dialogue

One of you is A, the other one is B. Fold this page in the middle so that you can only see your part.

A B

(B is a teacher at your school. You meet in (A is a teacher at your school. You meet in the staffroom) the staffroom)

A: Greet B. A: . . .

B: . . . B: Respond to greeting.

A: Tell B about a problem you have (doing a A: . . .

free role play in your class about a

family deciding to go on holiday).

B: . . . B: React with sympathy. Ask for details.

A: Give details (large class, noise, your A: . . .

students' low language level and lack of

words, too many mistakes to correct, some

students too shy to talk, the students' falling

back into their mother tongue ...) Ask for

advice.

B: . . . B: Give general advice (to start with a short and

guided role-play activity first).

A: Express incomprehension. Ask for an A: . . .

example.

B: . . . B: Name (don't explain!) one example of preparing

students for free speaking activities (cue- dialogues).

A: Ask for details. A: . . .

B: . . . B: Explain the use of cue-cards as a frame of a given conversation (students work in pairs, each having a card which explicitly helps with regard to content and language of what they will say).

A: Doubt the usefulness of this exercise, A: . . .

give objections (students read out their

texts only, no creativity, no real language

practice).

B: . . . B: Explain that students have their own part of the

conversation on their card only and thus have to listen carefully in order to be able to respond. Give an example; a situation in a shop where student A gets phrases for the shopkeeper and student B those for a customer.

A: Give further objections (students might A: . . .

look at each other's cards, they might not

speak English in pair work).

B: . . . B: Respond to doubts. Stress the positive aspects of

cue-dialogues (help as to content and language, errors kept to a minimum, students gradually learn to work independently and build up confidence, students get used to pair and group work, ...)

A: Admit that you might try. A: . . .

End conversation.

B.: . . . B: End conversation.

#### IV. references:

various coursebook exercises

Deller, Sheelagh: Lessons from the Learner, Longman 1990

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Ur, Penny: A Course in Language Teaching, Cambridge University Press 1996, module 9

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