Moving from teacher to trainer (MTT1)

Resource 5: Presentation techniques

Resource 5: Presentation techniques – running discussion, setting up pair and group work for adults

The aim of any training session, be it twilight, day or half-day, is to move teachers on in their thinking and to stimulate thought about their own classrooms and their own learners. The best sessions are those which inspire teachers to act on advice/ ideas as soon as they return to their school context, considering both short-term and long-term implications.

Key Point 1: Teacher audiences don’t appreciate discussion with no input from the Lead Trainer.

Leading discussion is not easy; sometimes the best teachers may not know how to get the best out of an audience in discussion. Difficulties may arise because the knowledge base of the audience isn’t sufficient for them to engage in discussion, because the discussion leader doesn’t ask appropriate questions, or because the dynamic of the group doesn’t allow discussion to flow.

Our job is not just to impart information but rather to stimulate creative thought and activity.

The module(s) will be the stimulus through which teachers will begin to think about the implications for learning within their own classrooms For this reason, in training sessions, teachers will need to be actively involved in processing material, experimenting with it, relating it to their existing experience and incorporating it into their personal knowledge base. Trainers need to facilitate this process within a session by questioning, discussion and giving lots of examples.

Input versus discussion

As far as teaching and learning are concerned there is no continuum which has lecturing at one end and collaborative learning at the other. There is nothing which says that lecturing *per se* is bad and collaboration is good. It completely depends on what you are trying to present and the needs of those present. Our experience is that teacher audiences do not appreciate discussion with no input from the leader. This is often seen as ‘do-it-yourself CPD’, a process of ‘sharing ignorance’, as one teacher once described a whole-school training session based totally on group discussion.

Trainers, therefore, will need to strike a balance between input of information and allowing their audience to discuss, create plans and exchange ideas. You need to be aware that giving information needs to be scrupulously planned, and that adult audiences will also benefit from interaction and variety as do young learners. On the whole, our audiences will respond positively to well-structured lively input that is interspersed with looking at materials or PowerPoints and includes questions focusing on reflection. For some events you might have the opportunity to set up pre-course reading and this can be useful in getting teachers to come with ideas and questions already formulated. The main message here is to avoid the long lecture and use key points which can be elaborated. If you are using PowerPoint, a handout of the slides can aid note-taking.

Key Point 2: It is useful to think about the purpose and variety of your questions in order to stimulate discussion.

Trainers will find it useful, we think, to consider the variety and purpose of their questions in leading discussion. Frequent, specific questions tend to generate a relatively silent response and to inhibit discussion. Giving an opinion or an idea or inviting speculation stimulates more talk. Questions and ideas coming from the audience can generate discussion among them but in order for this to happen they need to feel that they can interrupt and contribute as they digest the ideas being presented to them. So let’s take a look at questioning, since it is this that will foster critical thinking, evaluation and knowledge application. Before we begin looking at examples, here are some key points about developing discussion through questioning:

* Allow ‘wait time’ for the thinking process – don’t assume people are not interested because you don’t get an instant response.
* Avoid provoking ‘yes’ / ‘no’ answers by using closed questions. They lead nowhere and don’t promote discussion or thinking.
* Be sure that the audience has the requisite knowledge to respond to the question.

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| Session activity 3  Consider different types of questions (below) which are designed to get your audience talking. Once you have discussed and clarified these look at the checklist (Appendix 4.1) which you should use during the rest of the session to analyse the types of question that your trainer uses. At the very end of the session discuss the questions your trainer used, using your checklists, and consider how effective this was in promoting and enhancing discussion.  *Questions for clarification* What do you mean by…? I understand your example – what’s your main point here?How does … relate to … ?I’m not quite clear, can you give an example?What do you think is the main focus of this particular piece of work?Are you saying x or y?Would this be an example of what you’ve just said …?Can you say more about that?  *Questions that probe assumptions* What are you assuming?You seem to be assuming… Do I understand you correctly?You seem to be assuming… Can you justify your position?  *Questions that probe reason and evidence* Can you give us an example?Why do you say that?What led you to think that?What would convince you otherwise?Why have you come to that conclusion?Could you explain your reasons to us?But is that good evidence?  *Questions about perspective* What would be an alternative?  *Questions that probe implications and consequences* When you say … are you implying that…?But if you did that, what would happen as a result?  (adapted from <http://www.covington.k12.tn.us>, now obsolete) |

Controlling the questioning

The important thing about asking questions after (or during) an input is that you allow people to relate what you have presented to their own situation and thus engage them in reflection. If you are part of an audience you often gain a great deal from listening to different responses. However, we all know that not all answers are relevant to everyone. Teachers on the whole express themselves well and are used to being listened to but they are not always concise when given the floor! Trainers need to be aware that people don’t necessarily gain from someone ‘taking the floor’. Cutting in at an intake of breath or anticipating the end point: ‘Ah yes, I see what you mean – you’re talking about x’ can sometimes help in keeping up momentum. Though it may be conceived to be rude to interrupt an adult, the job of the trainer is to keep the discussion going and include as many people as want to join in. If a question has provoked all hands in the room to go up then you need to limit the audience input with ‘I’ll take five contributions here’, and then take five answers from different parts of the room.

Questions don’t have to be asked by the leader of the session. A good stimulus is to give groups of, say, three a key question (in writing) to consider together for a short period. Each group then asks their question to the whole group, the trainer can give his/her response but have the expectation that those who considered the particular question will chip in with the ideas which came out of their group. If a question is dealt with from each group the effect is often that the whole group feels that they have contributed to the discussion.

Key Point 3: Not all classroom ideas for regrouping will translate seamlessly to an adult audience.

Setting up pair and group work appropriate to adults

The advantage of group or pair work is that everyone is able to contribute in a non-threatening way to the work of the session and participants can rehearse articulating their ideas with a smaller audience than the whole group. For this reason trainers need to allow their teachers to work in groups (or pairs). Pairs is a useful formulation if you want a quick response, say to a question which needs thought or analysis such as ‘What activity do you do now in class which illustrates the objective we are discussing?’ With adult groups you often don’t need to take feedback or you only take feedback from a limited number of pairs.

Groups can be useful if you want teachers to engage in devising ideas or undertake planning activities. Since groups take time to set up, the activity they are asked to do needs to be relatively time-consuming. A quick brainstorm of language learning games, for example wouldn’t warrant the effort of grouping adult participants since they will take time to get to know each other enough to undertake the activity – particularly if they are from different schools and haven’t met before – and once bonded will not want to move from their group. However, if you wanted participants to map some objectives into an existing scheme of work, for example, then they could profit from the ideas of several people and group work would be worth setting up.

Trainers need to consider the size of the groups they set up and consider fitness for purpose. In our experience, in groups of more than three there will always be someone who does not take part, or does not get a look in. Plainly, if someone in a group wants to remain silent, then they must be allowed to do so but on the whole you want to make sure that people in a group have a chance to contribute and have time to contribute.

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| **Session activity 4**  Use Appendix 4.2 to discuss the appropriateness of different groupings for adult audiences. You will find our answers below but you may have different ideas.  Here are some group and pair work ideas commonly used in classrooms – are they appropriate for adult audiences?  *Whispering pairs* For quick revision, pairs whisper to each other all of the points they remember from last time they met. Everyone engages in the task, whispering in order to shield their ideas from others and the teacher can then ask any pair in the knowledge that everyone has been supported by their partner. Everyone feels they have contributed to the subsequent brainstorm of ideas with the whole class.  *Suitable or not?* Not suitable for adults. Whispering is too intimate and teachers will see this as a classroom idea not an adult learning idea.  *Double your list for brainstorming* For two minutes, individuals think through their own, individual ideas first and list them. Pairs share the items on their list and get rid of any repetitions – they merge their lists getting rid of any ideas they don’t like and elaborating any they do. This can then be extended to ‘snowballing’ where one pair joins with another pair and merges their ideas.  *Suitable or not?* Suitable though if an audience is in rows the foursome conversation is difficult to manage furniture-wise.  *Pair work for feedback* The trainer sets a short thinking activity such as ‘Which objective on your list does this video clip illustrate? Explain how.’ Participants think for themselves first, then share and compare their idea with a partner trying to come to a consensus in preparation for whole group feedback.  *Suitable or not?* Suitable  *Completing ‘worksheet’ in pairs* A pair is given a sheet with a series of tasks (or one task) to complete. They do this together.  *Suitable or not?* Suitable  *Twos to fours* As mentioned earlier, individual brainstorming followed by ‘double your list’ where pairs exchange their ideas with another pair can be extended with the ‘snowball’ method. Two pairs come together, making a group of four to pool their pair ideas further. They could be asked to produce a final ‘agreed’ group list or decide on the best, say, five ideas – thus providing a focus for their discussion.  *Suitable or not?* Suitable. The negotiation for the best ideas tends be a very good stimulus for discussion with adult groups.  *Jigsaw groups* This is where participants are assigned a home group. The home groups are given a task to do with a variety of different sub-tasks which they assign to individuals. These individuals then regroup into expert groups. So, say the task is for the home group to write a group essay in French with five different distinct paragraphs, there will be an expert group for each of these paragraphs. The expert groups discuss the content of the paragraph they have been assigned. The expert groups then return into the home group formation. Within each group there will be ‘experts’ for putting together each paragraph of the essay.  *Suitable or not?* Suitable if there is a meaty enough end-task and if groups have enough time for discussion both in home and expert group. However, this takes a great deal of planning and needs carefully explaining to adult groups. It can be a disaster if it goes wrong because it takes up so much time.  You will have your own ideas for groupings suitable for adult audiences. The main issue is to think first and foremost about fitness for purpose. You are likely to need to allow discussion through different groupings but you must not assume that groupings that work well with children will work with adults. Adults can be far less adaptable than children in the learning context and will certainly let you know if they are unhappy! |

Key Point 4: Don’t leave a discussion hanging.

Synthesising the main points of discussion

As a discussion draws to a close it is useful to draw out the main points that have been considered. You may find a pad of sticky notes useful to jot down pertinent points as the discussion unfolds. You need to draw out these points to show that you have been listening and to show how the points link to the rest of the session. Participants need to know that they are progressing through a planned series of actions leading to a clear outcome – in the same way as any class. Signposting the moments when you are moving to another issue or aspect of the session will be important. The need for such clarity is not always obvious with adult audiences. Participants need to demonstrate that they are comfortable with the discussions. Synthesising what has been said or done at key points can be a means of demonstrating such confidence. Without such a synthesis audiences can sometimes forget what the reason for the discussion was and therefore not see the relevance. Sometimes a plenary can be disappointing after the enthusiasm generated in the group discussions, but it can be valuable in sharing the work of the groups and drawing out the main conclusions. Participants may consider that a group spokesperson can feed back but we feel that a final statement will still be needed to move onto the next part of the session or to end the session. You may find it useful to structure your plenary around the above session activity about groupings around these points.

Key point 5: Adult behaviour sometimes needs controlling.

Dealing with dominant participants can be planned for

Of course, though a session can be meticulously planned, trainers may still encounter some challenging personalities. The person who forgets that there are others in the session is a case in point. This is the person who may have their own agenda and who dominates the session in order to express this, or who is in a position of authority and is used to leading rather than being part of a group. This may be someone who gets over-enthusiastic and wants to participate to the full. If left to dominate, others in the session can feel that they are witnessing ‘private’ support, or that the Trainer is allowing him/herself to be diverted because they are not sure of their materials and is glad for the interruption. Whatever the reason, trainers need to be clear that everyone who has come to the session has equal right to attention and everyone has a right to reach a planned outcome. Trainers need to control the amount of input the domineering participant gives or seeks. This could be by taking second contributions from participants only after everyone who wants to has contributed once. It is possible to signal that you are limiting the dominant person’s questions or contribution by some of the following means:

* Indicating with body language (e.g. a nod of the head, that you are aware of them but that you must take other contributions too)
* By taking a question and, if it is tangential, saying you don’t want to steer off the path of the discussion and you’ll come back to it at some point later
* By briefly saying that if people have school-specific issues which the rest of the group can’t gain from discussing then you’ll discuss them at a break or over email
* By planning a short input with a time-limited question and answer follow-up so that participants can quickly get into working in groups. Groups of adults are sometimes good at controlling the contributions of domineering members and showing the need for democracy.

You will need to think about this issue since it is possible for forceful adults to derail a whole session if allowed. You are unlikely to be addressing audiences of teachers totally converted to the idea of primary languages. You are likely to have the equivalent of ‘Why do we have to do this?’ questions and so you need to keep in mind the purpose: to disseminate best practice and demonstrate the contribution languages make to primary education and the personal, cultural and intellectual development of the child. You will need to think through strategies for keeping everyone interested as far as possible and in some instances, controlling behaviour.

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| Session activity 5  Come up with four ‘personalities’ whom you’ve met in sessions you have run.  Think about how you would deal with these different people.  Discuss how you accommodated these people.  Do a ‘thinking aloud’ interval to illustrate what runs through your head as you recognise these different participants.  For example:  ‘Ah, the guy at the back with head down is reading a newspaper, mmm…., I think I’ll do the next bit from over where he’s sitting… if he doesn’t respond I’ll move back to the front… no problem … it’s a twilight so if he doesn’t want to join in there’s nothing I can do about it… his loss… mustn’t let him derail me.’ |