

The Teacher Trainer  
Pilgrims Publications

Here is a typical exchange from the Teacher Trainer. The editor, Tessa Woodward, is interviewing Jill Hadfield, materials writer and methodologist. Tessa (TW) has asked her 'so if you were working with teachers destined for under-resourced settings, what five top principles, tips and resources would you recommend? What would you like to say to trainers or mentors of such teachers? Hadfield replies by suggesting teachers should find large sheets of cheaply-priced paper, that they should use student power to create some materials, that they should use realia, that they should use students' personal experiences and shared cultural knowledge, that they should use drama and finally (principle 6),

Use imagination. Your own of course, but more importantly – the students! One of the simplest and most basic low-tech activities is a visualisation. So, you don't have a textbook with brightly-coloured pictures to contextualise the language or act as a stimulus for a communicative activity. Simply ask students to close their eyes and describe the scene to them. Their minds will fill with brightly-coloured images, which you can use as the stimulus for an activity.

**TW:** Jill! That's gold, pure gold. Thank you!

I've chosen to open this review with part of an interview because it illustrates some of the most notable characteristics of the journal, namely an enquiring mind, straight-talking, and a sense of wide-eyed wonder at what other people do. Elsewhere, over the years, there have been other interviews too, notably in a section called 'people who train people' where, for example nurse trainers have been interviewed or, in the Autumn 2006 issue, Sir John Lister-Kaye, who runs a centre in north-east Scotland training people to be committed conservationists and environmentally aware. Welcome to Tessa's world.

The Teacher Trainer is indeed a reflection of Tessa Woodward's world. She has run it as editor for all of its 21 years of existence (except for a spell out while she was ill when her place was taken by Mario Rinvoluceri, and by Seth Lindstromberg, now assistant editor). So what goes into this highly personal journal reflects the interests and preoccupations of its editor, and it shows. The Teacher trainer is 'a practical journal for those involved in modern language, especially TESOL, teacher training.' And it lives up to this billing. Over the years, for example, it has concentrated more than any other publication I know, on issues to do with observing teachers and how to do this appropriately and fruitfully. For many years it allowed readers to listen to 'Trainee voices' where both pre- and in-service trainees told us what it felt like to be on the receiving end. There has always been a useful 'publications received' section where short summaries are given describing new books in a lightly evaluative tone ('sound and serviceable overview of ideas current in mainstream TESOL..') which occasionally sharpens up into,

for example, an activity 'which – despite being a very promising, highly intensive reading activity – has no built-in element of humanism that I can identify' (in a description of Rinvolucri's book *Humanising your Coursebook*).

To these regular sections Tessa has recently added 'Article Watch' drawing our attention to interesting writings from various journals, 'It's a wired world', Nicky Hockly's update on what's happening in the world of IT, and 'Practical Teaching Session', where trainers offer ready-made material for input sessions.

Mention of Mario Rinvolucri's name reminds us that the *Teacher trainer* is a Pilgrims' publication, a fact that is unsurprising when you consider the eclectic mix of articles it publishes. It has something of the same spirit as *Humanising Language Teaching*, the Online free Pilgrims' journal ([www.hltmag.co.uk](http://www.hltmag.co.uk)) in its mix of interviews, serious referenced articles, more liberally-tolerated musings, and some oddities (your reviewer, for example, having a controlled rant about the misuses of powerpoint).

And Mario (you can't get away from Mario, because he has been a very regular contributor to the *Teacher trainer*), also scores highly in the 'rant' category producing, at his best, an exchange which was both almost comically extreme but at the same time thought-provoking and a 'must' on any trainer's input session on the subject of planning. It all started when Craig Thaine in New Zealand wrote a measured article about how he got his trainees to plan a series of lessons as a specific training exercise. This was the kind of workaday article which *The Teacher Trainer* publishes so successfully. But only the *Teacher trainer* (only Tessa?) would publish Mario Rinvolucri's reply, an open letter to Thaine in which he (Mario) wrote (apart from a few choice comments about unimaginative teachers being on a 'silly-bus') that 'the assumption behind your article seems to be that a teacher on Sunday evening should know what...she will be doing with her class on Friday morning, five lessons on. The assumption fills me with a mixture of amazement and hilarity...' And there was more in the same vein. Back in 1996 Craig Thaine was perfectly able to defend himself from this assault and, as a result we got, over three editions, practical advice, impassioned intemperance and cool reasoning which illuminated the planning paradox (that planning may be a good thing, but that it militates against student-teacher creativity) in the most intense and (let's face it) enjoyable way. And there have been many more like this, not all of them involving Mario!

So what's in the latest edition, apart from the regular features described above? Megan McCue writes about texts on HIV/AIDS for use in teacher training, Richard Cooper writes about 'Podcast teacher observation,' Helen Basturkmen writes about teacher beliefs and teacher training', Susan Barduhn lets us know about 'news in our field', Ilana Salem discusses native speakers and the 'language component', Ali S.M. Al-Issa tells us about 'Professional English' development games for teachers, Sandra Kouritzin

promotes contact with learners in an introductory TESL methods course, and Robert Lucas shares his 'Flip chart magic' (well, he's written a book about it!)

So there you have it. Tessa's journal, whether in print form or on the web ([www.ttjournal.co.uk](http://www.ttjournal.co.uk)) has always been (and remains) an eclectic mix of the peripheral and the profound, the illustrative and the insightful, the inspiring and the irritating. I can't imagine why any teacher trainer would ever not want to read it. After all this is the journal that first published Rosie Tanner's wonderful (and wonderfully simple) *Erroroleplay*, still, many years later, my favourite experiential training activity.

Pure gold? Well gold, at least!

**Jeremy Harmer**  
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