One of the most popular columns in the early years of The Teacher Trainer was the one called “Process Options”. This column was designed to help us mentors, trainers, and teacher educators with the way we ran our courses and workshops, with the “How” rather than the “What” of the session.

Lecture Discussion Scales

by Tessa Woodward

Many teacher trainers/educators feel they want to give lectures or lecturettes when time is short, when numbers are huge, or when the material they want to present is densely packed or hard to translate into experiential exercises. There is no reason, however, why a lecture should necessarily consist solely of the speaker reading from prepared notes while the trainees listen, take notes and make the occasional comment. There are many ways of livening up the standard lecture before, during and after it!

I’d like to thank Cynthia Beresford for giving me an idea on discussion scales, which I’ve adapted for use before lectures.

This is what you do:

1. Out of the meat of your talk, pick out the central points or issues. Write these up as statements that can be agreed or disagreed with. An example here might help make things clearer. Recently I had to give a talk entitled “New Ways with Translation”. There were about 10 main issues I wanted to deal with. Changed into rather provocative statements they were, in random order:

Translation is fun because texts are fun.
Every word or phrase is translatable into the target language.
The best texts to translate are those written by famous authors.
Translation is unfashionable in language teaching but it’s a very natural activity.
It’s better if students translate what they create i.e. “internal” text.
Everybody would translate the same text differently.
There is no one perfect translation.
In real life you translate something for somebody.

In class too, you should have someone to translate for – an “addressee”. There’s no point training your students in good translation habits if their examiners make them do exercises out of context.

Under each statement you draw a line or scale like this:-

[__________________________________________]
agree            disagree

2. Photocopy the sheet. Keep one original for yourself and cut the others up into strips. Give one statement and scale to each person.

Participants read their own slip first, think about it and then mark the scale with an x according to whether they agree or not.
e.g.  
[_________x________________________________________ ______
agree          disagree

(This one would mean quite strong agreement).

3. Next, participants mill around telling people what is on their slip, how they feel about it and trying to find someone who agrees or disagrees with their statement to the same extent.

4. Next, give your lecture.

While listening, people will tend to be motivated to focus especially well on the part of the lecture that deals with the issue that was on their slip. They may be interested to find out how you feel about it.

After the lecture, if the trainees want to get together they will have, between them, on slips of paper, the key points of the lecture. There is a good chance that different individuals will have strong recall of certain points.

The advantages of the discussion scale idea, to my mind are:
- The initial reading, thinking and talking, focus attention on the subject and this makes people aware of what information or opinions they have or don’t have on different issues.
- The group is encouraged to meet afterwards to pool key points.
- People can relax and enjoy the lecture knowing the key points have already been noted.
- People will know what the lecture has missed out or not had time for. These points can be jointly researched and/or presented by participants next time.