

This article first appeared in the Process Options series. This series aims to help trainers to find different ways of conducting input sessions, different ways of interacting with content. The idea below uses a list, selection and discussion technique. The content below is teacher motivation but the list idea could be used with many different kinds of content e.g. ways of using a text in class, ways of dealing with discipline problems.

## The Flexible List

by *Natalie Hess*

An important aspect of teacher training is the provision of opportunities for prospective teachers to analyze the sources of their own motivation in having chosen the teaching profession.

I have found the “flexible list” a useful tool in such an examination of motives.

Below is an outline of the procedure. The judicious teacher-trainer will, no doubt, make changes to suit her/his own training style.

### Step One “Down the Line”

Make out a list of reasons people have given for becoming teachers. (These may be logical, serious, ridiculous, sublime or any other kind). Below is a suggested list.

- a. I love to explain things.
- b. I like children.
- c. I have a lot to say.
- d. I love the English language.
- e. I want to contribute.
- f. Good order and cleanliness are important to me.
- g. I believe in the value of education.
- h. I am good with people.
- i. I know how to mould a group.
- j. I don't think I can do anything else.
- k. I am a good actress/actor.
- l. The job offers a lot of security.
- m. The job gives opportunities to be creative.
- n. A teacher inspired me.
- o. Good discipline is important to me.
- p. I feel at home in the class-room.
- q. I like to be the boss.
- r. The job gives a great deal of autonomy.
- s. I like the people who go into teaching.
- t. I'm basically a scholarly type.
- u. I like regular working hours.
- v. I like the exchange of ideas.
- w. My mother/father/ is/was a teacher.
- x. I like to show off what I know.
- y. I like to help people.

### Step Two “Making Choices”

Post copies of this list on the walls in various places of the room. Ask your trainees to approach the lists and read them over several times. Their job is to choose two and only two items that best describe their own motivation. Make clear that making a choice of two is indeed difficult, and involves many left out items, nevertheless, the instructions are to choose only two. Having made their choice, the trainees are to pin the two letters of their choice on a tag which is to be visibly displayed. (Possibly pinned on). Each trainee will now be labeled with two letters, such as : A , S ; or B,G.

### **Step Three “Find a Friend”**

Trainees are now to mingle trying to find one or two people who share at least one of their choices. Their job is to explain to each other why they have made this particular choice and to see whether their reasons for having made this choice are similar or not. (Give this part of the activity approximately 15-20 minutes).

### **Step Four “Match or Mis-match”**

Ask your trainees to mingle again. This time their job is to find a person with whom they do not share a single letter. They should again explain their choices to each other and this time try to analyze their differences. Are the differences based on attitude? On training? On teaching style or what? Are they perhaps saying the same thing differently? Can one persuade the other that his reason is a more compelling one, or will they agree to disagree? – Groups of three may well have formed. (This part should be given about 20 minutes).

### **Step Five “The Neglected Child”**

Allow trainees to return to the list. Their task this time is to find ‘the neglected child’ – that third item that they were originally forced to reject because their instructions had been to choose only two. They may slightly change this third item, making it more suitable to their real desires. Or they may combine two items into one. For example, someone may choose, “I want to become a teacher because I think that the work will permit me creativity and autonomy”.

This time trainees are asked to write out their chosen or revamped statement in full and to wear it as a label. They are now to form groups of four and five with like-minded people and discuss their statements. (Give this activity 20-30 minutes).

At the closure of this activity, like at the end of any other training process, it is worthwhile analyzing each step with the trainees, hearing their reactions regarding each step and its application to language learning.

### **Conclusions**

The Flexible List allows for introspection through structure, flexibility and options. It permits your trainees to move about and mingle. It allows some serious give and take concerning their future profession and it involves the skills of listening as well as explaining. Trainees invariably find the activity stimulating and enjoyable.

I evolved this technique from one I learned from Dr. Ora Zohar at the center for teaching improvement of the School of Education, Hebrew University, Jerusalem.