

Some ideas stay with us for years and years and the idea of using a foreign language lesson as an interactive demonstration on an initial teacher training course is one of those ideas.

Just a week ago I received a draft article from a trainer using the "foreign language lesson" on her course in Japan and wanting to share a variation with readers of the journal. So when I re-read the article below reprinted from Volume One Issue Two, and remembered its classic trainee-centred and realistic rhythm, I knew it was one for the web archive!

The foreign language lesson-trainees prepare the trainer's demonstration

by John Carmichael

Many initial teacher training courses contain an element of demonstration by an experienced teacher in which trainees are placed in the position of the foreign language learner so that they experience teaching techniques from the receiving end. They are given a lesson or a micro-lesson in Arabic or Japanese for example. As has been recognised, this procedure runs the risk of dazzling the relatively inexperienced trainee with a display of techniques which s/he will find difficult to emulate within the typically short duration of the training course. S/he may be daunted rather than impressed. It can be very frustrating for the beginner on the slopes to be expected to admire the performance of a skiing virtuoso. As a result trainers often make a point of building in to their demonstrations deliberately bad practices that can be highlighted on the subsequent discussion.

A useful variation on this technique is to get the trainees to think through an appropriate procedure (for a particular micro-skill such as dialogue building, handling a listening comprehension or teaching a lexical set for example) before being taught in the foreign language. To take teaching a lexical set as a detailed example, tell the trainees that you would like to teach them seven or eight words in a foreign language (e.g. word for different fruits). You, the teacher, would like these words to become part of their active vocabulary. How would they like to be taught? What procedure do they think would be most effective in achieving this aim?

Get the trainees to discuss this in small groups and note down a detailed procedure. Monitor the groups and prompt if all the relevant issues have not been considered (e.g. When do you want to see the written form? How many times do you want to hear the word before you are asked to say it yourself? How many times do you want to say each word? What context do you want to practise the words in?). Get members of different groups to exchange their ideas and then, with the whole class, draw up a consensus procedure on the whiteboard. Differences of opinion at this stage can serve to highlight the need to accommodate the different learning strategies to be found in any group of students. Then teach the vocabulary using the procedure provided by the trainees. Follow the recipe they have given you exactly. After this, repeat the group/whole class discussion so that the trainees can evaluate the suggested procedure in the light of their experience and suggest any amendments they wish. This overall process of planning in the abstract and then assessing and re-evaluating in the light of experience directly parallels the experience of trainees in their own lesson planning and classroom contact. Here is an illustration of the before and after procedures that one group of trainees came up with.

Before

Use visual aids to convey meaning.

Teacher gives the model for the first word twice; students listen and then repeat chorally and individually. Follow this procedure one word at a time.

Write the words on the board and get students to read them off, checking pronunciation.

After

Use visual aids to convey meaning.

Teacher shows visual and says all the word while the students listen.

Teacher gives a model for the first word two or three times; students listed then repeat chorally and individually. Highlight pronunciation and stress where necessary. Don't dwell too long on students who are having initial difficulty reproducing the word. They can be given the opportunity to listen to other students' repetitions. Come back to them later.

Build up a lexical set. Repeat as you go along and at the end, both in order and in random order.

Practise the words further in a personalised context (e.g. talking about likes or preferences).

Elicit the words again from the students as you write them on the board. Highlight any peculiarities of the written form.

Matching exercise; students write the words (jumbled at the bottom of the page) next to the appropriate pictures.