

## SESSION REPORT

Exploring the principle of reciprocity in teacher learning  
By Tessa Woodward, UK.

### Menu

I wrote a “menu” on the board in the lecture hall. It read:

- Entry
- Introduction
- Talk..definition and ideas
- Carousel work
- Handing over the stick

### Entry

The music playing was by Ravi Shankar and David Glass who made an album by working together in an interesting way. They each wrote some music and sent it to the other who then played it in his own way. Thus we have music on the record composed by Ravi Shankar and played by David Glass and vice versa. The music seemed to me (the presenter) to be a good metaphor for a session on reciprocity.

So the “Entry” was the music and people coming in. Also, I asked some of the participants if they would be willing to help a little. If they said yes, they were given a pink slip with a reminder of their role on it. One slip said “Numbers person” because I needed to know the rough number of people attending so I could work out the group numbers later on. Other slips said “Music person”, “Chair person “, “Meet and greet person”.

### Introduction

I started by reminding people of the title of the conference\* which involved the words “Making connections” in one case and “Interaction” in the other. I referred to my work as a language teacher, teacher trainer and Professional Development Co-ordinator and discussed some of the things that I and members of the audience thought were important for connections and interactions of a positive, fruitful kind in this sort of work. We mentioned things like humour, fun, honesty, transparency.

### Talk...definitions

I then explained that, recently, I had been thinking that the principle of reciprocity was very important for healthy interaction in teacher learning relationships. I wrote up the word RECIPROCITY on the board and we discussed what defining words would fit it like in a scrabble game or crossword. We fitted in “Two way “ like this:

RECIPROCITY

W

O

W

A

Y

and also fitted in words like ‘give and take’, ‘mutual’, ‘role reversal’, and ‘accommodation’, words which helped to define the spirit of reciprocity.

### **...ideas**

I then explained that I had been trying, in my work over the last few years, to implement the flavour, the tone, the mood of reciprocity in the following professional areas: names and definitions, materials, activities, duties and privileges, assessment and ‘other’(!). To explain what I meant by each of these areas, I gave an example of an idea that would foster reciprocity in each of them. Each idea was written on a large sheet of A3 paper under its title. Thus, one sheet of paper read:

#### *Materials*

*Some materials, by design, are more reciprocal in nature than others. An example here is the interactive dialogue journal. This is a notebook that is passed between two people in a teacher learning relationship. In the note book, which is confidential to them, they each write letters back and forth to each other about elements of the teacher learning they are encountering.*

The six areas mentioned were thus glossed to participants by way of an example and by holding up a piece of A3 paper to show that each one was stored and would be seen by them later.

### **Carousel work**

With help from the “Numbers person”, I then divided people up into six groups. Each group was given one of the A3 pieces of paper and was encouraged to discuss the area written on it and to add practical ideas onto it. People were advised to listen carefully to the ideas produced in their group as, after about ten minutes, one of them would be chosen by the group to be the group’s ambassador and to take the big sheet of paper to the next group and explain the new ideas on it to them. And so the carousel work went. About every ten minutes one person (a different person each time) would leave each group taking a sheet of paper with new ideas written on it to the next group where they would start discussion on that subject. Thus topics slowly travelled, with their attendant piece of paper and an ambassador, around the room until as many groups had discussed and added ideas to as many topics as we had time for. As the pieces of paper travelled from group to group they gathered more and more ideas on them so a little more reading and explaining time was necessary each time before groups got going thinking up their own ideas.

### **Handing over the stick.**

Once the carousel work was over, I briefly summarised what we had done so far. I also made sure that people knew that the ideas for involving participants at the start of the session, the carousel work and the handing over the stick had all come from R. Chambers book called “Participatory workshops” and published in 2002 by Earthscan. (ISBN 1 85 383 863 2 ).

People were then invited to comment on:

- The processes used in the session e.g. the carousel work and how they would want to adapt or improve it, including what might happen to the group-produced posters
- The ideas that came up in the group discussion
- The principle of reciprocity itself and what had been learned

- The idea of taking a theme of great personal importance to us individually, be it “Providing challenge” or “Human dignity”, and chasing it through a number of professional areas to see how we can make it live and breathe in the courses we do.
- Anything else.

People wanted to have a copy of all the ideas produced at the seminar and so these are reproduced below in the appendix in cases where I could read the writing and understand the ideas!

The session finished with music, the handing back of sheets of paper and thanks all round.

## **Appendix**

### **The A3 sheets reproduced**

Topic areas are in **bold**. Comments that were on the papers at the start of the session and written by me are in *italics*. Comments added by group members in the carousel work are in Verdana and in note form. P's = Participants

### **Names and definitions**

*We do generally need to make distinctions between, say, a course tutor and a course participant, or between an input session (done by a tutor) and teaching practice (done by a trainee). But it can be very useful to put those separate names aside for a while and consider the basic similarity i.e. that we are all involved in learning and trying to get better at our work. Thus in input sessions we are really practicing our training and in teaching practice trainees do have responsibility for students. So renaming slots “Teaching Practice” and “Training Practice” potentially increases feelings of mutual understanding and empathy.*

- P's come up with own definitions of key terms ...put up on wall.
- P's given very difficult names so experience what it is like for language students.
- Trainees renamed teachers, TP renamed “Teaching”, Feedback renamed “Reflection, discussion and discovery”.
- Avoid distinction between NNS and NS by referring to English speakers.
- Change the names of the different levels of competence.

### **Materials**

*(See above for lead- in paragraph)*

- Set up open/shared access files on computer for adding to and using and include tutor's files.
- Session on “Something that influenced me..” all bring in story or book or saying etc.
- Materials bank eg picture library, tapes, extracts
- Articles and texts ranked and discussed (for details email keith.hardy@lilianbishop.com)

## Activities

*Some activities tend to work against reciprocity. An example might be the traditional lecture done in an authoritarian manner and with little time for questions. This lecture could be very interesting, could be absolutely okay, but it would not concentrate on the principle of reciprocity which is what we are interested in at the moment. Other activities are set up precisely so that everyone learns from every one else. The carousel we are now doing is one such activity.*

- Stickers on P's backs. All go round and write something nice on each back.
- Session on "If I could steal one thing from you, it would be..."
- Opener..."The worst moment of my week was...."
- Always disclose first before asking others to.
- P's write certificates for others and award them.

## Duties and privileges

*I wonder to what extent it is possible to share duties and privileges reciprocally? A group leader can do homework, participant can be responsible for preparing review questions for a group, teachers can look things up in dictionaries in class, students can call the register. Can course participants use the staff room?*

- All can use the board whenever they want.
- P's organise the grouping, furniture, course contents.
- Non-native speakers give language lessons to NS.
- Peer observation... setting own goals and feedback agendas.
- P's plan session, tutor teaches it.
- P's with special languages teach them to the group.
- Roles rotated.
- Last in takes the register.
- Trainers teach.
- Choose a representative to be responsible for giving an oral summary of the lesson at the end of the class.

## Assessment

*Course participants can assess the value, interest, clarity etc of course leaders' sessions whether by ticking scales on slips of paper or writing remarks on an exit poll poster on their way out of class. Teacher learners when in, and thus observing, a tutor's session can use the same observation checklists that are used on them when their classes are observed.*

- P's put up feedback on 'post-its' as leave class.
- Exact words used in feedback put up on OHT.
- P's consider feedback they have had in other fields e.g hang gliding and consider relevance to ELT.

- Get feedback on a session in terms of senses, colours etc and scales thus:

hot----- cold  
 white----- black  
 rough----- smooth  
 bright----- dull  
 loud----- --soft

- Give blank sheet of paper to each participant and to tutors. All write comments. All are read by all. Discussion follows.

### Other

*Teacher trainers/mentors/educators can make it clear that we are learning and have learned a lot from others by always crediting the names and books etc of those we have learned from. Those who are generally considered to know less about the field can be asked to teach others the things that they DO happen to know more about. Thus host families and canteen staff can state the sort of language and concepts they wish language students were being taught in class. Chinese students away from home can teach hosts the difference between the study culture back home and in the host country.*

- Teachers ask students how they would like them to behave.
- Student charters
- Present P's phone up past P to have a conversation about the course
- Hold an event or session on a rota basis in a different P or tutor home and do the event in the personal or national culture of the host.
- Have a notice board showing where previous trainees are now working and what they are doing, with letters, post cards, photos etc.

\*This interactive plenary talk was given at the International House Teacher Education Conference, March 2003 and the IATEFL SIG TT/T Ed Conference, University of East London, September 2003. Members of both conferences and the editor of IH Journal asked me to write it up.

### Author

Tessa Woodward is the editor of this journal. She also works as a teacher, teacher trainer and the Professional Development Co-ordinator at Hilderstone College, Broadstairs, Kent, UK. Her latest book is 'Planning lessons and courses' (2001) CUP. 'Ways of working with teachers' will be out in 2004, if all goes well.