

Chapter 6

DEVELOPING TRAINING SKILLS

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'The Portrait of the Teacher as a Trainer'

In this chapter I shall write about how a group of practising secondary school teachers of English became teacher trainers and course designers. I hope this chapter bears witness to how our contribution to the NETT course has helped our own professional development. In some places I may appear more personal than is usual in publications such as this, but I hope this personal approach will make it easier to follow and understand the process I describe.

6.1 The trainers

Internal monologue

No1

When I start writing this chapter, it is years I have to go back to recall my memories from 1996. It was the year when on an early spring day a notice appeared on the notice board in our staff room. It was advertising British Council courses for teachers of English. Having been in the teaching profession for more than twenty years, I regularly went on British Council summer courses (Kaposvár, Szombathely, Veszprém etc.), and I liked them a lot. But it had been a long time since I attended any.

Now, I remember, I was hesitating.

Among the titles there was one that looked quite challenging: 'Assessment in language learning'. The notice said the course would be delivered on 2 or 3 long weekends during the next school year. I don't remember if Richard West's name was mentioned or not. To tell the truth his name would not have meant much to me at the time. (How different is the case today!) On the other hand, I knew I had more than enough to do both as a teacher and as a mother. I did not know what to do.

Finally, a few days later I sent my application. Then I forgot about the whole thing until a few weeks later I got a letter saying I was admitted to the course, which would be launched in Esztergom-kertváros in autumn.

It was the starting point of a long, tiring, but at the same time exciting and challenging process: a group of practising teachers started to learn a lot of things, and have become teacher trainers by now. Of course, we did not even think of this possible outcome then.

Now let me introduce the initial members of the ***Teacher Trainer Team***.

Ágnes from Székesfehérvár

“I graduated from Eötvös Lóránd University of Budapest in 1976, majoring in English and Geography. From 1976 to 1988 I taught at Kandó Kálmán College for Electrical Engineering in Székesfehérvár. Since 1988 I have been teaching at Teleki Blanka Grammar School, where I was Head of English for ten years. At present I am a County Adviser.

I have attended several summer courses at different venues both in England (London, Newcastle etc.) and in Hungary. As a British Council in-service project trainer, I have participated in various training events and conferences, for example in Hastings, Szeged, Veszprém and Budapest. In addition I have organised and led several workshops, mainly about teaching and testing reading and writing. I found compiling the material for a 'Culture Folder' most challenging, too.

I have always been interested in not only teaching and assessing language skills, but using Literature in the English Language Classroom. I wrote my post-graduate dissertation on this latter topic at ELTE (Budapest University) English-American Institute in 1999.”

Györgyi from Szeged

“I have been in the teaching profession since 1981, first in primary then in secondary schools. I got my degree in English and Russian from JATE (Szeged University), but I have a college qualification, too. This is in Hungarian Language and Literature from JGYTF (Teacher Training College of Szeged).

I am dedicated to teaching in vocational schools, because I think these students deserve equal chances, and I know that these days they are not likely to get well-paid jobs unless they know languages. I teach ESP (tourism, catering, business and commerce) at a vocational secondary school and post-secondary training institution in Szeged.

I am Head of the Languages Department at our school, and I am regularly hired as an ELT adviser and examiner, and chairperson of school-leaving exam boards. I am a mentor teacher as well.

Between 1993 and 1997 I had seven assistant English teachers from UK, who worked with me to introduce new methods in developing students' speaking skills. We developed a special technique (co-teaching) for native and non-native teachers to work together in the language learning classroom. Moreover, I had the opportunity to gather further experience when teaching Hungarian in England (at Manchester Grammar School) and English in Denmark.

During these years I realised that there were serious problems not only in teaching languages, but in assessing students' performance, too. The reason why I applied

for the British Council course on testing in 1996 was to learn more about these issues.”

Katalin from Debrecen

“I graduated as a teacher of English and Russian languages from Kossuth Lajos University of Debrecen in 1976.

After working as an interpreter for years, it was only in 1984 that I started teaching English in secondary schools. First I was offered a post at Kodály Zoltán School of Music, then in Brassai Sámuel Technical Secondary School.

Since 1994 I have been teaching students between the ages of 12 and 19, and have been a mentor for KLTE University at Ady Endre Grammar School.

Professional development has always been of the utmost importance to me, that is why I have participated in several courses since my graduation. For example, I studied classroom methods in Nottingham on a British Council summer course, and language awareness in Hungary (Érd).

I had already started my MEd distance course at the University of Manchester (which I hope to complete in the near future), when I attended a Mentoring Development Course in Leeds in 1997. I have been teaching English in a bilingual class recently, which I find a very interesting and challenging job.”

Katalin from Budapest

“I live and work in Budapest. I have been teaching for almost twenty years, my majors are English and Russian Languages and History. I graduated from ELTE (Budapest University).

First I worked in a primary then in a secondary school, and now I teach adults in a military training school. I am glad I have had the opportunity to deal with different age groups, since they need a totally different methodology, which makes teaching really exciting.

I have always been interested in new ways of ELT, that is why I attend different courses and workshops regularly. When in 1996 I first heard about the idea of introducing a new school-leaving examination, I decided to get more information about it, so I applied for a place on a British Council course entitled 'Assessment in language learning', and that was the point where I got engaged with this project.

I hope the new examination system will help to make learning languages for students more interesting and efficient.”

Ildikó from Eger

“I live in Eger, but I got my degree in English and Hungarian Language and Literature from KLTE (Debrecen University) in 1975. I have been teaching both subjects ever since, in secondary grammar schools.

Besides teaching I have been doing amateur theatre work with my students either in Hungarian or in English (or in both) since I got my certificate for directing amateur theatre groups in 1986. As a teacher of English, I am especially interested in the possibilities for using drama activities in language teaching.

I like my profession, though I find it difficult at times. My life has been a process of permanent learning, but I think I still have much to study.

6.2 Pre-course development

6.2.1 Awareness raising

In 1996/1997 we attended **a course entitled 'Assessment in Language Learning'** which was extremely useful for several reasons. Now I would like to mention only the four most relevant ones:

- During this course we acquired the language (terminology) with which we can talk and write about language teaching and testing. ***I think it was our first and crucial lesson to learn.***
- Mention must be made of **Richard West** as a teacher trainer. His nice personality, his encouraging behaviour towards us was very important. He was tolerant and understanding, but not indulgent. Not only was he a pleasant person to listen to or talk to, but a very good trainer too, who seemed to know everything about his field.
- During this course we heard of several modern concepts, learnt about the latest findings that we could make good use of later, both in our MEd course and in writing the materials for our NETT course.
- Moreover, we saw for ourselves that 'translating' lectures into tasks makes the learning process much easier and more enjoyable for the learner.

To sum up: though we did not know it then, this course was **a good model** for our future work because of the content and the trainer's professionalism.

Having written our assignments we successfully finished the course, and we thought it was the end of the story. Then, quite unexpectedly, we were offered the possibility to carry on and complete an **MEd course** at the University of Manchester, which would mean 5 further modules about the four language skills plus *'The Education of Language Teachers'* module. At the same time we were invited to take part in the **Hungarian School-Leaving Examination Reform Project** as potential in-service teacher trainers, whose job would be to design (and most probably deliver) a course about the new examinations. This course was primarily meant to inform teachers about the principles, the content and the procedures of the new examination system.

When we answered in the positive, events began to accelerate and our tasks started to accumulate, because from January 1997 on we have been doing our MED distance modules at the University of Manchester in parallel with the work in the Examination Reform Project.

One might ask why it was thought to be desirable

- to set up a team for future teacher training at a relatively early stage of the whole project
- to select in-service teachers from different regions of Hungary as members of this team.

To answer these questions we can turn to, for example, Arlene Gilpin, who in her paper entitled *'Criteria for success in the cascade model'* (McGrath ed. 1997:189-90) discusses the success of reforms in education. Among many other things she claims, *"Above all, the materials must be ready when the implementation process begins."* *"The selection of participants for the 'top' tier should perhaps be informed by geographical criteria."*

From the very beginning of this exam reform project we were all aware that the majority of teachers might not welcome it if familiarisation programmes do not accompany it. The course we were to put together was meant to be one of these programmes.

6.2.2 Starting course-design

In January 1998 we spent three weeks at Lancaster University taking part in *a course on preparing and introducing examination reforms*. I think these three weeks meant the turning point to most of us in the process of becoming trainers.

A bit surprisingly, on arrival in Lancaster six of us were more and more often referred to as the 'Teacher Trainer Team'. We did not protest, though we clearly felt that we were not trainers yet. Of course, almost all of us had had some sort of experience in training: one of us was a British Council counterpart, two of us were mentor teachers, and each of us regularly had trainee teachers for one or two weeks to counsel in our schools. I myself did pre-service teacher training for Peace Corps members in Jászberény one summer.

But in Lancaster we were to do a more challenging job, something that none of us had done before: design and possibly start writing a course in English for in-service teachers. Strangely enough, the Project management's tactics worked: we had been given the title in advance, so we had to rise to the occasion and become what we were called: teacher trainers. And we got down to work.

Working in the Examination Reform Project meant different jobs for different groups of people. There was a team planning the Basic (Year 10) Examination, and another one designing the School-leaving Examination for Year 12 students. Various documents (requirements, specifications, descriptions of the papers), assessment criteria, rating scales had to be compiled by them. Whereas our job was to define what our role would be in the Examination Reform Project, and specify what our tasks would be for the immediate and the medium future.

Supported by the excellent tutors of the IELE of Lancaster University, like *Dianne Wall* or *Caroline Clapham*, we learnt a lot about the main issues that should be taken into consideration before introducing any examination reform. We planned an examination familiarisation programme aimed at various target groups, such as

teachers, principals, parents and students. What is more, we produced the detailed outlines of a course for in-service teachers about the planned examinations.

Our biggest problem was that the Examination Reform Team had not been able to finalise their job, since there were a number of questions still under debate.

- How many levels will the new examination have?
- Will it have to be in accordance with all the other foreign languages' exams?
- What kind of rating scales will be applied?
- Will there be a translation task in the examination? etc.

All this meant that we were to plan a course whose content was still uncertain. Considering this situation we decided to start working out the framework of our course without going into fine details. Naturally, it was not as easy as it seems now. Besides the hardships of writing the course materials in English, we had to face other problems too. First of all, we had to establish how to work together as a team. Lucky for us, we lived on the same floor of a student hostel, and all six of us shared a spacious kitchen. In the evenings we came together there to cook some supper and to discuss what we had done during the day.

As a matter of fact, it was not real teamwork yet: four of us worked in pairs, while the other two tried to produce things individually. Each of us was so much concerned with her own job that we were not really able to fully concentrate on the others' production. Though each of us tried to do her best, those three weeks were not enough to develop group cohesion, and shape a real team out of six individuals.

Had we been more aware of what **teamwork** was about, we could have developed much better working relationships with each other. At the time we had the misconception that we all should like each other as closely as friends in order to be able to work together successfully.

Since then we have learnt that personal and working relationships do not necessarily go together. Also, we have learnt that for successful teamwork it is enough if we know and appreciate the others' knowledge, skills, abilities and their way of thinking; if each member of the team does her own job professionally before coming together in group where she is able to display helpful behaviour or provide concrete practical help, and last but not least: she is able to bear constructive criticism.

Back then in Lancaster we thought it was the uncertainties about our job that prevented us from becoming an effectively working team. Now we can see that there was more to that.

I think it was our second important lesson to learn.

Internal monologue

No2

Lancaster. The name of this beautiful old town brings back a lot of personal memories. Unfortunately, the strongest two are linked to bad experiences.

One is the bumpy flight on 3 January 1998, which I really feared I would not survive.

The other bad memory is my permanent fight with one of the hundreds of computers on the campus. To understand all this you have to know that it was in Lancaster that I got acquainted with this latest and greatest invention of modern technology. Believe it or not, I had not even touched one before. Now you can imagine how many playful hours I spent sitting in front of one of these devices glued to its monitor, grasping the poor mouse or eagerly searching for the right key to press.

I still cannot explain why, but to ask for help was most embarrassing for me. When I looked round, everybody else in the computer-room seemed to be experts; they were all busy typing, pressing the keys at an unbelievable speed. They may not have been aware how contemptuously they smiled when, feeling absolutely helpless and hopeless after many unsuccessful attempts to make the computer do what I wanted it to do, I turned to one of them for help.

They smiled, clicked and IT obeyed them.

(To set your mind at rest, let me inform you that since then my computing skills have improved a lot, thanks to the Examination Reform Project.)

6.2.3 Theoretical foundation

After returning from Lancaster we started to work more systematically and more consciously towards our aim. To tell the truth, we needed development on the theoretical and the practical side as well. Fortunately, we had several people to help us, and quite a few occasions to use.

First of all, there was the **MEd course** to deepen, broaden and refresh our knowledge about teaching and learning the main language skills (Reading, Writing, Listening, Speaking). When I came across the answer to the question, 'Who are CELSE's MEd courses designed for?' I had the feeling that they were planned especially for us.

"The MEd courses lead to an academic qualification but they are, first and foremost, professional courses designed for qualified and experienced teachers who are already

established in the teaching profession and have a high level of English language competence.” (Main Handbook, 1999: 4)

Of course, we did most of the six required modules by distance with the help of the specially constructed booklets containing self-assessment questions, which helped us process the input material. Each module developed our awareness of what is involved in learning to read, write, listen and speak in English. Furthermore, we were expected to read numerous publications by the best-known authors of ELT. Finally, in our assignments we had to demonstrate that we knew what best practice was like, and could develop appropriate teaching materials for our learners.

6.2.4 Gaining more experience and information

In order to have items and trained item-writers by the time of piloting the new exams, the British Council launched item-writer training in 1998. We joined this training, where we ourselves tried writing items for all four skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking) and the Use of English Paper (Basic, Intermediate, Advanced). This was of special importance because of the immediate and thorough information we gained about the requirements and process of writing, editing, evaluating or revising items. Moreover, we realised how crucial it was to trial each item before entering it into an item bank.

As a consequence of these courses and training events, our confidence developed gradually until one day we realised that not only would we be able to answer questions about the content or the procedures of the new school-leaving examinations but, more importantly, we were capable of explaining the rationale behind. Naturally, it would not have been enough to obtain only bookish knowledge. We badly needed opportunities to acquire certain skills that a teacher educator needs.

Deriving from the special situation that we ourselves were writing the materials for the course in teamwork, our counselling techniques and relationship management skills improved a lot. We learnt and practised, for example, how to listen to the others actively, how to take part in discussions efficiently, how to do and record self- or peer – observations, etc.

6.2.5 Finalising the first version of the course

When taking stock of the turning points in our development as course designers, team-workers and trainers, I think the most decisive one was our ***training at the University of Manchester*** in January, 1999 with all the examination reform personnel present.

At least four determining factors must be mentioned here:

a) Since then our work has been co-ordinated by ***Philip Glover***, a British Council adviser, whose professionalism, experience, wider scope and practicality contributed a lot to the success of the course. Quite surprisingly, he managed to be inside and outside the group at the same time. Sometimes he behaved as a member of the team, e.g. when it came to sharing the jobs, sometimes he withdrew leaving us to make the decisions on our own. All in all the first two pilot courses proved that he has been successfully co-ordinating a really fruitful work.

There are two words that will always remind us of him: ‘agenda’ and ‘draft’. No matter what it was, a workshop, a meeting, a briefing or just a talk over lunch, Philip always arrived with a plan = agenda of what should be discussed in details or

just touched upon slightly. In the beginning this habit of his was new and strange to us but later we realised how useful and efficient it was.

The other word, 'draft' is connected with a thought Philip kept repeating, "*What we are doing is a long process. Our plans are changing all the time; these improvements will make our work much better, so do not feel too worried if some things do not seem satisfactory at this stage. It is not the final version yet, it is only the first, second...nth draft*"

I think this principle of teamwork and experiential learning was **the third important lesson that we had to learn**. Now we all know that the only way to exploit the advantages of team-work is to show your draft(s) to at least one team-member, discuss these drafts with them, take the others' remarks, comments, questions into account, and revise what you have done. Of course, the product will be less and less only 'yours'. Quite the contrary! At the end of the process the members of the group will have the pleasant feeling that the product is not 'his' or 'hers' but 'ours'.

b) Getting gradually involved in the whole project, we started to work more and more closely with the other teams that were responsible for the exam reform itself. Having them as an audience at our presentations made us set the standards higher for ourselves. The same applies to **Jane Andrews**, **Richard West** and **Charles Alderson**, whose presence in the workshops meant support, but at the same time another challenge to us.

c) Our study visits to the **examination boards in Harrogate** and **Dalkeith** added greatly to our belief in the importance of our work. At both those institutions they underlined the fact how important it was to inform in-service teachers about changes and involve them in the implementation of reforms in due time. Also, to employ teachers as assessors, interlocutors or raters appeared to be a well-established practice at those institutions. Of course these teachers are required to attend examination preparation trainings organised by the examination boards.

d) It was on one of the last days of the training that the 'big question' was sprung on our group. The project management wanted to know who felt ready to be **trainers on the first pilot course**, which was to be held in spring 1999 in Eger. I still remember the long silence after the question died away. Then the silence was succeeded by some timorous gestures of uncertainty, and titters of embarrassment. It took quite a long time until three of us took heart to say they felt ready to undertake the task

Internal monologue

No 3

Loop-input.

I'm sure most of you are familiar with this term. Shamefacedly I confess I heard it for the first time in Manchester from Philip, when I seemed to have invented it for myself already.

I think mine was a typical case of 'setting the Thames on fire'. To understand my story with the loop you have to know that I had been working on the Listening Sessions of our course for days when all of a sudden an idea occurred to me: "Why not convey the information about the Listening Paper of the new

examination through listening?" "My intention was to ask Charles about the topic, record the interview, and then transform it into listening tasks for our future trainees. Thus, I thought, we would kill two birds with one stone: trainees will have the chance to familiarise with the exam tasks and at the same time they will hear about the content and the procedures of the exam. I told Philip about my idea. He said he liked this 'loop-input' and suggested that I should do the interview and the tasks.

(To set your mind at rest let me tell you that during the summer school of our MEd course we learnt everything about 'loops' in The Education of Language Teachers module.)

Of course, it was not the case that those three who volunteered to deliver the first pilot course were full of confidence. The only thing we knew for sure was that we had worked a lot. It gave us some self-assurance and filled us with hope that we would cope with the job. Nevertheless, the period between the end of January and the first two days of the course in March, 1999 was full of excitement, nervousness, anxiety on the one hand, and enthusiasm, busy work on the other.

Though we had been reminded many times that it was to be only a pilot course, so we should not worry at all if things did not go perfectly, we could not attain this 'scientist type' of attitude. Had we been scientists, for whom to repeat an experiment is a commonplace, we might have been able to think differently. But we weren't.

So we had been rather nervous until we got the first praising feedback from the participants, from our co-trainers and from our advisers. One of our advisers, **Charles Alderson**, for example, wrote the following evaluation after the first two days in Eger:

"I thought the first two days went remarkably well, much better than I dared hope. The participants were positive and engaged, and covered a lot of ground, the materials were well done, and professionally presented, and the tutors were confident without being overwhelming, and got the level right. I know how nervous people were, but it did not show, and you all came over as competent and knowledgeable."

Certainly, he was exaggerating, but we were very pleased with his words, from which we could gather confidence.

Also, the **participants** must have been aware of how important their opinion was for us, because in their feedback they came up with encouraging sentences like these:

"X, you were great!" or "Y, you were a bit slow on Friday but Saturday was all right." or "I especially liked the way Z elicited what reading types are most common and realistic."

I need hardly say that all this helped us a lot.

6.3 In-course Development

6.3.1 Trainers' approach

We may have made mistakes while writing the material of the course, but one thing seems to have been impeccably right from the start: it was our training approach which undoubtedly proved to be appropriate for this course. To tell the truth, we did not attain this approach as a result of long theoretical discussions. In a sense it derived naturally from our situation: both we the trainers and the potential participants were practising teachers with the same or very similar experiences in teaching in secondary schools. Thus the teaching/ learning process of the course became more like an interaction or a dialogue, rather than a one-way transaction or transmission. I think the success of the two pilot courses was in great part due to this *'dialogic approach'* (Malderez & Bodóczy, 1999: 10).

With almost no exception, the participants' feedback answers praised the relaxed and friendly atmosphere. One participant of the Eger course, for instance, wrote, *"It seems that the trainers don't teach us at all but talk to us."*

Another trainee from Debrecen admitted, *"I expected lectures but I am glad it was not like that."*

Not surprisingly, the moment a trainer behaved as a traditional type of educator who would interfere in the trainee's work by e.g. monitoring too vehemently, in the feedback she could read the following remark,

"When someone is standing at my back watching my paper, my mind simply goes blank."

(Maybe people in Hungary tend to be even more sensitive to 'The Big Brother is watching you' effect.)

In spite of its advantages, this dialogic approach brought about certain *problems* as well. It was like being in an experimental theatre, where the director wants to get the audience involved in the performance by allowing them to express their views on what is happening on the stage. In such a theatre actors and actresses have to be trained how to react to unexpected situations. They have to be able to improvise new scenes if needed. They might have to debate a question with the audience or explain to them how they interpreted the play.

With a dialogic approach a trainer's situation is very similar to that of an actor in an experimental theatre. S/he has to be prepared for unexpected situations much more than with a transmission approach. As a consequence, the trainer becomes *more vulnerable*, but at the same time this self-exposure might serve as an encouraging model for participants, since the *"participants are constantly called upon to reveal, to expose or tell what they think."* (ibid: 27)

In one word, this two-way information flow of the dialogic approach is very likely to make a course a bit risky, but it is a good learning occasion not only for the participants, but for the trainers as well.

Internal monologue

No 4

The nearer the first day of the Eger course drew, the more nervous I became. A lot of worrying questions were flitting in my head. What will the trainees be like? Will they accept us – secondary teachers like them – as their tutors? Will they like the activities and the tasks? Will they be inclined to contribute effectively to the work of the group? What if I / we cannot answer a question? What if a task takes much more time than we expected? What if my English ‘lets me down’? What if any equipment breaks down during a session? What if the participants find my favourite warm up activity dull?

Then I tried to calm myself with the following thoughts. One is very likely to find the same range of characters in almost any arbitrary group. There is the quarrelsome, the know-all, the shy, the talkative, and the highbrow type. There are those who are not keen on almost anything, and those who ask persistent questions.

And luckily, there is the ideal type, who means a great help to both his / her partners and the group-leader, who is glad to contribute, but doesn’t want to hear his / her own voice all the time. I wished there would be only ideal group members among the participants of our course.

And believe it or not, my dream came true: almost each participant was an enthusiastic, open, co-operative, curious colleague.

6.3.2 Ways of observation

One of the main aims of the two pilot courses was to ***try out course materials*** (to see how the activities work, to test if the tasks fit within the time limits we planned etc.), to evaluate, revise and hopefully improve them. The other main aim was to provide us trainers with opportunities to ***‘try out’ ourselves***. Our approach, behaviour, language, instructions, reactions etc. were observed, commented on (criticised or praised), but at the end of the day it was our exclusive job to work out for ourselves how to ‘revise’ or ‘improve’ ourselves.

There were several ways and occasions to foster and facilitate these processes:

a) First of all there were the five ***observers***, who were sitting at the back of the room during the sessions. Their job was to take notes and later share their observations with the others. They could do it either at the debriefings or meetings when a day was over, or they could write a detailed observation report a few days after the face-to-face event. Very often they did both. In Eger we benefited a lot from the evaluations of Prof. Charles Alderson, Philip Glover and the teacher trainer team members. In Debrecen it was only Philip and Charles who acted as observers, but here the trainers did more ***peer observation***.

b) Another important source of evaluation was the ***participants' feedback***. Participants on both pilot courses were requested to give feedback at the end of each day, either in a questionnaire or in an impressionistic form.

c) Last but not least, we trainers carried out ***self-observation***.

To tell the truth it was not easy to get used to being observed all the time, in one way or other, but after a while we accepted it, since it proved to be very useful when we were to revise the training materials or modify our attitude as trainers. For example, a trainer, who is running a session, is not able to check and keep track of how long each activity takes. An observer can and will do it. Moreover, being involved in a discussion with the participants the trainer is not able to note down all the ideas that come up. An observer can and will do it.

I think observation is exceptionally important and valuable if the observer is a trainer herself. In this case she can consider all that she has seen and heard as a good or bad example. Of course it is only a subsidiary outcome, the main goal is to help the observed person improve her skills and thus make the whole training better.

6.3.3 Some lessons of the Eger pilot

Let me discuss some of the problems that arose concerning the trainers' work during the Eger pilot. Of course, we tried to do something about them right after they revealed themselves, but we could improve them with good results only by the time of the next pilot course in Debrecen.

a) One rather annoying problem that influenced each of the three trainers was 'keeping to the timetable' *versus* 'covering all the planned materials'. Sometimes we trainers were so much concerned with the timing that our attention was drawn away from the main message of the session. Sometimes we had to decide on the spot which activity to cut out to ensure that the timetable was kept. Sometimes the participants felt disappointed because they thought they did not have enough time to discuss a question in their groups.

When the Eger course was over, we revised the materials in the light of our experience, and left out quite a few activities in order to avoid struggling with time in future courses.

Besides that, we compiled a so-called course-booklet that each participant was given at the beginning of the Debrecen course. This booklet containing all the task sheets of the course made the trainers' work much easier and more efficient.

b) Another important but rather sore topic was ***how to handle criticism***. Occasionally, it was difficult for the trainers not to take the advisers' or the observers' remarks or comments too much to heart. On the other hand, it can't have been much easier for the observers or advisers to find the right words to formulate criticism. There seemed to be one way out for both sides: each of us had to understand that the aim of criticism is not to hurt anyone but to improve our common 'product'. Still, I think it is worth reminding ourselves of the lessons we drew from all this, that it is much wiser to praise first and then bring forward criticism, and it is rather unwise to criticise right after a performance, you had better wait some time.

c) Thirdly, the problem of ***giving proper instructions*** can be mentioned. To give instructions that can be heard and understood with no difficulty, which are uttered in the right moment and at the right pace, which are not lengthy but detailed

enough to guide the trainees. We trainers felt it was a crucial issue, so we spent much time and energy to reconsider our existing practice in this field. Needless to say that dealing with this problem contributed a lot not only to our trainer development, but to the effectiveness of our classroom practice as well.

6.4 Post-course Development

6.4.1 Conclusions

In this chapter I focused on our trainer development. As a starting point I pointed out that being in-service teachers we had already had and- consciously or by instinct- used several of the skills and abilities that we later improved and made good use of as trainers. No doubt, all the courses and trainings that we had attended prior to delivering the pilot courses contributed a lot to our improvement, but what really mattered was our intention to develop and resolution to learn.

At first sight a *'teacher'* and a *'trainer'* may seem to be two different roles, but I believe our story shows that they are quite closely connected. What a teacher has learnt, a trainer will never forget and vice versa. Both trainers and teachers should know, for example, how to

- build and manage successful relationships with students/trainees and colleagues/co-trainers,
- develop good working relationships,
- be supportive and helpful without becoming too intrusive,
- pay attention to group dynamics and handle problem-situations,
- initiate, conduct and close discussions,
- take care not to be drawn into discussions or seen as authority,
- use sensitive language (especially if the language is other than the mother tongue),
- be non-judgemental when giving feedback,
- use body language consciously.

(Malderez & Bodóczy, 1999: 10-25)

And above all, both a teacher and a trainer has to be qualified for the job and must have a firm understanding of the current issues of the subject.

Internal monologue
No 5

“A challenge is a potential opportunity for learning and is anything that makes learners consider or reconsider and possibly reassemble or expand their existing constructs.” (ibid: 11)

As far as I am concerned, the work with this course has been a chain of challenges, with a good number of things to reconsider and / or learn. I have learnt a lot about my profession, people and myself.

I believe that the utmost aim of human life is to learn as much as possible about ourselves and other people and to expand the limits of our abilities and knowledge as wide as possible, so I think it is our obligation to grasp every possible opportunity to let those happen.

I think this course has been such an opportunity in my, in our life.

6.4.2 Post-course jobs and further plans

Since the second pilot NETT course was over in December 1999, the Teacher Trainer Team have revised the materials of the course and started preparing the course for ***accreditation***. We would like to have our course accredited in the nearest future, and then deliver real NETT courses. What is more, one of our colleagues has already begun writing the ***trainer’s notes in a booklet form***. To complete these tasks would have been impossible or very difficult without the experiences we gained from writing and revising the training materials for the NETT course.