

A joy and indulgence not to be missed – Training the teacher trainer course

■ Sally Enzer, Skills for Life, Wiltshire College

In a moment of weakness last summer I signed up for the 'Teaching the trainers' course – a postgraduate Level 7 course (oh my gosh – that high?) at London South Bank University. The main attraction was that it was fully funded and would cost me, I thought so innocently, nothing. The name and status of the LLU+ is well known, of course. I did one part of my literacy/ESOL core curriculum training with Helen Sunderland many moons ago and her professionalism had impressed me.

Despite being a late joiner and missing the first seminar day, I presented myself for the second day to meet up with the majority of the other learners. The course is a blended one – we meet up about every six weeks and independently prepare assignments, observations and evaluations. Some people are regulars at every seminar, but some I encountered on my first session I have never seen again. It would seem churlish to ask if they have just changed their minds or if they are out there in limbo somewhere churning out assignments in isolation. Some of the group had done a residential course together in summer 2007 so were already blended into a Tuckman-ish companionship, but it has been difficult for the rest of us – meeting so rarely and for a relatively short time, little group 'norming' and 'performing' has taken place.

Teaching styles

One is always observant of the teaching of these 'teach the trainer' courses – will the lecturers trot out all the correct teaching strategies for us to emulate or will there be a more casual approach? I can quite honestly say that I have encountered both styles. Being new to teacher training, I am a great observer of other teachers – always looking for good tips, professional ways of cutting corners and adopting good time-management strategies. The tutors have been wonderful at sharing their own



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personal expertise and good practice.

I come from Further and Adult Education, where our timetables are crammed full of contact hours with little time left for administration and even less research and 'thinking' time, and this course has offered me a tiny skylight of opportunity to do just that. 'Read your Foucault!' one lecturer declared to us, reminding me of a former Russian teacher at school urging us: 'Make love to your vocabulary books' – aged 15 in 1973 all we did was snigger.

Discussion, theory and in-depth analysis

I have loved the discussion and theorising element of our seminars. John Sutter, ESOL Professional Development with LLU+, has led us in some challenging debate and encouraged us to be inquisitive, questioning, provocative and to think 'out of the box'. It is a joy to experience in-depth analysis of current educational issues again. He has offered us alternative viewpoints to the norm and has challenged us to question and to look for evidence. With such a theme as literacy, this debate relates not only to education but also to the political climate. The most notable theory for me must be the age-old notion of

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the masses being deliberately marginalised – in the Middle Ages probably, in Georgian times possibly, but in the 21st century? I have had to question my own position as a practitioner in this conundrum.

What has the course done for me? When I started I was an experienced ESOL and literacy tutor but an inexperienced teacher trainer lacking in confidence. I have learned not to be frightened to adopt the same techniques in teacher training as I do in Skills for Life despite the difference in level – to get students moving, doing, thinking, involved, taking part and contributing. Lecturing demands more than just ‘lecturing’. I was initially wary of the educational theory but one slowly becomes familiar with this – Kolb and Bloom become old friends, Tuckman a colleague, Fairclough, the school swot, only to be attempted when feeling brave and energised, and of course not forgetting Foucault, for more torment and self-introspection. My students have appreciated a more confident and professional teacher trainer, not afraid to question the theories and open to new ideas and interpretations. Aged 50, I have definitely ‘matured’.

Assignment

I am currently part-way through my final assignment – a history of the teaching of literacy in England – the changes, the similarities, influences and direction. I am really enjoying the research and am deep inside Hibberd’s door-stop treatise *The Social History of England, 1066–1945*. I am getting side-tracked at every turn, but it’s a fascinating companion volume to the more specialised booklist. Time, the illusive bandit of the adult student learner, is the problem as ever – one’s aspirations are tempered by one’s time limitations and commitments. There lies the sacrifice. Doing a course such as this is not for the faint-hearted. Weekends are lost. Long nights at the computer become the norm. But if one keeps one’s nerve and maintains a positive and open mind, it is a joy and an indulgence that should not be missed.

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