

To Martin [REDACTED]
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Dear Martin,

I enclose a piece on **One type of Student-centred Course Evaluation**, for possible publication in **IATEFL ISSUES**. The article develops a technique I have used over and over again ...it is not one of those articles about a sudden new love, about something barely yet explored. This piece has not been presented to any other mag or journal.

How is this bit of your new, archipelago existence going? I wonder how you feel on these rainy islands after all those years in the centre of the Cone?

Mario.

Ps: Each day that passes some bloody publisher culls a Teachers Resource Book from their lists. The last one of mine to die was "Letters", chopped by OUP last month, after a meagre run of 6 years. Longman capped the Pilg Longman list two years ago and then killed the 17 books, three or four of them brilliant titles, like the Grundy book on lit teaching.

A real option for Mag editors is to use this treasure trove of good teaching ideas that are now partly out of the public domain as part of their offering to their readers.

I do this in HLT in the "Old Exercise" section... <www.hlomag.co.uk> but I often go for really ancient stuff.

The Sept offering is from 10th century Japan!

Iatelf, as a teachers' Assoc is really well placed to do this Phoenix work for teachers hungry for new ideas.

Biodata: Mario has a book forthcoming with **ETp Delta** in 2002: **Humanise Your Course book**, and his CDROM **Mindgame**, has now been out with **Clarity** < www.clarity.com.hk > for two years. In January 2002 the web'zine he edits enters/ed its third year < www.hlomag.co.uk> . Mario works for **Pilgrims** as a teacher, trainer, writer and editor.

One type of Student-centred Course Evaluation.

by Mario Rinvoluceri, Pilgrims. UK

Typical “ consumerist “ feedback mechanisms

Most EFL course evaluation questionnaires clearly delimit the areas in which the student is invited to have a thought, a reaction or an opinion. At the end of the questionnaire there will typically be a relative small space for the students to add their unguided thoughts. The “ *Free Space*” is normally less than a tenth of the “ *guided thought space*”. And anyway, what is a manager supposed to do with feedback that cannot be turned into bar charts?

It is rare to come across an organised feedback process in education or elsewhere that is genuinely “open”, one which invites the person involved to show how they saw and felt the experience, within their own frame, in their own terms.

Hotel questionnaires

As a hotel guest I have never been asked to complete an evaluation questionnaire that asked me about any of the following areas on which I personally judge an over-nighting experience:

- lighting, especially around the table/desk
- writing and study surface areas
- nature of the view
- support given by the bed
- bath towel texture
- nearness to fire escape stairs and adequacy of these
- language competence of printed materials in the room.

In the case of both the hotel and the language institution the marketing people seem to think they already have an adequate map of how their guests/ students see the world. Amazing, when you come to think about it!

Graph your course

(Martin, could you scan in one of the graphs here, maybe?)
I don't have a scanner)

End-of-course graphs are one way to find out how students have experienced their course and to find this out within frames chosen by them, within frames that arise from their thinking rather than from yours or the institution's.

Procedure

In preparation, bring A 3 sheets and plenty coloured pens to class.

Draw a graph on the board and explain that the horizontal axis represents the time the course has lasted in days or weeks. Tell them to draw a large graph on their A 3 sheets and mark in the relevant time units along the horizontal axis.

Ask each student to now draw a graph line that represents the ENERGY they have had during the course. The level of energy is measured vertically, the passing of time horizontally.

Now ask each student to choose four other variables that have been important to them on the course and to graph these in with either colours or a different type of line (eg dotted, wiggly etc..)

Allow 15-30 minutes for this reviewing, thinking and drawing activity. Each student works on her own.

Bring the students together and ask each person to hold up their graph and explain what each line represents. Classmates will often ask them for more detail about this or that aspect of the graph.

(Martin add a second graph here>)

What the graphs show

These graphs tell the teacher and the institution about the course not as a finished whole, as if it were a product, but as a process over time, as it actually happened. By choosing the variables themselves, apart from ENERGY, the students give you and the school a vivid image of their concerns, of the things they really judge their **internal** course by.

You may ask what these concerns are. Students first:
course also

Students missing an advanced language course class came up with these areas they felt were worth reviewing:

<i>feeling fluent</i>	<i>language awareness</i>
<i>thinking in English</i>	<i>relationship with group</i>
<i>homesickness</i>	<i>interest and stimulus</i>
<i>involvement in class activities</i>	<i>cultural learning</i>
<i>understanding language</i>	<i>conscious wonderment</i>
<i>missing own bed back home</i>	<i>Unconscious "witness"</i>
<i>thinking before speaking</i>	<i>tiredness</i>
<i>listening to others</i>	<i>the feeling of being articulate</i>
<i>vocabulary learning</i>	<i>working well in small groups</i>
<i>idea of what the course is about</i>	<i>happiness</i>
<i>curiosity</i>	<i>confidence</i>
<i>oral mistakes</i>	<i>feeling better in the group</i>
<i>language acquisition (as opposed to conscious learning)</i>	
<i>development of social relations</i>	<i>spoken mistakes</i>
<i>shock</i>	<i>listening comprehension</i>

Of the thirty or so areas that the students chose as important enough in their minds to graph, roughly one third deal with typically linguistic things like *feeling fluent, oral mistakes, thinking in English, language acquisition etc...*. Two thirds of the factors these students chose to think about come in the areas of psychology and socialisation, things like *confidence, shock, working well in small groups etc...*

Conclusion

My contention is that students are able to tell the teacher and the institution more of what they think and feel, if the feedback process is as free as possible. Not only will a dozen students cover more areas that are of concern to them but their state of mind will be different. The graphing exercise forces them to really think and work within their own value systems and, as they draw the graphing lines, really re-play the course

in their heads. Answering the point blank questions of a typical consumerist questionnaire by writing in a number from 1 to 5 is a very different and much more passive experience. When they answer the institution's questions they are in a foreign house, while when they graph their own concerns, they are in their own house. It is from within the wall of their own house that they will recommend or dis-recommend they course they have just been on to their friends and relatives.

If you decide to use this system of getting feedback, uncontaminated by you or your institution's concerns, and if the results are interesting, why not send your reactions to IATEFL ISSUES . I know that the Editor, Martin [REDACTED], wants the magazine to be as interactive as possible.

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Humanizing Language Teaching