

Second Monday

Dear Everybody,

I hope you have had a resting week-end and have maybe seen a few things around this strange commuter peninsula where more and more middle class folk do their monthly shopping in France, while working all week in London. We are on the edge of the dormitory area for the Great Wen, as London was described in the 18th century. As I understand it a "wen" is a sort of boil or pus-filled swelling on the face.

My week-end has been spent with friends, at the stove and in the garden. I love the cycle from preparing the earth through to finally eating the produce with some or all of these steps in between: planting, manuring, transplanting, weeding, watering, lifting or cropping, washing, chopping up, and frying, steaming or boiling. I have not read, or been swimming or been cycling. I have spent quite a lot of what in NLP is called "down-time", or inward time- Howard Gardner would talk about being in intra-personal intelligence. I find this is re-making after a week very much in "up-time", focused outwards, in what Gardner calls "inter-personal intelligence"..

The feedback sheets make clear that in this second week we need to do at least the following things:

in the area of TASK we need to spend more time on overtly upper secondary and adult things at intermediate and advanced levels. In week one I wanted to make sure I did not neglect the primary area, as this is the area I have never taught in.

The above change of course has been requested by several people.

In the area of things happening in THE GROUP, we need to hear more from the people who thought a lot last week but did not speak.

One way of helping that to happen will be to split the group for a third of the day on Tuesday and Wednesday. It tends to be easier for quieter folk to speak out in smaller groups.

Another way is to have "home groups" of around six or seven people, though this will only get the quieter people speaking if they decide to. I was in a group of seven on Friday morning and the discussion was ably led by 2 people... they really did not seem to me to be stopping the others contributing..... but then I am a talkative sort of person.

In the area of things coming up from PEOPLE'S PASTS, I feel that this was happening in a quite normal way last week either spontaneously or in response to an

exercise. Clearly, in a limited autobiography exercise, like the one about hair, people speak quite a lot about their past, and also omit speaking about some things that come to mind.

The above thoughts are organised within a framework for thinking about working with groups that I learnt from Mike Eales. He suggests that any work group will have a TASK: in our case this task is creative ideas, exercises, behaviour and beliefs about teaching M.L.'s creatively. He suggests that any group will have a GROUP LIFE that will either help or hinder work on the task. Even in a committee of engineers it makes sense for the chairman to pay careful attention to what is going on in the group's life as this can colour and influence the work on TASK.

Eales finally suggests that things happening in a group will inevitably bring up STUFF FROM THE PAST in the minds of individuals. So an engineer may well come to a bridge building project with pressing experience from a different project she worked on five years ago. This experience she brings with her may be either very useful or may amount to a distortive prejudice.

Eales maintains that a group leader should keep her thinking about the group open to input in the above three areas.

I have found this a useful thought frame.

What thinking frames have you found useful in dealing with your classes?

Writing letters to language classes I work with is something I learnt from Herbert Kohl, a New York primary school genius. It was a technique he used to somehow persuade Puerto Rican 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders to put pen to paper.

I have used it most usefully at upper intermediate and advanced level and have had gripping and interesting correspondences with a large number of students.

Technically, this is a very powerful language teaching tool as the student completely naturally models on the teacher's letters in his/her response.

Correction is also completely natural: if a student writes to me about the

"Micro-Asiatic excursion" I will refer to the "Asia Minor Campaign" in my letter to her. She may well not notice the correction, and this is great.

Over a 12 week term I may well exchange 8 letters with an individual student.

Yes, it is labour intensive but I don't mind intelligent work.

Yours



Mario