

To Hanna

For Reviews section

Trainer Development
Tony Wright and Rod Bolitho
(self published- obtainable from rod@nile-elt.com)

Reviewed by Mario Rinvoluceri, Pilgrims

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Overview of the book

This is what the book says about itself on the back cover:

TRAINER DEVELOPMENT has grown out of the authors' work together over more than a decade of in international programmes at the College of St Mark and St John (Marjon) in Plymouth, UK. Put simply it is an account of the processes in planning and running training courses for teachers and teacher educators. The detailed discussion in the book reveals a great deal about specific aspects of and stages in this process such as:

Beginning a course

Awareness raising

The role of talk and dialogue in training

The place of theory

and assessment and evaluation issues

In their introduction the authors further define the scope of the book:

This is neither a traditional resource book nor a recipe book. It is simply an attempt to put three dimensional , lived experience down in words and to unpick some of the issues underlying the experience. It is offered in the belief that sharing of practice is a key element in professional learning.....

If you had the book in your hands I guess you would skim down the 12 chapter headings. Here they are:

- 1. Inside a training course 1**
- 2. A framework for training**
- 3. Working with groups in training**
- 4. Working with participants' experience**

5. New and shared experiences in training
6. The awareness raising process and its consequences
7. Talk in training courses
8. Creating meaning: new learning
9. Planning for action
10. Feedback, assessment and evaluation in training
11. Inside a training course 2
12. Developing as a trainer

Resources for trainers

Appendices

A number of leading people in the field of ELT teacher training have read the book and here is what three of them have to say. First you have Margit Szesztay and Uwe Pohl from Budapest:

There are not many teacher educators who can really work from their course participants' agenda and only some of these professionals would be able to describe articulately and helpfully what they do. There is also a real need to demystify participant orientated training in terms of "nuts and bolts" as well as in terms of sound principle. We find that this book does both things.

Adrian Underhill writes:

This is the book I have been waiting for. The authors show "trainers of trainers" how to create finely tuned experiential spaces in which real content is developed and fashioned through inquiry, reflection, experiment and practice, enabling would-be trainees to find their own authentic training voice.

What I have done above is to try and put the book into your hands and allow you to see how the book presents itself. This is in the best tradition of German book reviewing and no doubt adherents to this tradition would mumble about this being the "objective" part of the review.

I am fully aware that you have sniffed the book through the texts that I have decided to select, and that you have approached the work through the distorting mirrors of my subjective magpie selection and sequencing. "Objectivity" is a pernicious myth bequeathed to us from Ancient Greece..... the nearest we can ever get to it is "overlapping subjectivities"

My reasons for being overjoyed by this book

Bolitho and Wright place human relationships at the dead centre of the training process.

How close can relationships between participants be? Teaching is often referred to as a "passionate encounter" and it is true that the quality of learning can be profoundly influenced by the involvement of individuals in the encounter. Sharing in the learning experience of an individual is bound to create a bond between those concerned if the learning has been significant and meaningful. We all remember our favourite teachers with some affection.....

Bolitho and Wright see trust within the learning group as being essential.

No group can function in the absence of trust. When participants from different backgrounds come together, and even in mono-cultural groups with little experience of openness or cooperation, we have found that mutual trust cannot be taken for granted. There may be prejudices in one participant's view of another, suspicions about motivation, or caution about disclosing anything to comparative strangers. As trainers we are part of this. Participants need to learn to trust us and we need to trust them. We are aware that the process of trust-building is often a long one and that it is fragile.....

Bolitho and Wright are clear about where the power lies in a humanistic training room. They are fully aware that empowering students enormously enhances the trainer's power.

From a trainee's diary: " Power is in the tutor's hands , even though on the surface we learners feel we are in control"

Jamilah's comment is very apt: trainers are always in control of the learning experience, no matter how much work groups do on their own and no matter how much they negotiate their programme. Trainers have power over course content and direction. A danger is that we direct covertly without making our intentions plain- we need to open up issues related to trainers' roles from the very beginning of the course in order to alert to the dangers that lack of awareness of this issue can produce.....

Bolitho and Wright pay good attention to the role of intuition and inner voice in the work of a trainer.

We also need to listen to the voices in our own heads. We are sometimes aware of an alter ego talking to us in training sessions, telling us to tread carefully, or to intervene ,or even to stop bullshitting. The advice we get from this source is often the wisest.

Bolitho and Wright make clear that every training course is a new one because the protagonists, the trainees, are new. They have no truck with the tired recycling of limp old stuff.

It is comforting but also dangerous to emphasise the similarities between one group and the next. It can lead us to over-generalise, to survive on "old tricks", and to pull out and re-use old materials.....

However, to understand the needs and interests of a group fully, we have to wipe the slate clean, to quieten down the noise of previous groups in our head and to tune in completely to the new group. Wee have to be prepared to start where they are, and to make the journey of professional learning, hand in hand, with them, rather than starting from where we are.....

Bolitho and Wright state clearly that it is impossible for a trainer to have any real idea of what she is doing , however hard she may try.

.....Training is an individual undertaking and in every training room there are as many courses going on as there are individual participants present. As trainers we have to use every means at our disposal to understand these "courses", as individual participants make their own sense of what is going on around them and within them.

This book is so rich in experience and insights that parallel my own and often take me way beyond my own thought that I could offer you many more centrally important quotes. However the job of a reviewer is to dip into the book rather than produce a complete re-telling of it!

Things I am sad about

The title, **Trainer Development**, suggests this is niche book for a handful of people who prepare teacher trainers to then train teachers to then teach students.

This is not the case.

This book is a major life statement by Rod Bolitho, one of Europe's outstanding language trainers, about his whole belief system as a language learner, as a language teacher, as a trainer and as a "trainer of trainers" and above all as a brilliant human being. This is a major book, not a niche one. Bad market placing.

The title **Trainer Development**, begs the question whether it is possible for Person A to "develop" person B. In a major article that appeared in **Humanising Language Teaching**, Feb , 1999 Vol 1 Issue 1, Paul Davis argues that the work done by Bolitho and Wright can be correctly called **trainer training**, but has no right to call itself **trainer development**. Davis argues that in real development work all power must be vested in the protagonists.

It is weak that the authors do not seem to have addressed this fundamental point.

Though it is clear that Wright and Bolitho have both learnt a huge amount from the therapies it is very odd that they would seem to be unaware of the work of Bernard Dufeu, Europe's major humanistic language teacher trainer, whose book, **Teaching myself**, OUP, 1994, was, with Stevick's work, a major landmark on the language teaching landscape in the last quarter of the 2000th century.

Given the emotional depth-seeking nature of their work it is odd that Bolitho and Wright do not mention therapeutic supervision of the sort that is normal across policing, social work and the therapies. In my own case, mutual supervision has been a major support in my intensive teacher training work.

This book would have been richer, clearer and more subtle had the authors interested themselves in the riches and insights of NLP.

The book's bibliography contains references to a number of authors whose vacuity is well known and this is sad in a book that is marvellously bullshit-free, both in its thinking and in its style. It is great to read a book that is as far as you can imagine from "MAese."

The omission from the bibliography of Tessa Woodward's **Loop Input**, Pilgrims Pilot List, 1988 and **Model and metaphors in language teaching**, CUP, is a bizarre one, as these two overlapping books have been a major contribution to language teacher training.

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