

1 What is this toolkit about?

The performance or success of language teachers as well as other trainers are mostly evaluated through the testing of their learners (to assess what has been learnt) or through satisfaction surveys inquiring about how happy the students are with the learning experience. And though such feedback is invaluable, it does leave some important blanks. Indeed, nor the performance of learners, nor their satisfaction rates can give a proper and precise account on the particular strengths and weaknesses of the trainer's posture and methodological habits, so she can celebrate and valorise what she is good at, and further develop other aspects of her

practice. It is for this purpose that we propose our toolkit. It can serve language teachers and trainers, but also other educators involved with heterogeneous groups of adult learners. This toolkit will help to identify defining moments of a training process (rather than elements of content) and invite teachers, trainers to reflect on their practices. The toolkit can be an essential tool for the acquisition of the other products of LALI, but more generally, the methodology derived from it can be a useful component in the initial or continuous training of any professional working in a connected field.

2 How to use the toolkit?

This toolkit can be used in two ways: it can be integrated into training processes where it is used collectively, but it can also be used as a self-learning tool for teachers / educators who wish to use it independently. In both contexts the toolkit is based on the same five steps, which we are presenting bellow. Wherever relevant, we indicate variants of how to use the toolkit according to group training / self-learning context.

For the sake of simplicity and easy reading: from now on we'll use the word "facilitator" and "trainer" as synonyms, to refer to a wider range of educators, language teachers involved with adults in different types of educational activities focusing on developing language and writing skills. Furthermore, because of the high dominance of women in these professions, we opted for using the feminine instead of masculine, we'll make less errors this way statistically.

a) STEP1: Making video recordings

The key feature of our toolkit is to invite facilitators to explore their own practices, approaches, postures. Such an exploration requires a good mirror. Our best idea for a good mirror consists in the video recordings done in sessions delivered by the trainer where she really sees herself in action. For this purpose, it helps if the recordings are as little influenced / biased by our theoretical framework as possible. For this reason, we invite trainers to carry out these recording before starting to read our toolkit. We would suggest recording a whole session, which can be considered representative of the trainers' usual practice.

IN TRAININGS

You can use the training environment to make a trial recording during the session and view it together, exploring some possible errors / challenges and discussing how it can be overcome.

If you'd like to invite the facilitators to make their own recording between two sessions make sure to give them sufficient time so they can carry out the recordings.

b) STEP 2: Getting acquainted with our map of concepts

The next step consists in getting acquainted with some concepts and models about the success of learning experiences. Understanding these concepts will be important before trying to answer the questionnaires, simply because there may be some new concepts, or some technical terms which we may use in slightly different way than other authors. These preliminary conceptual readings cover three sections:

- SPECIFICITIES OF ADULT LEARNERS AND THE ACTIVE INGREDIENTS OF ADULT LEARNING

- FROM COMPETENCES TO FOCUS OF THE FACILITATOR
- MAP OF THE LALI DOMAINS

IN TRAININGS

For a bottom-up approach in training settings, we recommend an interactive exploration of the "active ingredients". For instance, you can carry out a brainstorming activity together on the "specificities of adult learners" and the « success factors » of adult trainings. This could be done through an adaptation of the "Hello game" of Thiagi ¹. Make three small groups and give one of the questions to each group:

- What are the distinguishing features of adult learners as opposed to children?
- What are the success factors of adult training processes?
- What are your most cherished competences as adult trainers?

Give 15 minutes to small-group work and then 5 minutes to each to present what they found. New items can be added during the plenary discussion.

c) STEP 3: Exploring one's own representations, expectations concerning these elements

Right after reading the conceptual introductions, we invite the facilitators to fill in the questionnaires whose aim is to elicit the facilitator' representations and ideas concerning these concepts. At this point, we're interested in exploring two perspectives. Sometimes our inquiry focuses on what is important for the

¹ For the basic description of the activity please see: <http://thiagi.net/archive/www/game-hello.html>

facilitator. For instance, is it important to make participants laugh? Other items will refer to what the facilitator thinks of herself, for instance: “I often make participants laugh”. In some cases, we may discover some gaps between these slightly different perspectives (I can think that it is important to make people laugh, yet I rarely do it). When we discover such discrepancies, they should not be taken as mistakes, rather as opportunities to explore why they happen.

IN TRAININGS

For a creative exploration of trainers’ self-perception in group sessions, trainers can draw their own self-portraits, including what they consider their main skills / strengths and also what they see as weaker elements in their trainers’ posture.

d) STEP 4: Analysing one’s own practices, based on the evidence of the video recordings.

After having completed the preliminary questionnaires facilitators are invited to view their video recordings and use them as a mirror to explore the same domains we have already explored before. The difference is that this time we have visible evidence on the basis of which we can answer the questions. In this questionnaire all items are descriptive and invite the participants to find “visible evidence” that illustrates what the items refer to. For instance, “I made my participants laugh”. As we had said before, it is very important that the facilitators don’t use this questionnaire in a restrictive way, if they don’t perform as they expected to. This would simply result

in shame or self-blame, and rarely in a positive learning experience. We invite facilitators to adopt a posture of positive curiosity.

IN TRAININGS

In case of a collective use, specific precautions are needed to ensure that the work does not become a negative experience. We recommend creating small groups of 3-4 people that can view together video extracts of their colleagues and either offer open feedbacks or they use the grids, adjusted for using with another person’s video.

e) STEP 5: Comparing representations and reality, identifying possible development areas

The main objective of the toolkit is to serve facilitators in identifying domains of development where they may wish to further elaborate their skills, improve their posture etc. It is quite possible that some facilitators have a very precise and objective knowledge of her own strengths and weaknesses and an awareness of her own style, but this is indeed a minority group. Most of the time we are not quite aware of all aspects of our behaviour, and interesting gaps and divergences appear between what we think we do, what we think we should do and what we actually do. Our toolkit proposes to explore these discrepancies not as a source of negative assessment (how poorly I know myself!) but using them as precious information that can help us become aware of aspects that were hidden from us before.