

Managing the different voices in the group

Reflective writing doesn't always take the form of a diary entry. The short message below was written by Simon Borg at the end of a short residential course for teachers. Here the course tutor is reflecting on the way the group worked together, and what he is taking away from the experience. (Margit)

Dear Alex, Alexandrs, Betty, Bhikul, Emily, Mauricio and Svetla,

Here are some thoughts about our work together I,d like to share with you before you leave.

I can sum up my feelings about the whole experience in one word - "challenging" – and I hope that you too have all felt challenged in one way or another. Challenged to reconsider assumptions we've always held to be true about language learning, challenged to think. This has been a key feature of our work.

All in different ways, you have contributed to the life of the group. Alex and Bhikul silently observing and listening, but deep in thought; Svetlana and Alexandrs full of enthusiasm for debate; Emily and Betty with their soft-spoken but very meaningful comments, and Mauricio, whose openness about the novelty of much of our work provided a valuable perspective throughout our discussions. Attempting to manage the different 'voices' you presented is an experience I have learned a lot from. I, too, was a learner on this course.

I have tried to stimulate you without pushing you too far; to guide without being assertive, to respect your knowledge and experience without appearing condescending. I would be naive to believe I always succeeded in doing so, but the frankness with which you were ready to share with me your feelings about our sessions has provided me with valuable insight into my work. I hope that the feeling of mutual respect which existed among all members of the group is something that you too have learned a lot from.

If I had to choose one idea I'd like you to take away with you it would be that teaching is all about interacting with and relating to people. Keep that in mind when you return home.

Good luck,
Simon