"Starting From Where They're At"
Towards an appropriate methodology
in training
Rod Bolitho and Tony Wright

Abstract
In this article we discuss and exemplify a training sequence involving *change*, which is rooted in the belief that a trainer's responsibility is to discover and work with the implicit theories and values of trainees. The example is taken from our work with Malaysian trainers on a primary English project

Dans cet article nous présentons et nous analysons un stage de formation conduisant au changement. *Ce stage est fondé sur la conviction que la responsabilité du formateur est de découvrir les théories et les valeurs implicites de ceux qu'il forme et de les utiliser. Cet exemple est tiré du travail que nous avons réalisé avec nos formateurs malaisiens sur un projet d'enseignement de l'anglais à l'école primaire.*

General Introduction
One of the main challenges we face as trainers is to find ways of engaging with course participants' previous knowledge, experience and beliefs. Without this engagement, even in part, we believe it is difficult to enable participants to make sense of any new input on a training course. It is also vital for us as trainers to familiarise ourselves with key aspects of participants' backgrounds. The development of any training sequence depends to a considerable extent on how successful or otherwise the beginning of the sequence might be - linking with previous issues (teaching or training) can only be of successful if we are able to make the initial connection, and then build on it during a programme.

This short article describes a 12-hour training sequence in which we introduce the concept of 'educational change' to a group of teacher trainers on a short intensive in-service course. The trainers were part of a large group of professionals engaged in an extensive programme designed to bring about fundamental

changes in training methodology and practices in their home context.

Managing Educational Change - A Short Introduction for Trainers
Stage 1. (30 minutes)
We briefly introduce the course concept to the group. We tell the group that we are going to address issues in educational change by working through a sequence of activities, all of which are grounded in the notion of "change". From this, we draw out issues involved in change in educational systems and then consider how participants, individually and collectively, might address these issues in their work in the next phase of their project. We introduce, as a pointer, the paradox that education is intended to bring about change and yet educational practices are surprisingly resistant to change (see Fullan (1993) for further discussion).

Stage 2 - Activity Sequence (3 hours)
We invite the participants to take part in a sequence of activities each aimed at bringing out experience of and attitudes towards change in one way or another. Following the experience of doing an activity, we provide the participants with an opportunity to review the activity with the aid of a grid (Bolitho and Wright 1993). After each activity, quiet time is set aside for participants to make notes under each heading on the grid. As they do this, they are beginning the process of integrating the activity into their experience. A copy of the grid we used is in Appendix 1.) After grid entries are complete, we move quickly to the next activity.

The activities we used are:

Activity 1 Introductions
(Used to break the ice and to help us with names.) Each participant introduces the person on her/his left, and tells the group one thing they like about this person

Activity 2 Career Pathways
In this activity, participants are asked to visualise their careers to date, and choose a visual image, such as a path to a river to represent their progression. Images such as bridges, cross-roads, forests etc. are selected to represent timing points, choices and problems encountered

along the way. Sketches are shown to partners and discussed, then displayed on the wall. For us as trainers this is a quick way of gaining access to a wealth of biographical information.

Activity 3 Development Continuum

We ask each participant to think of three adjectives which describe them when they were 'beginning' teachers. They write these down in a column as follows, with the opposite positive adjective (describing how they'd ideally like to be) on the right hand side of the page. For example:

Beginning		*Better*
impatient	————————X————————	patient
enthusiastic	———X————————————	more enthusiastic
excitable	————————————X———	less excitable

Participants then work on each line where they are now in terms of how they have developed as a teacher. A central aim of the activity is for each participant to see how far they have developed and changed during their career. Participants are encouraged to share their feelings in pairs. (Adapted from Brandes and Ginnis (1986).)

Activity 4 Lighthouse

In this activity, one participant (the lighthouse keeper) stands on a chair and guides a ship's captain (a blindfolded volunteer) through dangerous rocks (the other participants) safely to shore. The blindfold is necessary to simulate thick fog. One aim of this activity is to build trust and solidarity within the group. (We cannot, unfortunately, recall the source of this activity. Apologies to its creator.)

Activity 5 Story

Participants listen to a story (a good one is "the inventor" in Morgan and Rinvolucri (1982)) which has a strong change theme. We tell the story without comment and then ask the participants, first in pairs, and then in plenary discussion, to respond to the story. The aim is to identify issues such as individual isolation, unpredictability and loss

as key aspects of the change process.

Activity 6 Twin Axes

This activity, borrowed from Brandes and Ginnis (1986) gives a trainer instant access, in a roughly tuned way, to the experience and attitudes in a group relating to a particular topic. The theme of motivation to change features strongly.

Activity 7 Classroom Metaphors

In this activity, participants are asked to select and explore metaphors for the classroom. Metaphors chosen include a theatre, a market-place, a jungle etc. The exploration is conducted by looking at roles, perhaps using 'if' questions:

"If the classroom is a jungle, who or what are the teachers and learners...?"

Once again, attitudes and experience are revealed in all sorts of ways.

A key theme to examine here is how our metaphors might change.

Stage 3 - Making Sense (3 hours)

Participants are grouped around the activities, 3 or 4 per activity. They are asked to share their perceptions about the activity they have been assigned, using material from their grids. So group 1 will consider Activity 1, and so on. They are invited to identify what they see as the main "themes" in the activity in question related to change. The themes are not necessarily directly or literally linked to change - they might be more subtle. For example the notion of trusting others features very strongly in more than one activity.

Each group then reports back to the whole group in plenary and the main points are recorded on the whiteboard. When a group has completed its report, other participants can add their own individual perceptions. In this way a composite picture is created of the whole group's responses to the activities with reference to the theme of change.

The small groups are now asked to find common themes running across all of the activities. These are collected and discussed as they are elicited.

The final part of this activity involves the small groups making a poster (A3) of their own activity, using "key words and phrases" generated during the thematisation of their responses to the activities. The posters are displayed for

(a) clarification and (b) comment. The group is asked to identify further 'change themes' from the posters which we "store" on the whiteboard for follow-up in the next stage (see Appendix II for a list of change themes).

Stage 4 - Towards Understanding (3 hours)

The themes generated in Stage 3 are now examined and discussed. A key theme is "personal response" to change. We give a short talk on some of the views of various writers and thinkers on this theme. This is supplemented by a questionnaire for personal reflection on individual's responses to change based on Kirton (1989). We then move on to look at important features of peoples' response to change such as resistance - this sets up a need to examine ways of responding to resistance in training which we accomplish through role play and active listening exercises. From a consideration of how individuals respond to change we look at the impact of change on organisations. This in itself entails dealing with motivation, with a specific look at Herzburg's theory (1966), Maslow (1968) etc. We examine various "blockages" in organisations and through their set of activities begin to assemble the agenda for participants as change agents in their own institutions, introducing new training and learning materials (see Appendix III for a sample activity).
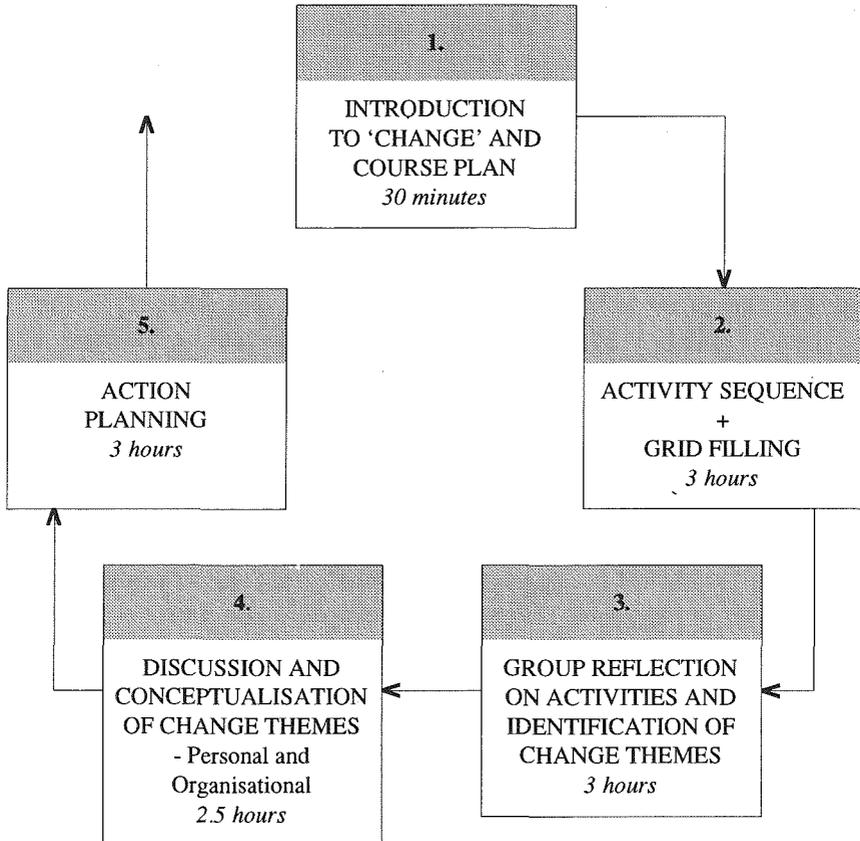
A key part of this stage is a discussion of the rationale behind the training approach we ourselves are using. This is done through a talk showing how the stages we are progressing through follow a learning cycle - we shall discuss this in the next part of this paper. This is an important stage as it provides us with an opportunity to discuss our own ideas about training and change, and associated notions of trainer role (or change agent's role) and the role of previous experience in helping to shape a training sequence.

Stage 5 - Action Plans (2.5 hours)

Having identified the central issues involved in change as raised by the participants' responds to all the activities in Stage 2, and explored them through discussion, activities, our own input and associated reading, we now, as the final stage of the training sequence, turn to the participants' agendas in their home situations which has developed in Stage 4. We deal with their hopes and, especially, fears through role play, active listening, and discussion, and brainstorm ideas. The final stage is for each individual to create an action plan for introducing change into their institutions and a personal plan for coping with

the effects of change among their colleagues (see Appendix III for a sample activity).

The whole sequence can be summarised as follows.

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                    ┌──────────────────┐
                    │       1.         │
                    ├──────────────────┤
                    │  INTRODUCTION    │
          ↑         │ TO 'CHANGE' AND  │
                    │  COURSE PLAN     │
                    │   30 minutes     │
                    └──────────────────┘
                                              ↓
┌──────────────────┐              ┌──────────────────┐
│       5.         │              │       2.         │
├──────────────────┤              ├──────────────────┤
│    ACTION        │              │ ACTIVITY SEQUENCE│
│   PLANNING       │              │       +          │
│    3 hours       │              │  GRID FILLING    │
│                  │              │    3 hours       │
└──────────────────┘              └──────────────────┘
      ↑
  ┌──────────────────┐          ┌──────────────────┐
  │       4.         │          │       3.         │
  ├──────────────────┤          ├──────────────────┤
  │  DISCUSSION AND  │ ←        │ GROUP REFLECTION │ ←
  │ CONCEPTUALISATION│          │ ON ACTIVITIES AND│
  │ OF CHANGE THEMES │          │ IDENTIFICATION OF│
  │  - Personal and  │          │  CHANGE THEMES   │
  │   Organisational │          │    3 hours       │
  │    2.5 hours     │          └──────────────────┘
  └──────────────────┘
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Rationale: Developing Training Sequences from Personal Experience

The vast majority of participants on training courses start, in our experience, with widely varying degrees of knowledge, expertise and experience and with a range of value systems. In order that they make the most of the experience of a course or workshop, we believe that they should be able to respond to the

themes of course, **from their own standpoints**. It is a further principle that participants **experience** any new approaches and have the opportunity to respond to it themselves. Their responses enable them (a) to make sense of the new approach and (b) to develop an agenda of issues to be dealt with on the programme.
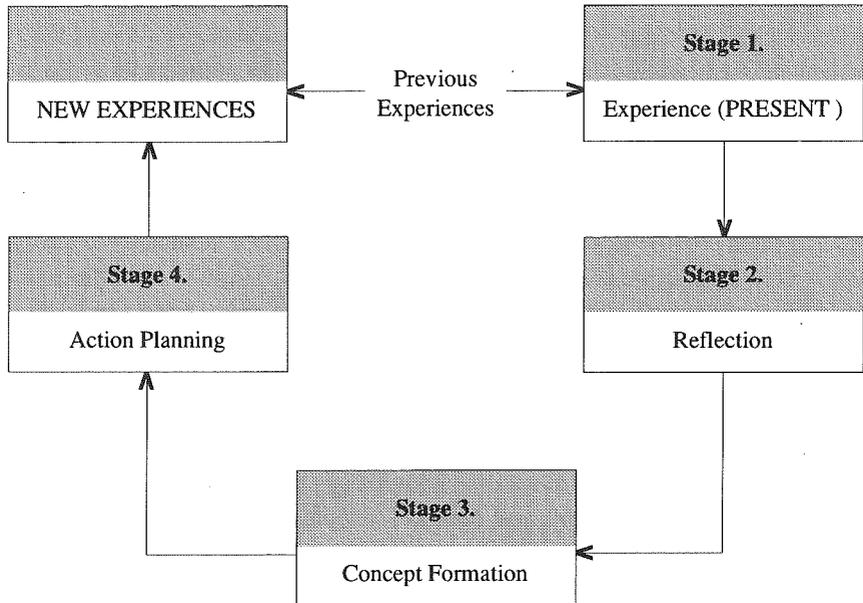
Thus, the training methodology we use is appropriate in the sense that all participants face the same experiences at the beginning of the programme. While the training methodology we use may be new to the participants, we contend that our way of introducing it is appropriate as it engages the participants as they are when the programme begins - it draws off both previous experiences and knowledge, and new experiences.

We also believe that it is vital for participants to have ample time to process the experiences presented in Stage 2. While Stage 1 is an important stage - to allay fears and provide an early rationale for the approach - it is unlikely to have made a very deep impression on participants so quickly. Stage 3, when the activities are discussed - feelings are revealed and concepts are explored - provides the opportunity for participants both to make sense of their own thinking and to share it with others. Again, all participants are able to contribute to the agenda and to build an agenda for further discussion which includes everyone's ideas. Thus, individual and group perceptions on 'change' are the essence of the agenda which is created. This is a time-consuming part of the sequence, but is important for both participants and facilitators in setting a collective agenda, based on reflection on experience, past and present.

In Stage 4, we change role - as well as providing the support and structuring of activities, we also add input when appropriate or requested by the group. We feel that it is important not to "feed" participants with input until this stage - our aim is to work from participants' perceptions in the early stage of the programme. Our contributions are made to clarify, inform and enable the participants to develop their ideas on the topic in question. It is also tuned to what we have discovered about them so far. We also provide ideas for further exploration and reading as requested. The final stage is crucial - it re-connects the participants with their own institutions and contexts, and re-orientates them to the issues they face "armed" with new perceptions. Confidence is a key factor here - change agents often run a lonely race - and we find it necessary to assist participants in developing their own ideas for the future. This is an issue discussed by Baldwin and Williams (1988), among others. Again, the group's

contribution to the process is vital - sharing worries and seeking solutions is a key element of this. Our role is again to support and to provide structure for the process.

Our approach is a modified version of the Kolb (1984) learning cycle, as follows:

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┌─────────────────────┐         Previous          ┌─────────────────────┐
│     Stage 1.        │      Experiences          │     Stage 1.        │
│                     │  ◄─────────  ─────────►    │                     │
│  NEW EXPERIENCES    │                           │ Experience (PRESENT)│
└─────────────────────┘                           └─────────────────────┘
          ▲                                                  │
          │                                                  ▼
┌─────────────────────┐                           ┌─────────────────────┐
│     Stage 4.        │                           │     Stage 2.        │
│                     │                           │                     │
│  Action Planning    │                           │     Reflection      │
└─────────────────────┘                           └─────────────────────┘
          ▲                                                  
          │              ┌─────────────────────┐            
          │              │     Stage 3.        │            
          └──────────────│                     │◄───────────
                         │  Concept Formation  │
                         └─────────────────────┘
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Our experience as trainers is that this methodological pattern is a firm basis for enabling participants to process new ideas by working from their present state of knowledge and beliefs towards the new ideas, encountered in "conceptual" form in Stage 3. This has the following advantages (see also McGill and Beaty (1992)).
1. It values past experience as a basis for learning.
2. It enables participants to contribute to the agenda for learning.
3. It leads to raised awareness as well as the acquisition of the new knowledge.

4. It provides relevance for new ideas by allowing participants to relate them to their work contexts.
5. It frees trainers from having to provide input on every aspect of the topic, allowing them time and space to enable participants to explore the topic for themselves

Concluding Remarks

The sequence we have outlined has the additional advantage that it can be adapted to training sequences of different lengths and intensities, from a short workshop to a longer intensive programme. The sharing of experiences and of thinking, based on the principle of active involvement in learning are our guarantee of relevance and appropriacy in our training methodology.

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To be completed by participants after each activity				
Name of Activity	Brief Description of the Activity	Purposes of Activity	Your Feelings During the Activity	Other Comments

Appendix I: Reflective Grid

PETEP[1] Course 1994 Training for Educational Change

Below you will find a list of 'change messages' identified by you in the various activities we have so far done. Read them through and do the following:

1. *Make sure you are clear about the nature of the message* Discuss with a partner and question if the group identified the message if necessary
2. *Group the messages around broad themes* Identify themes with your collegues
3. *Locate the 3 most important themes for you personally* in your current work with PETEP. Be prepared to talk about them
4. *Add any further themes* that come to mind as a result of this activity. Any 'change metaphors' come to mind?

CHANGE MESSAGES

- change can happen to us without being aware that it is
- no (wo)man is an island
- change is not difficult (really)
- do we have to change? —— Yes ——> in what directions?
  - No   how?
- change when I want to
- change at my own pace
- self-esteem raised
- dare to be one's self
- danger of isolation
- accommodation of other's ideas
- be conscious of the situation you're in
- need to understand the task
- need to do tasks patiently, carefully
- need to maximise our potentials
- look at ourselves in order to identify changes we want to make
- change ourselves before we bring about change
- interraction is necessary
- need to change according to the environment we're in   **Appendix II**

1. PETEP - Primary English Training and Education Project. A jointly planned and financed programme (by the Overseas Development Administration (ODA) and the Government of Malaysia) started in 1993, aimed at developing training practices in Teachers' Colleges in Malaysia.

Sample Activities from Stages 4 and 5

1. *Motivation (Stage 4)*
   We give the participants a list of motivators (as follows). There are asked to choose, individually, their top 3, in order.

   • to be liked
   • to make a lot of money
   • to serve others
   • to have a good time
   • to be secure
   • to be an expert
   • to become well-known
   • to be independent
   • to make the most of your talents
   • to maximise status
   • to be a leader
   • to achieve something worthwhile

   Appendix III

   Participants share their preferences in pairs and bring out any general points about motivation and change (e.g. that some people need 'hard' incentives to change). They then do the 'job motivation' questionnaire from Everard and Morris (1989: 36-41) and share their results, again with the change motif in mind.

   The final stage is where we talk about various theories of motivation and focus on people's motivation in participants' home context. We draw out various obstacles and constraints to deal with later.

2. *Sharing Fears (Stage 5)*
   Participants are invited to list their feelings as would-be change agents and to list their main fears and forebodings in the home context.

   These are shared in small groups, and an advice bureau is set up to answer letters from the groups on their fears and expectations. Practical, moral and emotional advice is offered - participants are often relieved to discover that they aren't alone in their fears. This is a necessary step prior to drawing up personal action action plans for the first stages of implementation at home.