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THE SUPERMARKET - a frame for short, intensive, in-service training courses?

by Bryan Robinson

Sometimes teachers on short, intensive, in-service training courses can appear to their trainers to be very "greedy". However, when you think about it, that's not so unjustified really. After all, they're probably taking time out of their weekends, half-term or end-of-term holidays in order to attend; they're sacrificing family-time for work-time; perhaps they've had to pay a lot of money for the course out of their own pockets, or perhaps they're not getting paid for attending; and they do have very pressing needs in their work situations. With one group, I tried out the idea of using the supermarket as a metaphor for the course to try and parallel their hunger and desires, and to show them how together we were trying to satisfy these.

Timing: 45-50 minutes

Procedure:

1. In the second session of the course, once everyone had got to know the others reasonably well, I proposed to them that we looked together at what would be the content of our course.
2. I distributed a lot of index cards and coloured pens, and asked the group to write on to the cards the things that they expected or wanted to cover. I told them to include things that were in the brochure, and other things which were not. They started off writing individually, but then after a time formed groups of two or three to pool ideas. Those who wanted to work alone were left to do so.
3. While they thought about this, and started writing things out, I made a set of cards myself, on which I put everything which was in the brochure, and which the others seemed to have missed out. (Surprisingly enough, many of the participants didn't remember what had been advertised as the course content). I also added a number of other items which I thought would be of value: "Business people = real people?" was one such card, as this was a topic which had come up again and again in previous courses.
4. When everyone had finished, we spread everybody's cards over the floor to read them. I told the group that I wanted them to read the cards in order to remove or combine any that were repeated, or which overlapped. If anything was unclear people asked for explanations.
5. Once this was done, I then handed out the bluetack, and drawing pins, and told them that I wanted them to arrange all of the items on one wall of the classroom. They were to imagine that this wall was a set of supermarket shelves, and so they would need to arrange like products with like, and to put up signs indicat-

-ing to the customers what each section contained.



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6. This part of the activity was quite lengthy, but it provided us all with a clear perspective of the course, and their group expectations of it. Priorities started to emerge, as well as differences in the level and degree of experience which they possessed. Throughout this stage I remained on the sidelines unless absolutely necessary. I wanted them to plan things for themselves, using me as another resource, not as their instructor. Some of the headings which they chose at this stage were very revealing: "Insoluble problems" was the label they gave to all of those things which depended on the Ministry, the Headteacher, or other "powers".
7. Finally, I directed them to inspect the shelves, and we added one or two products which we'd overlooked, before pronouncing ourselves satisfied.
8. This set of shelves was then to serve as our programme for the course. We worked "down the aisle", taking topics according to the pattern and priorities which we had established for them in Step 6. Each topic that was taken from the shelf was then placed in our shopping trolley (the opposite wall of the room) as a way of recording it.
9. Mid-way through the course, we held a review session, in which we replenished the shelves with new, and previously forgotten "products".
10. When it came to the end of the course, we were all able to look at our full "trolley", and review objectively the areas which we had covered. The items left on the shelves were those which had proved to be not that important, or which were minority interests that we hadn't had time for.