

HANDOUT 6 EXAMPLE OF FIELD NOTES**Introduction**

This document is an example of field notes which are a commentary on the first half day of teaching on an intensive three-day course at the University of Education, Freiburg, Germany. The course was delivered in April 2005 to twenty second and third year students and was titled 'Radio/Audio production in teaching: an introduction to radio journalism and media education theory'. The half-day session covered a general introduction, and an introduction to doing an interview and, like the rest of the course, integrated sessions of theory, instruction, exercises and reflection. The University specialises in educational theory and practice and students aim to qualify as teachers, adult educators and media trainers.

The notes below (which have been edited to shorten them) were not made by the course lecturer – although we are encouraging you as trainers to make notes about your own teaching yourself – but were taken by Thorsten Hoessler, assistant student in media education at the University.

1. Background and course introduction

An unexpectedly high number of students registered for the course which showed a great interest in the topic. Those who had not registered beforehand had to be sent away because there was not sufficient equipment for more than twenty participants. The course lecturer introduced herself and explained the schedule and course aim: to produce a radio report combining interview and scripted links. She explained that the course was not just about journalistic skills but was intended to teach the basics of media pedagogy as well; the students needed to know how to make a radio production for their own teaching in schools.

The students were given handouts and handbooks for the course (these could also be downloaded) and assigned the daily task of recording their personal impressions and individual progress in a diary.

2. Introduction of the participants

The twenty students, the majority of them female, were asked to write down their names on cards so that everyone including the lecturer knew who was who. The horseshoe shape of the seating arrangement allowed easy communication.

The students were asked to get into pairs and by way of introduction first to interview each other and then present each other to the whole group, taking no longer than two minutes and including the name of the person, their radio experience, their special interest and their expectations of the course.

During the presentations I noticed that most of the students followed the recommended sequence quite strictly – a fact noted by two of the participants in the

feedback session that followed. They remarked that it wasn't easy to remember details when the presentations followed the same structure and the language didn't differ very much.

Somebody said it was much easier to remember details when very colourful language or unusual expressions were used. For instance the phrase "sandwich children" was used to explain someone born between two siblings. After that one student introduced his partner as a spoiled single child. This was done jokingly and was not meant to be offensive. I guessed the two (male) students knew each other. Most didn't have any experience of radio work; most were studying Primary school teaching.

The feedback/reflection session was very lively and seemed to be a very positive experience for everybody. One criticism was that an introduction which compared the partner to oneself didn't seem very professional and wasn't helpful for learning more about the person presented. Students felt it was easy to follow the introduction session because of the structure of the predetermined questions, but the very large amount of information received was difficult to remember.... Following this point, students discussed what could be changed to attract more attention. One student, referring to training she'd had at a radio station, suggested singling out one characteristic trait of a person as an anchor for the audience to remember... The seminar teacher asked the students how they felt while being introduced by their partners. The procedure was very familiar to the students from other courses. They reflected that to introduce somebody is always to a certain extent an interpretation: "You always filter, depending on your point of view". One student said: "You listen really carefully while you are being introduced so as to interrupt if necessary".

[....]

The discussion was frank and lively, and the lecturer did not have to initiate the process very much.

3. Radio interviewing: examples

The lecturer asked the students to listen to and to reflect upon four examples of different radio interviews. After each, a reflection and discussion took place to analyse the interview structure, the techniques used by the journalist and the type of questions asked.

[.....]

4. Introduction to radio interviewing– origin, development, types, techniques of interviewing

This session began with a lecture. At the beginning only a few students took notes, although when the lecturer wrote key words or a structure on the blackboard note-taking was more likely. After a while some conversation started alongside me. The lecturer did not react to this by asking for silence but invited the students to interrupt the lecture if they had questions: “You can ask at any time if you didn’t understand or if you want to comment”. Her intervention re-established a concentrated working atmosphere.

For me it was very difficult to take field notes while people were listening to the lecture. If I watched them for too long, they probably felt uneasy and observed. During the lecture about interview techniques the participants paid great attention. The lecture was illustrated by transparencies, some of them cartoons showing interview situations and common mistakes. The students especially responded to these. It seemed much easier to attract attention by this style of presentation, whereas a straight lecture often gives students the impression of being very long. After the session had gone on for a while with students actively and frequently asking questions and making comments, at a certain point the response faded out. The lecturer had to answer her own question: “What do I do if the interviewee doesn’t answer?” I thought this was a sign that the students needed a break. After a long lecture they were a bit tired and keen to start the practical training that had been announced as next session.

5. Doing interviews

The students were asked to do an interview in pairs. The noise level in the seminar grew because the students got very excited. Each of them had to suggest a topic with which s/he was very familiar. Suggestions written on the blackboard included:

- Playing music in my band
- One month in Chile
- Work with children suffering from cancer
- Rabbits in the flat
- Women’s soccer in Munzingen (village near Freiburg)
- Apprenticeship in a hotel

After all the suggestions had been listed the students could choose who to pair with. The rules for forming pairs were: 1. No two persons who knew each other could form a pair, 2. first come, first served, i.e. the ones who were first to agree to work together had more possibility of choice. There were no difficulties in pairing; at the end everybody was satisfied, even those who decided late and thus did not have much choice of partners. I think that showed there was a very good atmosphere among the students so that everyone was able to work with everyone else.

After the lunch break the students had to carry out their interviews.