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A brief guide to training methods and approaches

• Methods of training

This section of the *Notes* provides training materials for participatory learning, exploring a different theme in each issue¹. This issue explores different approaches to training other people in participatory learning. Many methods of instruction can be used during training. For a training which stresses active participation and open dialogue, it is essential that trainers use a style of training that is consistent with these values.

It is best to use a combination of learning methods and to alter the tempo of the training. A regular change of both the methods and pace will keep the trainees interested and ready to learn. It will also be more interesting and less tiring for you as a trainer.

Lectures

Traditional teaching and training most frequently rely on the lecture. This is the one-way communication of a prepared talk, accompanied by a period of questions and answers at the conclusions. A lecture provides you, the trainer, with an opportunity to get many ideas across to your audience. However, there is little opportunity for discussion and a process of learning is not guaranteed.

Lectures can be used for groups of any size. For very large groups, they are the most common method of instruction. The trainer is in complete control of the session and can predict the timing and content accurately.

Lectures are useful for introducing new subjects or presenting summaries or overviews

¹ Taken from *A Trainer's Guide for Participatory Learning and Action*. Published by IIED. Price £14.95 + postage and packing (25% UK & Europe, 35 % airmail)

to participants. They are often combined with visual aids, such as slides or overheads. Even in training programmes on participatory learning, some lecturing will be needed. However, lectures have many disadvantages. They do not necessarily take into account the individual needs, interest and pace of trainees. Discussion and debate are kept to a minimum so creative and reflective learning is limited.

Deliver short lectures and break them up with buzz sessions (see Box 1). Allow plenty of time for the preparation of materials. Remember that your presentation will be more effective if you say what you are going to say, say it and then say what you have just told them.

BOX 1 LECTURE CHECKLIST

Are you using lectures only when other methods will be less effective?
Have you limited your talk to 20 minutes?
Does your talk have a clear beginning, middle and end?
Do you always keep to simple key points?
Do you support your talk with a clear handout?
Do you know your own body language mannerisms and how these affect the lecture?

Buzz groups

During a longer session, the plenary group can break into sub-groups to discuss specific questions or issues. The room soon fills with noise as each sub-group 'buzzes' in discussion. While they are buzzing, participants are able to exchange ideas and draw on their wide collective experience. It may provide a good opportunity for trainees to reflect on the content of a lecture. A good buzz session will generate many ideas, the most important of which can be reported back to the plenary.

Your role as the facilitator is to watch time and manage feedback concisely. Buzz groups are helpful for trainers as they allow you to:

- draw your breath and gauge the mood by listening to some of the discussions;
- change the pace of the session; and,
- encourage participants to reflect on what they have learnt and how they might incorporate it in their work.

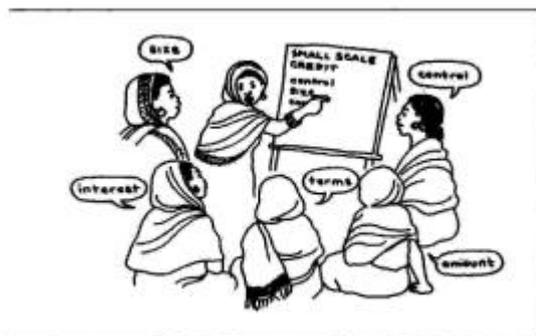
The main obstacles to using buzz sessions include: unfamiliarity with their use, the time required, the need for leaders or facilitators in each sub-group and the need to have tables and chairs arranged for quick and easy discussions.

Brainstorming and collecting ideas

Brainstorming sessions help us discover new ideas and responses very quickly. All ideas are given equal credence. Participants are encouraged to let ideas flow freely, building on and improving previous ideas. No idea, however crazy, should be rejected.

Ideas are listed exactly as they are expressed on a board or flipchart, or written on pieces of paper and tacked to a pin board. This combination of swiftly generated ideas usually leads to a very animated and energising session. Even the more reserved members of the group should feel able to contribute.

After a brainstorming session, ideas can be discussed further and evaluated. They can be grouped and analysed so they belong to the group rather than individuals. Unlike a buzz session, brainstorming can work well in a large group and usually takes less time. It is best to limit the time for plenary brainstorms, as you might lose the attention of some participants.



Role plays

In role plays, participants use their own experiences to play a real life situation. This can increase their self-confidence and give them the opportunity to understand other perspectives. Role plays are useful for improving interviewing techniques and examining the complexities and potential conflicts of group meetings. They help participants to consolidate different lessons and are also good energisers.

However, role plays can be time-consuming and their success depends on the willingness of participants to take active part. Some trainees may feel a role play is too threatening or embarrassing. Their reluctance may be overcome by careful explanation of the objectives and outcome.

Case studies

The case study involves the presentation and analysis of an incident or scenario that has happened or could happen. Trainers can select examples of relevance to the trainees, such as learning how various diagramming methods can be used in sequence in the field.

Simulation exercises or games are a form of experiential learning that uses both case study material and role plays. Participants are briefed about 'real world' situations about which they make decisions and must accept the consequences. They are sometimes given pre-determined roles and asked to act out the situation from the perspective of their respective characters.

Experiential activities are highly participatory but require clear, explicit objectives and careful facilitation. As with role plays, sufficient time must be allocated for a debriefing sessions.

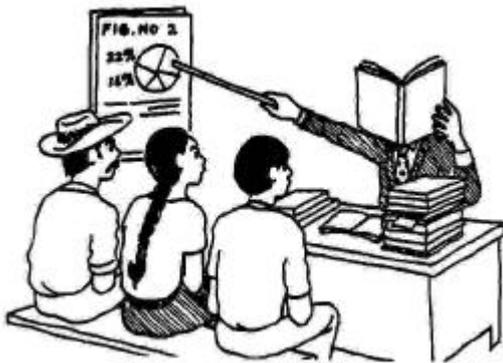
Notes and visual aids

Even very experienced trainers will usually require some notes. These are best made in the form of key points or topics arranged around the order of the presentation, and are planned around the use of visual aids. Many speakers use small cards on which they write key points.

Remember that old saying 'A picture is worth a thousand words'. It has been said that trainees remember 10% of what they read, 20% of what they hear, 30% of what they see and 50% of what they hear and see. Visual aids such as overhead transparencies, slides, flipcharts, posters and videos help to ensure effective communication and are a crucial part of any well-designed training session. They can also act as a prop for the trainer, reducing the need for notes.

• You, as a performer

To train well is to give a good performance. People will grasp your message if you keep it simple and avoid jargon. Your gestures and body language can overwhelm your words. So look at the group and make eye contact, smile and avoid distracting body movements.



Those who are training for the first time commonly misunderstand performance anxiety or 'nerves'. But being nervous keeps the adrenaline flowing and helps you deal with problem situations. Even experienced trainers feel nervous or anxious before beginning a training course. There are ways to deal with nerves and use them to help, rather than hinder, your performance:

- prepare thoroughly as this builds confidence;
- calm yourself by breathing slowly and deeply; and,
- smile and talk to participants as they arrive, by getting to know a few names and faces, it will make the group less intimidating.

By putting your participants at ease, you will also feel more relaxed and friendly. You can

express this using some of the following techniques:

- Highlight the benefits that the participants will receive from attending the course;
- Speak to the participants as equals rather than as students, use 'we' and 'our' rather than 'you' and 'your';
- Try one or more new exercises during each training programme. Don't be afraid to try new activities because you fear criticism. Mistakes are a valuable part of the learning process;
- Develop training materials that build on the skills of trainees. This increases their self esteem and helps them to relax; and,
- Plan an easy exercise early on in the programme so that participants can experience success.

• Questions and answers

A useful and brief exercise is to ask participants to reflect on a question that you give them and to write down their thoughts. For example, how might you use this approach in your work? The objective is not to collect the answers, rather to encourage the trainees to participate more actively by reflecting on what you have presented.

You can also encourage question and answer sessions after any presentation. Sometimes questions don't flow immediately. You can use a quick buzz session in groups to energise people and enable each person to contribute. Each subgroup can then select the best question to ask.

Remember to pause before answering questions and respond concisely and honestly. Never invent an answer: if you don't know, say so. If you sense hostility, try to remain calm. Give the question back to participants by asking them to comment. If in doubt, rephrase the question by asking 'Do I understand you to mean...'. Remember to summarise what the group has said to round off the question and answer session.

• After you have finished

Conducting training sessions in participatory methods is always exhausting for trainers.

Make sure that you have space and time to recover. But remember that immediately after the workshop is a critical time to learn from the experience, even if you are tired. It is an excellent habit to make notes on your performance as soon as possible so you can learn from yourself and improve for next time.

Analyse the good and bad points by reviewing each session thoroughly. Focus in particular on the weak points of your performance. It is from mistakes that we can learn the most. How accurate was the time-keeping? Were you able to focus the interest of the trainees?



A good way to learn from your trainees is to ask them to evaluate you. This can be done formally with a written evaluation of their overall training experience. However, do not ask more than a page or two of questions.

• Working as a team

Interactive training demands good concentration, flexible planning and improvisation, creativity in dealing with problems and above all patience and enthusiasm. Your training can be made more effective by working with another facilitator, thereby providing mutual support.

Working as a team with another trainer has several advantages, not least sharing the workload and the facilitation of sessions. By complementing each other's input, you are less likely to overlook a key learning point. Changes of style and rhythm between trainers will keep the group more concentrated.

BOX 2

A TEAM CONTRACT FOR TRAINERS

We will strive to communicate honestly with each other.

We are committed to attend all trainers' team meetings.

We will strive to be together during the training course as much as possible.

We will have daily assessments of each other's performance.

We will not interrupt each other's sessions.

We will try and contribute constructively during each other's sessions by mentioning at the end of the session any additional learning points that the session co-ordinator may have missed.

Although working with another facilitator can have clear benefits, smooth teamwork will not happen automatically. It is important that you are seen to work together as conflict between trainers will undermine the learning process. You should reach agreement with co-trainers about the content of the training and ensuring that your training styles are complementary.

A good way to promote collaboration is to draw up a team contract (Box 2). This requires all the trainers to make explicit what they require to work effectively and how they expect the partnership to develop.

BOX 3

TRAINER'S CHECKLIST

Have you reached an agreement with co-trainers about the division of roles, training objectives, the programme and training styles?
Have you planned your sessions to include a variety of learning methods?

Are you planning to use several techniques to calm yourself before the session starts?

Have you planned an evaluation for your session or workshop?

Next issue: Group Dynamics and Team Building.