

**Aims:**

To highlight the purposes of relationship building with trainees

To offer guidelines on 'trainer intervention and participation'

To experience the use of 'Icebreaker' games and exercises

**Resources required:**

Training room and small group spaces; flipchart, OHP and pens

- 3.1 'Preparation checklist' OHP transparency
- 3.2 'Welcomings and setting the scene' OHP transparency
- 3.3 'Unbiased Leadership' OHP transparency
- 3.4 'Unbiased Leadership' handout copies
- 3.5 'The Peer Principle' handout copies
- 3.6 'Guidelines for participation' OHP transparency
- 3.7 'Icebreaker activities' handout copies
- 4.1 'Autographs' exercise worksheets

'Learning log' sheets

**1 Background notes**

Building relationships with trainees in the 'here and now' context of a training course is the key mechanism for creating an informal, non-threatening and effective learning environment.



Relationship building has definite purpose and assists in the learning process. It is crucial in the early stages of a course and essential throughout it to maintain a conducive atmosphere. At least one fifth of total course time should be specifically utilised for this important activity through the use of icebreakers, feedback techniques and so on which are largely focused on the *process* of the training group's activity (i.e. simply *being* together as a learning group) rather than on the learning content of the course. A number of icebreaker activities is suggested in 3.7.

Trainers need to plan their events around the fact of the fears and anxieties participants sometimes bring with them. For example:

- Fear of being 'shown up' or not performing well (with possible career consequences)
- Fear of being 'put down' or laughed at by other

participants for making mistakes

- Fear of being 'exposed' by the trainer

The good trainer will counter these fears and anxieties as soon as she meets participants – individually or collectively – for the first time. First impressions *do* count and she will want to

- create a welcoming atmosphere where everyone uses first names – many trainers make a point of welcoming each participant individually where possible
- demonstrate that each person is valued as both an individual and as someone with something of worth to contribute
- empower participants by highlighting and nurturing their own role in the learning process

These are the 'central concerns' of the trainer which lie at the core of the cycle of experiential learning (see OHP transparency 3.3 in chapter two).

Being well prepared for your training course is the most important thing you can do. If you have done both the necessary thinking about your participants and your methods and materials, then you will be free to work with the group process and build effective relationships with your participants.

The 'Preparation checklist' (3.1) outlines the main factors trainers should take into account when preparing the opening phase of a course. This, together with the 'Welcomings and setting the scene' chart (3.2) were presented to a 'Training the Trainers' session we were involved in by a colleague, John Holt from the 'Framework' consultancy group.

This part of John's work with us looked at the two elements, 'welcomings' and 'setting the scene' which form the first phase of experiential learning events. This phase should culminate with an 'expectations and safeguards' session where participants 'opt in' to the concept of self-responsibility and ownership of the training course ('I am responsible for myself' – Houston).

Being responsible for one's own learning immediately puts the participant in the position of *wanting* to fully engage in the learning process and use opportunities for disclosure, feedback and negotiation.

OHP transparency 3.2 illustrates how ice-breaker exercises, combined with the trainer's 'personal style', are used to prepare the group for its learning or 'task' phases. Assuming that your own personal style is sufficiently warm to make participants feel genuinely welcome on the training course, then the use of icebreaker activities and basic information giving should begin to cement your relationship with them.

Of course the precise nature of that relationship will

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depend largely on the *interventions* you make as the trainer in response to emerging issues or challenges from participants. It helps if you are objective and unbiased. 'Unbiased Leadership' (3.3) is from John Heider's 'Tao of Leadership'.

### Unbiased Leadership

*Can you mediate emotional issues without taking sides or picking favourites?*

*Can you breathe freely and remain relaxed even in the presence of passionate fears and desires?*

*Are your own conflicts clarified? Is your own house clean?*

*Can you be gentle with all factions and lead the group without dominating?*

*Can you remain open and receptive, no matter what issues arise?*

*Can you know what is emerging, yet keep your peace while others discover for themselves?*

*Learn to lead in a nourishing manner.*

*Learn to lead without being possessive.*

*Learn to be helpful without taking the credit.*

*Learn to lead without coercion.*

*You can do this if you remain unbiased, clear, and down-to-earth.*

For the duration of the training course, participants become, no matter their real life status, much more like a task group of equals in pursuit of a common goal (see Chapter 6 - Applying Groupwork Skills to Training). This has implications for the kinds of relationship the trainer must build with and between trainees.

Handout 3.5 is taken from 'Experiential Learning - A Framework for Group Skills' by Bryce Taylor which outlines this 'peer principle' and how it is nurtured by 'equality of consideration' and 'equality of opportunity'. It is also reinforced by course safeguards (see Chapter 10) which in effect give the trainer authority to facilitate open, honest, direct and equal relationships for the duration of the training course.

Trainer interventions will be used mainly to re-inforce these principles or when they have been transgressed. We see the trainer's most important task being the management of the group process, particularly the 'peer principle' element; if group process issues are not properly handled, the learning potential of the course will deteriorate for some, if not all participants.

In order to be aware of and intervene in group process issues, the trainer needs the kind of objectivity discussed above. This objectivity is gained in part by a 'stepping back' from the training group while you use all your skills, senses and intuitions to determine what is *actually happening* (rather than what you or anyone else *thinks*

should be happening). Only when you know what is actually happening can you decide whether an intervention is necessary or not.

As well as the issue of when to intervene, there is the question of when to *participate* as a trainer, e.g. in icebreaker sessions, role plays etc. While this may depend to an extent on the particular type of training group you are working with, you should ensure that you are *always* free to be aware of and intervene in the group process.

One of the major benefits of using a co-tutor (the subject of Chapter 16) is that responsibility for these issues can be shared and perceptions of what is 'actually happening' checked out.

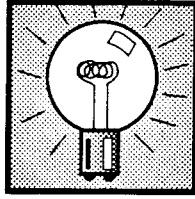
The 'Guidelines for participation' shown below and in 3.6 can provide a useful starting point for discussion on the issue of trainer/trainee participation.

- *always* participate in icebreaker sessions and others which are designed to work with the overall group process, e.g. feedback sessions
- *never* participate in intensive sub-group exercises unless you have a co-tutor who can do any necessary trouble-shooting with the other sub-groups
- *never* ask the group, or individuals within it to do things you would not do yourself
- *never* insist that someone participates in an exercise (unless you have specifically negotiated this)

The golden rule about building effective relationships is to be both *non-judgemental and compassionate* towards participants.

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## 2 Suggestions for using these materials

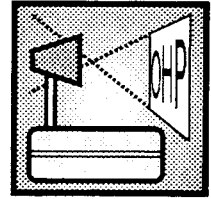


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- 1 Introduce the session and its aims.
- 2 Distribute 'Autographs' worksheets and introduce the exercise. Take an active part in this yourself and try to keep the pace of the session brisk by encouraging people to collect all their autographs as quickly as possible.
- 3 Introductory input/discussion on 'Building Relationships', with the emphasis on the early stages of training courses. Use the background notes (1) and OHP transparencies 3.1 and 3.2.
- 4 Distribute handouts 3.4 and 3.5 and ask pairs or small groups to discuss the implications experiential methods have for relationship building with participants.
- 5 In plenary session elicit the learning points from this exercise.
- 6 Discuss the 'Guidelines for participation', OHP transparency 3.6 flagging the dichotomy that good relationships require a participative trainer while a good course depends on the trainer's ability to step back and assess the 'big picture'.
- 7 Drawing from the 'Icebreaker activities' handout (3.7) invite participants to volunteer to lead and introduce a few short rounds. If you are working with a largish group, create smaller sub-groups for this exercise to maximise opportunities for learning. Now invite a few of those who have a favourite icebreaker from elsewhere to share it with the group.
- 8 Debrief and summarise learning points.
- 9 Distribute 'Learning log'.
- 10 Close the session by reviewing its aims and making reference to future sessions if appropriate.

## 3.1 OHP Transparency

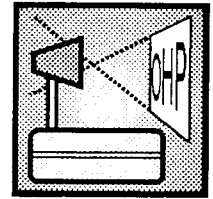
# Preparation checklist



- **Type of Group**                      membership - voluntary? -  
likely anxiety levels -  
expectations - experience -  
level of openness/  
defensiveness
- **Task/Aim of Group**              content or process  
dominated?
- **Style of Group**                      directive leadership -  
process facilitation - self-  
help, etc.
- **Life Expectation  
of Group**                              Including frequency and  
length of meetings

3.2 OHP Transparency

# Welcomings and setting the scene



## A Welcomings

## B Setting the Scene

### Issues

*Anxiety Levels*

*Openness*

*Defensiveness*

*Expectations*



### Methods

ICE BREAKERS &

'PERSONAL STYLE'



### Issues

*Level of Experience/Expertise*

*Clarity of Goals*

*Good Communication Systems*

*Clear Process of Participation and Leadership*



### Methods

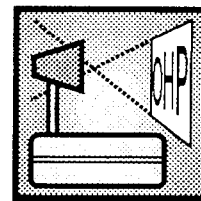
BASIC INFO GIVING &

'PERSONAL STYLE'



**Ground and/or group rules and safety**

## 3.3 OHP Transparency

**'Unbiased Leadership'**

Can you mediate emotional issues without taking sides or picking favourites?

Can you breathe freely and remain relaxed even in the presence of passionate fears and desires?

Are your own conflicts clarified? Is your own house clean?

Can you be gentle with all factions and lead the group without dominating?

Can you remain open and receptive, no matter what issues arise?

Can you know what is emerging, yet keep your peace while others discover for themselves?

Learn to lead in a nourishing manner.

Learn to lead without being possessive.

Learn to be helpful without taking the credit.

Learn to lead without coercion

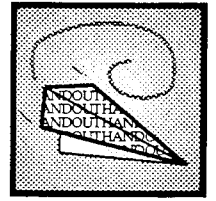
You can do this if you remain unbiased, clear, and down-to-earth.

from *The Tao of Leadership* by John Heider (Wildwood House)

## CHAPTER 11 :

## 3.4 Handout

## 'Unbiased Leadership'

**Unbiased Leadership**

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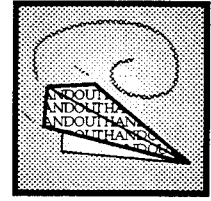
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*from John Heider's 'Tao of Leadership' (Wildwood House Ltd.)*

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**CHAPTER 11 :****3.5 Handout****The Peer Principle****The Peer Principle**

Participants involved in experiential learning stand much more in relation to one another as peers engaged upon a co-operative learning endeavour in which all contributions have potentially equal weight. This involves the principles of equality of consideration and equality of opportunity.

**EQUALITY OF CONSIDERATION**

By equality of consideration is meant that the needs, interests, skills and resources of those entering a course are equally worthy of consideration. In other words, if people are invited to explore some aspect of behaviour, some element of the human condition, then all have a right for consideration of their contribution and comment upon the programme as it develops. Not all contributions will be equally valuable and relevant, but they are equally important to be heard.

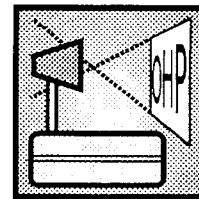
**EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY**

It is equally open to anyone to contribute or intervene in the course process in any way judged to be relevant and appropriate. Again, this should not be taken to imply that all contributions are of equal value in fulfilling the objectives of the courses, not that the skills and resources of individual participants are equally pertinent in respect of meeting the course objectives. Some will have more or less experience, more or less skill to offer, and it is important that these differences are not only recognised but used creatively.

These two principles, however, do mean that equal attention must be given over to a consideration of what different individuals require from their participation upon a course, and that equal opportunity is available to enable them to make their needs known, to exercise their judgement upon events, and to influence the process and direction of the course by using the skills and talents they already possess.

*from 'Experiential Learning – a framework for group skills' by Bryce Taylor (Oasis Communications)*

**• • • Notes**

**3.6 OHP Transparency****Guidelines for participation**

- never participate in intensive sub-group exercises unless you have a co-tutor who can do any necessary trouble-shooting with the other sub-groups
- always participate in icebreaker sessions and others which are designed to work with the overall group process, e.g. feedback sessions
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