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A SHORT NOTE CONTAINING TIPS
FOR TRAINERS RUNNING "LONGER"
WORKSHOPS / TRAININGS.

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Running a two-week workshop may seem a hell of a thing (and you have altitude as well!). I asked Fio how to take pressure off, from her TEFL experience (which if I remember right you have too), and she said "Turn it back to them". It is a great reflex. Never do anything they can do, never answer anything they can answer. Everything then takes longer, so you do not have to worry about filling the time, and learning is often better. I have these dodges, rules and principles that I use now:

* **return serve**: wherever possible, put questions back to people. Often people have experience and ideas which you do not know they have. "Would anyone like to respond to that?" "Does anyone have a different view?"

* **the impersonal defence**: If you find you are put on the defensive, depersonalise it. "Quite a number of practitioners take a different view. They have found that....They take the view that...." "I suppose some people would argue that.....How would you react to that...I suppose another point of view could be that...."

* **time off**: We have discussed this already. Make some private time each day, without people. I sometimes walk away and hide at lunch time. It is a strain to have to talk at lunch as well as facilitate sessions. I even sleep sometimes in some corner at lunch. It has a miraculous effect.

* **breaks in the programme**. Plan enough breaks in. They are liable to get eaten up. But plan them anyway, and defend some against all comers. A day trip that everyone goes on except you, for example. With a two week programme you need at least one completely free day, and probably at least half of another day, maybe two half days, for some entirely different activity, and when you can sleep, watch a video, or whatever; a break that you can look forward to, and which you must preserve for yourself and for those taking part, so that they and you know it is coming.

* **handling difficult people**. This is the one that gets me! Expect that one or two people will be quite difficult. Early on identify those with stamina, commitment and insight, and ask them if they can help those who are being difficult. Often the difficult people turn up trumps. Don't allow yourself to get trapped in staying up very late with people answering challenging questions. If they want to do this, thank them for their enquiries, and either pass them over to others, or postpone discussion, or give them something to read. The latter is a good wheeze because it is positive, and may indeed answer their queries. In desperation you can suggest that whoever it is is free to leave (but that has never worked with me).

* **logistics**. Ensure that someone else is responsible for all logistics, and that they are flexible. You need to be able to concentrate on substance and process. Make sure that you have nothing to do with allowances and claims, and that someone else will handle all that

* **buzzes and groups**. Have lots of buzzes and groups. If you are going to talk for ten minutes, say in advance that when you finish you will ask everyone to discuss with their neighbours, e.g. in threes. While they discuss you have a breather, and they learn. This also makes for active listening. Also, some of the questions which might otherwise come to you will be dealt with in

IDS PRA Reading Room

C: TRAINING AIDS Box

Please Do Not Remove

the groups. Have semi-shambolic seating so that people can have plenary conversations between one another with little eye contact.

* **reflections.** Ask people to reflect on issues and on their experiences. I like the word reflection more and more. "Has anyone any reflections to share on what I have just said/what we have just done/ what happened yesterday afternoon?" They can buzz first, then share, or share direct.

* **optimal unpreparedness.** Dont overprepare. Sure, have things up your sleeve, but remember that in a participatory training mode, things almost always take longer than planned. How long is unforeseeable, so there is no point in worrying. Play it along. Enjoy. Let the programme be flexible. Having a repertoire of things to do gives you confidence and some serenity, and also allows you to let things take their course as you drop things you might have done.

* **learning by talking.** Most people learn more by talking than by listening. So give plenty of opportunity for people to talk together in small groups.

* **cards and the ground for issues.** At some stage, ask people to put their concerns and questions on cards, and then let them sort these on the ground into categories (not the wall, the ground is easier, quicker and more democratic). Ask them to put these together on sheets and stick up. Then variously get groups to tackle the questions rather than you respond.

* **dealing with tension, problems.** If tension develops in the group, stop and take time to let it all out. Let people talk, complain, question, argue...After a time most people want to get on with things, but also you learn a lot and can adjust in the light of points made. Dont take criticisms personally, unless you have made cockup, in which case the best thing is simply and straightforwardly to apologise, publicly embracing error. Usually forgiveness is forthcoming, and the atmosphere clears.

* **do some preparation well in advance.** This gives a feeling of security which is precious, knowing that some things are already sorted out.

* **find out who knows what in the group, and bring in individual contributions** and support as much as possible. People like being called on usually, and are flattered by being asked to contribute; and their contributions are often really good and helpful.

* **dont do for people what they can do for themselves.** For example, they can read and present to one another, in small groups, and there is a lot of learning. Give different overnight readings to members of groups of three, each person having to present to the others the next morning, ending with plenary reflections. And so on and so on.....

* **jokes, wherever possible, built into the culture of the course and group.**