The art of effective training

Providing effective training: the method

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Foreword

It has been almost fifteen years since the Alfred Mozer Foundation (AMS) commenced its political training courses for social democratic parties in Eastern Europe. These “pioneering” activities developed into a well-developed methodology with its own training modules. The courses are based on a bottom up approach and encourage the students to actively participate. This is our manual. The manual is aimed at trainers of the AMS itself, but also at trainers from the countries we work in. By training trainers from the countries in question, we make our programmes sustainable.

Political training provided by a member of the same political family (in our case social democracy) is something different altogether. Even though the students and trainer usually never met and even though they do not share the same nationality, there is a relationship of trust practically from the very beginning. Both share the same political principles and both know politics from the inside. We are in this together. It creates an ideal climate to learn and accept that things can be done in a different way.

All modules are based on many years experience and often include suggestions for practical follow-ups. The modules are not ‘carved in stone’ though and need not be followed slavishly, letter for letter. Trainers are always free to include their own material and follow their own interpretations. Every module can – and indeed should – be adapted to the need of the students.

Chapter 1: Rather the method than the content

We used to think the content of AMS courses was responsible for the success them. However, it became gradually clear to us that it was not the content which made the courses successful, but rather the way it was presented; the methodology was important above everything else.

In essence the method involves:
- considerable emphasis on the ‘bottom-up (rather than a ‘top-down’) approach
- a small amount of theoretical knowledge combined with (a lot of) practical work
- a lot of emphasis on student-contribution. After all, they are most familiar with the political situation on a local level and know what will or will not work in the country or region in question, whereas the trainer cannot be expected to have the same level of expertise as far as the local political situation is concerned.

Especially as a trainer from another country you cannot do much more than explain how successful parties, both in other countries and in other times, tackled problems during periods of electoral success. And even if you are a trainer from the same country as your students, you rely on “knowledge of the past”. You can tell what was successful in the past and what was not, but you can never be sure that this previously successful approach will work here and now. In fact, it is highly probable that it will not (see the section on multicultural training). Every competent teacher or expert can present the same lectures as the AMS, but it is the methodology that makes a difference. On top of all this, we concentrate on what students do well instead of on what goes wrong. We try to expand existing knowledge and skills instead of offering totally new material. Moreover, we believe participation is the essence of a successful training. Our training encourages the student to pursue knowledge actively rather than passively.

This might seem a matter of course, especially to a trainer who is familiar with this kind of method. However, the situation in Eastern Europe was – and to a certain extent still is – rather different. People were used to a ‘top-down’ approach and long-winded theory. During the communist period there was no culture of personal initiative, rather the contrary. At the moment, this is changing rapidly and interactive methods like workshops are quite common. Our trainers and experts, experienced as they may be in their own party, do not insist on being right. Nor are they convinced that they have the single possible answer to the problems and questions the students encounter. Following a brief introduction and sometimes an equally brief discussion on the general political situation, we proceed to the practice of the relevant setting (at a local, regional or national level) as soon as possible. The central issue focuses on what the organisation itself can do rather than what should be changed on a higher or more abstract level. Short open sessions are held to discuss the theory of, say, organising an election campaign. The students are then divided into groups and asked to make suggestions relevant to the actual situation. Very rarely this approach meets some initial resistance. Nevertheless, we have never yet failed firing the group’s enthusiasm eventually (by means of the dreaded ‘top-down’ approach if necessary!). Once the course has been completed, enthusiasm is generally very high. This is not surprising, as the students are ‘seduced’ into participating, which makes them feel involved and taken seriously. As a consequence, the training leads to clear-cut and often very practical (and practicable) results. In essence, we provide the approach and a very general outline and it is the students themselves that provide the suitable solution for their situation by filling in the details according to local circumstances and available resources.

Chapter 2: The training method

This section includes a number of points concerning the training method. Some aspects have already been touched upon in the sections above. This chapter has a more systematic approach.

Five steps

The Foundation's style of training (interactive, theory mixed with practice, bottom-up rather than top-down) relies on five distinct steps.

1. The first step is to base all activities on the students' own experience rather than on abstract theory alone. We do this for two reasons:
    a. we must not assume that we know what will work in a particular country or region and what will not. (See the section on Multicultural Training).
    b. this approach results in a much more active contribution on the part of the students. Furthermore, we can avoid becoming bogged down in theoretical discussions about what is right or wrong, good or bad (as often happens when the topic is politics). This would not be particularly useful to the learning process. Personal experiences cannot be labelled 'right' or 'wrong'.
2. While we do use some theory and theoretical models, the second step involves presenting these in a way that is relevant to the students' own experience. The theory is therefore divided into 'chunks' illustrated by the personal experiences of the group. It is obvious that theory proved to be relevant in this way will be more readily accepted and assimilated. Moreover, it will probably be better applied in practice too.
3. The third step is to take a case study from the students' own experience and to base a practical exercise upon it.
4. The fourth step is to discuss the results of this exercise, providing feedback taking the theory into account. This step includes the most important 'learning moment' and may well present the 'eureka!' of enlightenment.
5. The fifth step is to give the students some 'homework'; something they can undertake in their own situation. This will ensure that the subject matter remains fresh and in use even after the course, whereupon students will be able to apply it more effectively.

This method attempts to create a positive working atmosphere. The thought behind it is that learning by means of a step-by-step approach, expanding upon what the students already know and providing positive stimuli, will be much more successful than other training methods.

Security and predictability

Many people find a training course to be an exciting, perhaps even tense, experience. This is particularly so for the trainers, who will meet a lot of new people. In any event, students will not have met the trainers before, and may not even have met their fellow students. Our courses usually involve very mixed groups in terms of age, education and experience. Frequently, there is also a distinction to be drawn between students who speak English, German or Russian and can therefore communicate with you directly, and those who do not. The proportion of men to women within the group may also be relevant. Many students will be unsure of what to expect and will be inclined to 'keep a low profile', adopting a passive attitude. This does not help to create the right sort of atmosphere for our courses, which rely on the active participation of the students. It is they who must supply the relevant information concerning the political and social circumstances in their country. To ensure everyone's fullest contribution, it is necessary to create an atmosphere of security and predictability. Suggestions for doing so include:

1) If possible, ensure that the full programme for the course is available beforehand, in writing and in the students' own language.
2) Begin the first session with introductions so that everyone meets everyone else.
3) Introduce yourself first of all, and provide some personal details in order to reduce the 'distance' between yourself and your students.

4) If the party chairman or some other dignitary wishes to give an opening speech (a regular occurrence) try to ensure that he keeps it as short as possible!
5) Having finished the introductions, go through the programme with the students and ensure that they are happy with it. This increases predictability and thus the feeling of security. (It does not mean that the programme cannot be amended later on. This is often necessary as the trainer comes across some unexpected aspect).
6) During the training sessions, do not use 'trick questions' to prompt wrong answers.
7) Try to avoid calling upon students who are obviously nervous or shy. They can make their contribution later.
8) If possible, ensure that the first practical exercises or role-playing games are successful. You can do so by making the exercises relatively easy and by inviting the more confident students to take part first.
9) Praise students for things that go well rather than dwelling upon things that go badly. Always list the good points before going on to mention anything that could be improved.

Positive encouragement is better than negative criticism

During a training course - and in everyday life - positive encouragement works much better than negative criticism. People are generally not open to criticism of their own behaviour and ideas and tend not to accept it. If you tell someone that he is doing something wrong, there is an almost automatic reflex whereby he will defend his actions or will state that you are wrong. We sometimes speak of people 'learning from their mistakes'. This is possible, but it is extremely difficult if those mistakes are pointed out by others, and more so if they dwell upon them!

This is probably even more applicable in politics, since competition and competitiveness are so extremely important aspects of political life. Showing weakness (by accepting criticism) is often penalized in politics, while showing strength (by insisting that you are right, come what may) is frequently rewarded. This may not be a pleasant aspect of politics, but it is one which we must keep in mind in our training courses. It helps greatly if the person drawing attention to any mistakes has a good relationship of trust with the person making the mistakes. However, this will not be the case with the trainer and his student. It is therefore advisable to build up a good relationship as quickly as possible, given the limited time and scope available. In doing so, positive encouragement will prove much more effective than negative criticism. If you first say something positive about the student's performance, he or she will be more likely to take heed of any less favourable remarks.

Expanding on existing knowledge is more effective than teaching new material

The training method attempts to build upon the students' existing knowledge and skills wherever possible. This has been shown to be more effective than trying to teach totally new concepts or skills. People will always compare unknown subject matter (whether knowledge or skills) to that which they have already acquired. It is as if there is a sort of 'filter' in people's minds. New information must pass this filter before it can be accepted. Anything which is similar to, or an extension of, that which the student already knows will be quickly absorbed. Anything which is totally unfamiliar or which contradicts the student's existing knowledge runs a very great risk of being rejected or instantly forgotten. For the purposes of training, it is therefore preferable to base all material on the existing situation and to expand on the students' existing knowledge and skills. The training course will never begin with a completely 'clean slate'. When meeting a group for the first time, it may seem difficult to estimate the extent of their existing knowledge. However, it is relatively easy in practice. Ask the students to describe their situation and everyday work, and ask for their personal perceptions. You should then tailor your theoretical and practical lessons to reflect the students' existing knowledge.

Mix theory and practise

Another feature of the AMF method is that short 'chunks' of theory are mixed with intensive practice sessions. This is very important for two reasons. Firstly, it is difficult for people to listen to and to absorb purely abstract material for any length of time. This is particularly true if the material is being presented in a foreign language or - even worse - through a go-between in the form of the interpreter. Usually, people can concentrate fully on what someone is saying for no more than twenty minutes. This is why a speech that takes more than twenty minutes (a practice which should be made illegal!)

will incorporate all sorts of tricks to maintain the attention of the audience. However, in a training course lasting several days, this will not be possible. Furthermore, it would preclude interactivity and thus bring about the very opposite of what we are trying to achieve. For this reason alone it is good to offer the theory in small, easy to absorb, blocks. After each session, the students should be given the opportunity to ask questions, make comments, draw your attention to any inconsistencies with the local situation, etc. This will also help to maintain their involvement.

Secondly, students are better able to absorb and remember new or difficult theory if they can see its practical relevance (even if only in a practice situation). By inserting practical exercises between the blocks of theory, you will greatly increase the students' involvement and participation. Once they realize that they will be called upon to put what they have learned into practice, and will be asked to present the results to the entire group, they are likely to devote much more attention to the theory. They will also feel that they are being taken seriously.

Through a combination of these aspects, the teaching method we use generally meets with considerable enthusiasm on the part of the students. It reinforces the feeling that they are really in a position to do something, rather than the idea that there is still so much to change and to improve.

Chapter 3: multicultural training

Any teacher can tell you that teaching is not an easy job. Training is sometimes even more difficult; it is an art. To achieve full proficiency in this art, the trainer must not only possess adequate (theoretical) knowledge of the subject matter in question, he or she must also have certain specific training skills. This second volume deals with these skills. However, before we proceed to the training skills, we must make some remarks concerning the knowledge we use in political trainings.

The knowledge that we use in political trainings is not based on an exact science and is not always and everywhere applicable. It is not scientific knowledge. The knowledge we use is more often than not, not based on hard facts, but rather on subjective sociological considerations and is to a great extent time- and location-bound. In other words, it is cultural-bound. What is true or applicable in any given cultural environment might well be wrong in the other. For this reason, the knowledge we use in our trainings can be interpreted in more than one way. It is relatively easily to reject, especially when the knowledge is not transferred correctly. This is one of our motives to transfer the knowledge in an interactive way. This approach does not only call for the trainers to act and speak, the student is also actively involved and brings in knowledge, in particular knowledge concerning the (cultural) environment in which the knowledge should be applied.

Teaching students from another country entails additional challenges. A number of practical problems spring to mind, such as differences in language and behaviour. Certain terms that are used by both parties may not have the exactly same meaning. For example, an English speaker will understand the expression ‘free press’ to imply that newspapers operate independently of political parties. In Eastern Europe, ‘free press’ generally means that the government does not control the newspapers. But a newspaper owned or controlled by a party is part of the free press. Matters become even more complex when there are less obvious, implicit differences in standards and values. For example the general attitude to authority (including that within the party itself) differs from country to country. In some countries it is quite normal and even regarded as a political asset of the party to criticise the leader to a certain extent. This is seen a sign of an open and lively party climate. In other countries criticism on the leader is absolutely ‘not done’. The status of man and women may differ greatly, even if the official party policies state otherwise. In some countries the highest value is individual freedom and personal initiative (Anglo-Saxon style societies), in other societies the fate of the collective (Rhineland model) is more important.

There can even be major culture differences between various parts of the same country. Usually, there is a big difference between the culture in the capital and in the provinces. Students at the university have quite a different “mind frame” than workers in a factory. Elderly people often have totally different values and interests than young people. Even from business-company to business-company the culture can differ. In order to ensure the success of a course, it is very important that the trainer is aware of the cultural differences in existence. Throughout the course the trainer must check and double-check that the theoretical knowledge being presented is indeed applicable to the local situation. There are two key considerations in this regard:

1. Are the trainer and the students really discussing the same topic when they are using the same vocabulary?
2. Will the suggested action actually work in the student’s own country/region or environment?

The most serious trap into which the trainer can fall is to believe to be in the possession of the formula to success and to believe that it is his role is to tell the participants how to operate in their political environment. This is not the case. Methods that are effective in one country or in one region in a given period of time are not necessarily successful in another. No matter how well prepared, the trainer will lack certain specific knowledge concerning the situation in which the participant “must” operate. Luckily, the students themselves will have this knowledge. It is the task of the trainer to bring this knowledge to the fore without imposing his own opinion on others.

Working with an interpreter

When training students from another country, you often work with an interpreter. Usually, you will use the English language. Working with an interpreter has some obvious disadvantages.

Firstly, it is rather time-consuming, as everything has to be said twice unless the translation is a simultaneous one (which is seldom the case). You must take the time required into account when drawing up the timetable for your course.

Secondly, much of the direct interaction between you and your students is lost. This severely restricts the spontaneity of your course; you will not be able to make little jokes or react directly and it may be more difficult to create a relaxed and pleasant atmosphere. Even with an interpreter, it will be not always easy to follow what the students are saying to each other. It will be not easy to resolve any disagreements between the students (or between the students and yourself).

On occasion, you may find that the interpreter does not do his work well, or makes his own, uninvited, contribution to the discussion (this may occur when, for example, the interpreter is embarrassed by the student's own contribution). Luckily, this is a very rare occurrence. When mistakes are made, the English speakers of the group will usually correct the interpreter. If you suspect that the interpreter has translated something incorrectly, it is best to take a friendly but firm attitude. You must ensure that you remain in charge of the course. If you cannot follow what the others are saying, you may decide to interrupt and have someone explain. Both the interpreters and the students will appreciate that all interaction must be understood by the trainer.

In any event, it is always wise to develop a good working relation with the interpreters right from the start of the course. Practical tips for doing so include:

- Take the interpreter aside for a private talk prior to the training session. Ensure that he/she knows what you expect.
- Display interest in the interpreter's own situation (work, family circumstances etc.) and do not forget to thank him for his efforts at the end of each day's session (in front of the students).

Chapter 4: Technical and tactical tips for the trainer

The previous chapter considered the training method in depth. This chapter offers a number of tips for putting this method into practice in the most effective manner. There are tips on preparing the course, working with groups within groups, and remarks concerning your dealings with other trainers. We also offer a number of suggestions for ways of getting to know your students better and for holding successful meetings.

Thorough preparation is essential
It is important that every training course is preceded by thorough preparation. This section offers a number of tips to assist in this. 'Thorough' preparation entails a number of aspects, one of which is to learn as much as possible about your students. This will help you match the content of the course to the training requirements and level of the group (a precondition of successful training).
Ways of learning about your students in advance include asking the relevant political party (or other course organizers) for as much detailed information as possible. It may also be possible to contact the students directly, either by telephone or by e-mail. The most important questions to ask are:

- What is the position of the students within their party organization?
- How old are the students?
- Does the group consist of men, women or is it mixed?
- What is their educational background?
- What personal training requirements do they have (besides those which the organization has formulated)?
- Are there any other significant factors, such as a group from a specific region (rural area or large city) with some noteworthy feature (such as high unemployment), or are the students from a special group within the general population?

Besides this specific information concerning the students, it is also important to be well briefed with respect to the political economical and social situation within the country or the region concerned. Unfortunately, it is not always possible to acquire a detailed picture of the group beforehand. In such cases, you should ask the students at the very beginning of the course (e.g. during the introductions) what their expectations are and what they would like to learn during the course. If your planned programme diverges significantly from the students' requirements, you must give serious consideration to amending it - at least in part - there and then.

Once you have gathered as much information about the students as you can, you should then devise the programme for your course. See for guidelines about this the section “Making a programme”.

Where the course is to be given by more than one trainer (which is usually the case) they must meet prior to the course to discuss all aspects of the programme. They are jointly responsible for ensuring that the programme fits within the agreed time limit.

Working with groups within the group
The ideal group size for a training course is between ten and fifteen students. This is a good number, because it enables you to maintain personal contact with each individual, while it also ensures a good cross-section of different opinions and viewpoints, essential if the activities within the group are to be a realistic reflection of those within the party. With up to fifteen people, you can hold a classroom-style session while still having enough time and attention for the individual and his or her contributions.
However, for the purposes of the practical exercises it is often more convenient to divide the group into smaller groups which can then act independently of the others in carrying out their tasks. These smaller groups will usually include between four and seven people. It is essential to appoint one member of each group to present their findings later on. Another way of dividing the main group is to ask the students to discuss points with whoever is sitting nearest to them. This is convenient in the

classroom situation as it avoids the inconvenience of dividing the group up (which is time consuming). It also has the advantage of allowing all students to take an active part.

In practice, the group size will often exceed the ideal of ten to fifteen people. Nevertheless, when using the Alfred Mozer Stichting's teaching method, it would be irresponsible to address a group of more than thirty, since you would then be forced to take the top-down approach whereupon your sessions would take on the character of one-sided lectures. Moreover, large groups make it impossible to carry out the practice exercises successfully. If necessary, you may be able to hold a general session at the beginning and end of each day, splitting the group into smaller groups - each with its own trainer - for the rest of the time.

Make sure you get on with your fellow trainers

In general, the Alfred Mozer Stichting does not send its trainers on 'solo missions'. One or more fellow trainers will usually accompany you, as the training courses tend to be fairly difficult and demanding. In most cases you will be facing a group of people you have never previously met (not even through a direct intake interview with representatives). When training in another country you are often required to communicate indirectly, often through an interpreter, as the students speak a foreign language. They come from a different (cultural) background than your own - one which will be largely unfamiliar to you. There are many other factors which make giving these courses more difficult than might be imagined. In such a situation it is preferable to work with other trainers, whereby there is mutual support and someone to step in and take over if required or desirable. The following will present a number of tips to ensure that your cooperation with another trainer (or possibly more) is successful.

1. You and your colleague are jointly responsible for the smooth running of the course. The first tip is therefore to ensure that you are in full agreement regarding the content. Your contributions to the course should not contradict his. The key to success in this respect is a thorough preparation of the programme *together,* agreeing on a clear division of responsibilities so that both of you know who is supposed to be saying what and when. This will ensure that you do not present fundamentally opposing views. However, this ground rule does not mean that you must be in constant agreement. Your answers to students' questions may reflect differing opinions. After all, just as the trainer is not the fount of all knowledge, neither does he or she have the only correct answer to every question. What is important here is that you should give each other the room to shade the answers to questions in such a way that the students do not immediately think you are having a blazing row! Occasionally, slight differences in viewpoint or in the answer to a question will be extremely useful to students as they help to break through the closed 'top-down' culture.

The most important rule is that a trainer is loyal - and is seen to be loyal - to his fellow trainers. This will serve as an example to the students and will create a climate of security.

2. The second tip in this section is to ensure that tasks and responsibilities are divided appropriately. For example, one trainer may be responsible for the theory lessons, while the other looks after the procedural aspects. During breaks or after the sessions, information concerning the procedure itself can be shared (e.g. which of the students seems on the point of dropping out, who feels uncomfortable, who has not had a turn to speak, etc.)

3. The third tip designed to help you maintain a good relationship with your colleagues is to involve them in the interaction with students, even where the colleague in question is not playing a prominent role during the current section of the course. For example, during your review of a session, before giving your own opinion you should allow your colleague trainer to present his or her observations. This type of input is almost invariably of great value, since you will not have been able to notice everything going on or to attribute the appropriate value to what you have seen. No one person knows the answers to every question that arises. By involving the second trainer in the course session in this way, the transition to the next module (given by that trainer) will be easier and more natural.

4. If there is a clear difference between you and your fellow trainer (he may be older, have more experience, have a more senior position or simply be a man in a male-dominated setting) our next tip is to ensure the trainer to whom a lower status or authority is likely to be attributed is given a clear position within the training process. A very simple 'trick' is to allow this trainer to introduce the very first session. He (or she) will then lead the discussion in the opening session and introduce the other trainer(s). This will serve to establish his position. Of course, the apparent relationship between you must be maintained throughout the course, although there will be opportunities to acknowledge others' greater expertise in certain aspects: "this question is for Peter since he knows a lot more about this subject than I do."

Suggestions for starting off on the right foot: introductions
Every course begins with a round in which you introduce yourself to the students and vice versa. The objective is to create a pleasant working environment. It is very important that you introduce yourself, giving some personal details about yourself. By doing so, you will immediately reduce the distance between you and the students and you will be setting a good example. You will also be contributing to the predictability and security of the situation.
Here we present a few suggestions for this introductory round. The common factor is that they all require the student to leave his or her place. This breaks down the static picture of the trainer at the front of the 'class' and greatly contributes to the interactive atmosphere you wish to create.

There are various ways in which to conduct the introductions. Whichever is adopted, it is important that everyone is brief and concise so that there is enough time to hear from everyone. Everyone should be given a turn to speak: this helps to overcome any shyness and will encourage active participation throughout the course. If you feel that a student is perhaps a little *too* brief in his or her introduction, you can step in and ask questions. You should try to learn as much as possible about the students' backgrounds and their expectations with regard to the course. This information can then be used to tailor your material to fit the students' wishes and requirements. It may be a good idea to treat the introductions as a first 'exercise', relevant to the training programme as a whole. A number of suggestions for this follow.

Suggestion 1: the short interview
Ask the students to introduce themselves by means of a short interview. The group is split into couples. Student A interviews Student B for five minutes or so before changing places. The following questions would be appropriate in this situation:

- Who are you (name and age)?
- Where are you from?
- What do you do for a living and what are your hobbies?
- What do you do in the party?
- What do you expect to learn from this course?

During these interviews, you can take photographs of everyone using an instant (Polaroid) camera. With the photo and the answers given, students can then make an A4-size poster of their interview partner. Once everyone has had a turn, the students are introduced *by their partner* in a short speech of about one minute's duration. You could also ask the students to sum up their interview partner in a short catchy slogan, or to make the poster using symbols or pictograms as well as words. The advantage of this approach is that it is also an initial exercise in presentation: writing short pithy text and making an eye-catching poster. This method of making the introductions can also be applied in many campaigning courses and in general communications and presentation tuition.

Suggestion 2: Picture postcards
Another means of making the introductions is to ask the students to choose their favourite postcard from a selection you have brought with you. The procedure is as follows.
On the table, you lay out twice as many postcards as there are students. These postcards show various pictures, such as balloons, fruit, people of various ages, animals, flowers and abstract patterns. (Ensure

that no card shows a red rose - this would just be inviting a response based on standard social democratic imagery.) Ask each student to select one card that they believe best represents their motivation to be politically active. Each student will then be given one minute to present their thoughts, answering the following questions:

- Who are you?
- Where are you from
- What do you do for a living?
- Why does this card represent your motivation to become politically active?

This method will provide you the trainer with information concerning the themes and images which appeal and which are important to your students. It is therefore an approach which is particularly appropriate in strategy training, where it is important to set priorities. However, it can also be applied in campaign training in which themes, a message and images are brought together.
A significant advantage of this method of introductions is that students find it easier and 'safer' to say something about themselves based on a picture than just 'off the top of their heads'. This is particularly so with people who are taking part in a political training course for the first time. Moreover, this method is somewhat shorter than the interview method described above, which will be an advantage with larger groups. However, there is also a disadvantage in that students do not have any direct contact with each other.

Suggestion 3: ‘coloured' questions
A third possibility for the introductions round is to 'get down to business' straightaway by introducing relevant subject matter. Some students will be inclined to make direct statements about a subject which is particularly important to them. You can prevent this, or steer the discussion in the right direction, by preparing three or four relevant questions beforehand. Each of these questions is written down on a separate card and each card is of a different colour. The questions should be designed to prompt thought and discussion and should be positive in their approach. They should lead to a sort of 'brainstorming' session. Examples include:

- Why are you a member of a youth organization/women's organization/party
- What is your prediction concerning the position of women/young people/ the party in 2010?
- How can you help to improve the position of young people/women/the party?
- Which election promise would persuade you to vote in a certain way?
- What added value can young people/women/ a social democratic party provide for politics in general?

First of all, hold a very brief introductions round in which students state only their name, where they come from and what they do for a living. Next, hand out the cards. Everyone is given a minute to think about their answers. They will then go in search of fellow students with the same colour card. They again introduce themselves to each other in brief (name, home town, job) and discuss the question on the card. The object of the exercise is to take stock of existing answers, not to make or defend choices. All answers are then included on posters that are put on display. One person from each group will briefly describe why these answers were given.
The advantage of this method is that sections of the group get to know each other very thoroughly. The first statements stand in their own right without there being any necessity for discussion. There is no such thing as a 'wrong' answer and there is no requirement to make choices. Furthermore, the method also reveals important background information concerning the students and their motivation for taking part in your course. The method can also provide an opportunity for students to make their opinions known - even the less favourable ones.

Use ‘breathers' to maintain pace and concentration
This section presents a number of tips to ensure that the intensive learning process does not lose its effect through being *too* intensive. Breaks and variety are necessary. The course will inevitably involve much talking and much listening. Students are constantly required to think about new information. To ensure that they have the creative energy necessary to do so, you should arrange a welcome break now and then. The most obvious type of break is the coffee break. However, there are

other types of break which will have the required effect. We might term them 'breathers'. A number are described below.

Breather 1: Street interviews
A first possibility is the street interview. Street interviews are very surprising. Not only can it be very pleasant to spend some time outside the training room itself, 'ordinary' people can provide a fresh approach to the theme under discussion. Send your students out to ask questions in groups. Each group must include an interviewer, a person who records the answers and a 'process controller' to ensure that the interviewer sticks to the job of asking questions. Topics which might be raised include political problems or the image that people have of the party. You should instruct the students *not* to enter into discussion with members of the public. The aim of the street interview is to establish existing views and standpoints, not to influence them. After half an hour 'on the streets', the students will return to the training room. They will then have ten minutes to prepare a short presentation of their most significant findings.

Breather 2: role playing
Another opportunity for a welcome break is a role-playing exercise which can be used to practise just about any political skill. You can recreate a meeting, a press conference or a (street) interview. However, there must be clear instructions beforehand and the roles to be played must be accurately defined. Keep the exercise brief and concentrate on the skill to be practiced. You should intervene if the 'actors' become so enthusiastic in their role that the reality value of the exercise is lost.
The role-playing exercise should be organized as follows. Split the group into two sections. The roles will be assigned to the members of group 1. The main player will prepare the game with the help of a 'second' chosen by himself. You will instruct the rest of group 1. The members of group 2 will act as observers. You should instruct them in particular aspects to look out for. The advantage of a role-playing exercise is that it provides excellent preparation for other exercises, such as the street interviews. It occupies an almost automatic place in any training course dealing with communication.

Breather 3: posting ‘post-its’
During a course, contributions from external experts can be very useful and are sometimes essential. Despite the agreements made beforehand regarding time limits, it may be that the lecture goes on longer than you had planned. You see the students nodding off, while the discussion has yet to take place. There may be one or two enthusiastic participants in the discussion, but most will remain silent. Time for a breather to revive the flagging interest!
Distribute 'post-it' memo pads to all students and ask them to write down the one point from the lecture that they considered to be most important. Stick all the memos on the wall and ask some of the students to arrange them according to theme. You will then be able to see which themes are considered most important and worthy of extra attention in the brief discussion which follows. You may even decide to arrange the discussion in sub-themes.

Social interaction
It is important to maintain “good relations” with your students. Therefore it is good to take part in the social interaction during breaks or after the sessions. Students always appreciate this. It gives them a chance to get maybe some personal advice or address topics not on the agenda of the course but nevertheless interesting to them. It also creates the type of bond between trainer and students which is difficult to establish in the classroom. This social aspect is often an essential part of the training. Obviously you need not be present at all social occasions, which sometimes last till far after midnight. And you also need time for yourself, to relax or prepare for the next session or day. However, appropriate participation of the trainers in social activities will go some way towards compensating for the lack of direct interaction during the course itself.

Chapter 5: Role play and simulation

Role-plays and simulations are tools to help the participants in a training to understand **and** to apply (a piece of) the theory. A role-play simulates a real life situation (as much as possible). Participants are playing a well-designed role in which they have to apply the theory given to them by the trainer or solutions they themselves have brought up. Practising not only helps the participants to fully understand the content and meaning of the theory but also helps them to develop skills to use the theoretical solutions for any given problem in real life situations. Knowing on an abstract level how problems can be dealt with is still quite something different from successfully doing it. Furthermore, role-plays have the big advantage that they function as a means to keep up interactivity in the training. Students are not only asked to passively listen to and absorb a piece of theory, they are also asked to actively apply the theory.

There are two ways to develop a role-play:
The first one is that the trainer prepares a role- play (or role plays) that he can use during the course of the training before it starts. An advantage of this method is that the role-play can be designed in such a way that it helps to clarify the difficult points in the theory and that every role within the play can be fully defined, developed and even written down. A possible disadvantage is that a role-play prepared in advance may prove to be unadjusted to the real life situation in which participants in a given training are operating. Nevertheless, it is always a good idea for a trainer to have a couple of standard role plays in mind or even at hand for every important part of theory that he plans to deal with in the course of the training.

The second way to construct a role-play is to make one together with the participants during the training at the moment a role-play is needed. After having explained the theory, the trainer announces a practice session, in which the theory has to be applied in a simulated real life situation. He asks the students to propose a situation in which they can practice the application of the theory. The advantage is of course that the role-play can be adjusted as close as possible to the real life situation of the participants in the training.

For both situations (prepared or spontaneous role plays) it is important that the role-plays are not too complicated in the sense that they have a lot of different roles and contain a lot of possible developments in various directions. The role-play must not only be as close to the real life situation of the students but also as simple as possible and concentrate on the skill to be practiced. Of course, this adds to the learning value of the role-play. Students often love to participate in role-plays and at times it seems that the more complicated the role plays are the more they like to play them. But training is not about the play or the game and the fun of doing it; training is about learning something or developing a skill. The role-play is merely a tool not a goal in itself.

After having determined the content of the role-play it is extremely important that the trainer instructs the various players (and the rest of the participants) very carefully with respect to what is expected of them. Make sure that there is no misunderstanding concerning the situation the players are in (who are you, where are you, who is the audience, what are the circumstances, who are the other players etc. etc.). This is important, as the players need to know their role to prevent them from acting in an unexpected way that will result in the learning value of the play to be damaged or even totally lost. Usually not all the participants have a role in a role-play. Those who do not have a role will be observers. They are asked to act as an audience and to comment on the way the play has been performed by the various players in the feedback round. Also the observers must be instructed. In particular, ask them to observe with the provided theory in mind. Was the theory applied well? Have the goals the player had set for himself been met? Did the player take the circumstances of the play into account in a proper or good way? Etc. Of course, the feedback will be given in two rounds: what was good/what did you like and what could be done better?
After instruction, the player or players usually need some time for preparation, for instance in a simulated presentation time to prepare the presentation. Or in the event of a simulated negotiation, they have to determine their approach and their target and resistance point. Of course, the players

prepare themselves separately if the play calls for this (in the event of a negotiation for instance). Usually, they also prepare separately from the participants that will act as observers. It is advisable that a trainer checks whether the players are still clear about everything during preparations and he may even lend a helping hand if the deems this necessary. You want the practise session to be a success, not a failure.

During the play, the trainer usually does not intervene. He observes the play (make notes) and only intervenes if things get “out of hand”, for instance, if the players become so enthusiastic that the reality value of the play is lost. Or if the play goes on and on far beyond the point that something more can be learned from it. However, be careful with ending the play before it is finished, because the players tend to become so involved in their role that they do not like to be interrupted before it is. Establishing time limits before the play starts (clearly defined instructions) may help. Also explain that you may deem it necessary to stop the play even if it is not finished because of the abovementioned reasons.

After the play there is a feedback round. The chapter on feedback deals with this.

Chapter 6: instructions

There is a lot of distraction and hubbub in any given group, which leads to ample circumstances where an individual in the group cannot hear or understand what is being said to the group. Some members of the group will talk with each other during lectures and instructions. Some members will drift off. Not all the members of the group hear the same things. Not every member has the same interpretation of what he/she hears. All this is very annoying, but it becomes harmful when you are about to start a practice session or a workshop. These parts of the training require the students to act on their own without the trainer guiding them. In order to achieve the best results (or even results at all) at these times, it is extremely important that the students understand what they are expected to do. Unfortunately, students tend to be even more distracted than usual when instructions are given; the lecture is finished and a workshop or practice session is announced. Students like this; something exiting is going to happen, or at any rate more exiting than merely listening to a lecture by the trainer or an expert. Students are about to become active themselves. Students wake up from their passive attitude. They start to move and talk with each other.

Giving good instructions is an important skill of a trainer. Without clear instructions there is a great risk that practice-sessions, workshops, role-plays etc. fail to give the results required.

The "secrets" of good instructions are:

- make sure that you have the full attention of all participants
- use normal language (no difficult or technical terms)
- use as many examples as possible to make what you say more concrete
- divide your instructions into short parts
- In the event of a role-play or simulation, make sure that there are no misunderstandings with respect to the situation the players are in. Who, what, where, when etc. should be absolutely clear
- Set clear time limits, not only for the practice session itself but also for its specific parts (preparation time, time available for the play itself etc.). However, keep the following in mind. The establishment of strict time limits does not mean that these limits should be strictly upheld. Participants usually need more time than you or they themselves anticipate. Be strict when setting the limits, be gentle when upholding them.
- check whether you heard **and** understood everything correctly after each part
- make and keep contact with the individual that plays a certain role during the instruction of this role
- repeat your instructions (to the extent of overdoing it)
- check again whether everything is still clear during preparations (of role plays etc.) and during workshops (questions may have come up)

Chapter 7: feedback

This manual mentions feedback in various places in relation to other subjects. This chapter will provide a more systematic approach.

Feedback is in order after each practice session in which (a part of) one or more of the participants apply (a part of) the theory and also often after each workshop of which the results are presented to the entire group. During the feedback session the participants and/or the trainer evaluate and discuss the results of the practice session or the workshop in order to determine what went well keeping the theory in mind. Provide suggestions for improvement whenever something went wrong.

Positive

As we mentioned in the chapter concerning the training method, we strongly believe that people learn better, quicker and more from positive encouragement than from negative criticism. Criticism often provokes a defensive attitude and diminishes the change that suggestions to do things in a different (and better) way are accepted. As it is rare that everything is done in the proper way (with regard to the theory), suggestions for improvement must be made. In order to achieve the right frame of mind and to make the participant more readily accept suggestions for improvement, the feedback session should start with a positive round. “What was good/ what did you like?” is the opening question the trainer asks the participants in the role of observer. This is not merely a “trick” to create room for the acceptance of suggestions for improvement. This positive round has value in itself. It is not only important for the people who performed to know what was good and more important to understand why it was good, it is also important for the other participants who can learn a lot from a successful practice session. A positive round also creates a safe learning climate for the course of the training. It will teach all participants that there is no danger in acting in a practice session and that the focus will not be on their weak points only. In some cases you may notice that it is not easy for the participants to abstain from criticism in the first round and to stick to positive points only. This is especially true at the start of a training period with participants who have never encountered this approach before. However, usually they catch on to the system very quickly.

What can be improved?

A round in which suggestions for improvement are given follows the positive one: “what can be improved?” Similarly to the first round, this round mainly focuses on what can be improved in relation to the theory. Of course, suggestions for improvement that are not related to the theory are welcome, but the application of the theory is the central theme. It goes without saying that the trainer must try to avoid an overall negative climate.

In both rounds it is important that the trainer ensures that comments (both by the observers and the trainer) are not only uttered, but also explained and illustrated. The mere remark ”I did not like the way he tried to convince the audience” is not sufficient. Why did the observer not like the approach of the “performer”? Was it too strong, too soft, did he/she not use common language? Etc. The trainer must explore the remark made: “could you please elaborate a bit on why you did not like …”. This is a requisite to understand the remark, to test its value and to accept or reject it.

In both rounds (the positive and improvement ones) the trainer leads the discussion. Usually the trainer gives his/hers opinion as the final one. If everything has already been said, the trainer simply summarizes what has been stated, emphasizing what he sees as the main learning points in relation to the theory.

Differences of opinion between observers or observers and “performer(s)” can occur. Sometimes one observer likes a certain aspect of the performance and another does not. Or one observer lists something as positive, while another one feels that the same example needs improvement. As long as there is no direct contradiction to the theory dealt with, different opinions can coexist without any problems. Sometimes a point may not only be productive and therefore good but may entail a counterproductive aspect also. For this reason it can be listed as something to improve. The trainer should try to avoid or stop discussions about right or wrong or good or bad in moral or ethical terms. Keep the feedback as pragmatic as possible.

However, before proceeding to the rounds of positive points and points of improvement, the trainer should allow the acting participants to make a comment first. The purpose of this is to give the performers an opportunity to let go of the tension that might have built up during the "performance" and functions as a safety valve when things went really bad. It is preferable that a participant who did not perform well has the chance to say so himself than that others deliver this message. After giving some comfort and reassurance ("it was a very difficult task you had"), the trainer can then give a positive twist to the situation by continuing with the statement "let's see what we can learn from this".

At this point you ask the players to reveal (and explain) the goal they aimed for. For instance, convincing a part of the audience or to achieve a specific result in negotiations. Of course, achieving this goal (or not achieving it) and the reasons behind it in particular are the main focus points of the feedback session.

As stated above, the feedback session will as a rule be divided in two rounds of comments (what was good, what can be improved?). As a trainer, it is up to you to make sure that these two rounds are clearly distinct. This often proves to be difficult for the participants/observers, in particular at the beginning of a training course. Politicians (even young and recent politicians) are "programmed" to criticise and not to give praise. If the observers start with criticism in the first round, two things are likely to happen. In the first place, the players will start defending themselves (and they will therefore lose the right frame of mind to accept suggestions to improve their performance) and in the second place it is likely that the entire feedback concentrates on negative points. This does not contribute to a safe and positive climate.

Of course, the statements of observers and trainer during both rounds of feedback should be as clear as possible in order to achieve as much learning value as possible. This means that the feedback has to be:

- Unambiguous (not "I like the careful way you handled this but it was a bit slow".)
- Motivated, if possible ("I like your approach because…")
- As specific as possible ("I like your approach and in particular this or that")
- Honest/truthful (do not say something was good if you do not feel so, people usually hear this or see through it)

If the participants/observers do not fully abide by these rules, the trainer should correct this by asking more detailed questions in a friendly manner ("could you explain why you liked this or that?").

Chapter 8: establishing an training programme

A good training starts with drawing up a good programme. A good programme helps the trainer to create a predictable and safe climate, helps to keep up interactivity during the training and enables both trainer and students to work as effective as possible within the given time limits, tackling as many subjects as possible. The following rules are given for the creation of a good programme:

In general
First of all, the trainer should know as much as possible concerning the participants before he or she can tailor a programme to the group of participants of the training in question. The absolute minimum of information required is:

- How many participants are to be expected? (the ideal size of a group is between 10 and 15 participants, but often there are more)
- What is the age of the participants?
- The proportion of men to women.
- The level of education.
- The position within their organisation (if relevant, which it usually is).
- Where do they come from (city/region/village/rural area/industrialized area etc.)?

It would be an asset if the following information were also available:

- The experience of the participants with previous trainings.
- The expectations of the participants with respect to the training (what do they want to learn?).

This information can also be obtained during the introduction at the start of the programme.

Usually, the (local) organisers of the training collect all this information, but the trainer must make sure that it also reaches him/her before he/she starts creating a programme.

Secondly, the organizers have a goal for the training. For instance, to improve the level of their (local) campaign teams, to develop a strategy for the next election campaign or to improve the presentation skills of their candidates. Of course, the trainer must be aware of this goal also so that he can model the programme accordingly. The participants have to know this target also. This is the reason they follow the training for in the first place.
Furthermore, there may be no misunderstandings concerning the average time available for the training itself. This may seem obvious, however it is not always so. Sometimes travelling time (not to the country but within the country itself) is a lot more than expected not only for the trainer but also for the participants. As a consequence, you may loose half a day even before you begin. Sometimes representatives of the organising party want to make an opening speech, expect the trainers to pay them a visit or pay a visit to the training in person and expect a separate meeting with trainers and party officials without the participants. It may even occur that the organisers insist on spending some time organising a sightseeing tour for the trainers and/or participants. In this case, make sure (with the aid of the AMF office) that you are prepared and can take it into account when drawing up your programme. Try to make clear agreements concerning the time to spend on these events, if they cannot be avoided.

Furthermore, the trainer should have at least a good general idea concerning the country in which the training will take place. What are the main features of the country (history, economic development, political situation, specific problems (a large unemployment rate, minorities or anything similar)? If a trainer from the same country as where the training takes place conducts it, he should be informed with respect to the specifics of the region in question. The general information concerning a country as a whole is usually available through the office of the Alfred Mozer Stichting. Other information must be collected through the (local) organisers.

The programme itself
The programme itself should contain at least the following elements:

- The (main) topic or goal of the course

- The venue and dates
- The name of the trainers
- The topic of each module or session
- If possible, a very short description (two, three sentences) of the content of each topic and how the topic relates to the goal of the training
- A detailed schedule (timetable with clear start and finish times for each module or session and the exact location of each session including the location of breaks and meals)
- The names of possible experts who will give an introduction and some background information about them
- If possible, information concerning travel arrangements for the participants (the (local) organisers can also provide this information separately

When you draw up a timetable make sure that you take the time required for feedback into account as well as the time required for question and answer (Q&A) sessions.

The programme should be available (in the native language of the participants of the course) for the participants before or when the training commences.

Furthermore, a good programme should contain the following features
- Theory is necessary, but keep it Short and Simple
- Alternate between theory and practise to keep it lively and interesting
- If possible, take turns with various lecturers (trainers and experts)
- The training should appeal to the participants
- Use examples from real life
- Bring examples of your own work (the AMF office can help)

Of course, a programme must be developed with the intention to go through the entire programme. Both trainer and participants have to cooperate to achieve this. At the start of the training the trainer goes through the programme together with the participants in order to check whether the participants agree with the programme proposed. If so (and this is usually the case) you can regard the programme as a kind of contract between the trainers and participants. You will perform the job at hand together as well as possible following the timetable agreed upon. The trainer can ask the students for their cooperation in this and the students can ask the trainer to organise the work in such a way that the schedules are met. However, a programme is not a rigid straitjacket. It is a calculated guess the trainer made before he and the participants met. If it becomes clear in the course of the training that the timetable cannot be maintained for whatever reason, it is usually not a serious problem. As long as the timetable is altered in dialogue with the participants. The trainer should not change the programme secretly. He should explain why he proposes to change the programme and take possible comments regarding the proposed changes seriously.

Practise
At the end of training for trainers, it is a good exercise to ask the participants (future trainers) to develop a fully written out training programme for their first (imaginary) training. Ask them to make a programme for a relatively simple training (for instance a basic campaign training) for a well-defined group within their own organisation (for instance, local campaign teams). They have to determine the goal of the training and then think of theoretical modules and practice sessions. Of course, they are divided into smaller working groups. Ask them to present their programme explaining the relation between the programme and their goal. Of course, this is followed by feedback.

Chapter 9: problems for the trainer: FAQ's

A lot of starting trainers fear to end up in a situation they cannot cope with; for example to encounter participants that do not accept the authority of the trainer, or participants that simply do not like to attend the training course and are annoying and making trouble; or he fears to have a black-out or to be asked a question to which he/she has no answer. What to do then? During the years we received a series of questions concerning this kind of situations. We will list them below together with the answers to these questions. However, first we would like to give a suggestion: it is usually a good idea to organise a workshop at the end of a training course for trainers. Here the participants (in small groups) are asked to sum up their fears as starting trainers and then to deal with them (if necessary completed with the list of questions and answers given below) in a plenary session. Everything in line with the method recommended in this manual: connect the theory with the participants' own experience. Naturally, this takes place at the end of a training course for trainers. Participants usually like this part of the training, as it provides them with practical tips and offers the trainer possibilities to assign "home-work".

The most frequently asked questions (and their answers) are:

What should a trainer do when some or more of the participants do not behave well (they are not interested, tired, display a lack of discipline, are annoying and sabotaging the course)?

First of all, ask yourself what the reason for this behaviour is. Are the participants themselves to blame or rather the programme or even the way the trainer operates? Often participants do not behave well or show lack of interest or involvement when the programme is not well balanced; there are too many theoretical parts or they are too long, there are too many plenary sessions or they are too long, there are insufficient workshops; to sum up, the training is boring. If the problem is only a mild form of "improper behaviour" the solution is often relatively simple:

- a break (for example, a coffee or tea break)
- a breather or something else that is "fun" to do
- finish the theoretical part as quickly as possible and proceed with a workshop or practice session

Of course, many of these problems can be prevented by making the programme as varied as possible. Ensure that the theoretical parts do not last longer than half an hour and mix them with practice sessions and workshops where the participants can be active themselves. Vary with lecturers or experts if they are included in the training and make clear-cut deals with them with respect to the length of their contribution.

Of course, it may be possible that the participants themselves cause the problem, if the problems do not arise from the abovementioned causes. Sometimes (however seldomly) the entire group may be involved, sometimes only part of the group. If you are concerned with the entire group and the abovementioned tips do not work, you have to bring the problem out in the open and make the situation discussable. This must be done in a neutral way; not in an offensive one ("Why are you so annoying?") of defensive one ("What is wrong with the programme or what is wrong with the trainer?"). It is preferable to phrase the question neutrally: "I have the impression that the way things are developing is not what you expected or that it is not interesting for you. Can you tell me whether this is correct?". Nine out of ten times the result is an open discussion resulting in a couple of suggestions for changes or improvement, which the trainer can use to his (and the participants') advantage. The mere fact that the not very pleasant situation is made discussable usually brings relief and lifts much of the tension. After this discussion, it is often advisable to insert a (short) break. This will allow everybody to get rid of the last tensions and the trainer (or preferably the trainers) can use this time to adjust the programme, if this is possible and required.

If the problems are caused by a part of the group or even an individual participant, usually the approach must be a different one depending on the nature of the problem. Apparently, a part or the majority of the participants is satisfied with the development of the training course and only a part or an individual is not. If the trainer has the impression that the participants that are not satisfied or happy and behave accordingly have serious problems and are not just behaving improperly, then the approach to discuss matters as suggested above can be applied. A personal conversation between the people in question and the trainer can take place outside of the course during a break, if it concerns only a small part of the group or an individual.

If there is no serious cause for the improper behaviour, another approach is called for. At the basis of this approach lies the fact that those who show improper behaviour are not only a problem for the trainer but also for the other participants. They are doing their best, they wish to learn something and are best served by a pleasant atmosphere. The trainer must try to deal with the troublemakers in alliance with those participants who want to cooperate. Usually this means that the trainer starts with calm attempts to correct without aiming for a direct confrontation. He will try to reinstate his authority in a friendly way. If these friendly attempts to improve matters have a positive result, all the better. If they do not, the other participants will start displaying irritation concerning the improper behaviour. Now it is time to either directly confront the disturbing factors and to demand an explanation for their behaviour, or to approach them indirectly by addressing the whole group concerning the lack of discipline. Usually, the trainer will receive support from those who want to learn from the training, as long as the timing is right and the trainer avoids the question "who is boss here?" as long as possible. A great risk of this last question is that even willing participants will turn away from the conflict or even support their "attacked" fellow participants. Every pupil likes making fun of an authoritarian teacher, whether the teacher is right or not.

If a group or a majority within the group simply does not want to behave, there is only one solution: stop the training. Training is about the participants, not about the trainer. If the participants simply do not want to work, nothing helps. Luckily, this very seldomly happens. Our kind of trainings usually involves people who follow it voluntarily and are looking forward to learn something.

What if the participants are older, more experienced or have a higher status than the trainer?
The importance of age, experience or status differs from country to country. But in general this is something to reckon with in every country.

In the first place, it should of course be avoided that a couple of trainers in their twenties have to deal with a group of participants in their forties, for example. As a rule, we send two trainers, preferably an older, more experienced trainer together with a younger one. Furthermore, we make sure that the younger trainer gets a clear position in the training (for instance, by letting him/her handle the opening session).

In the second place, the most important question is of course whether the trainer (young as he/she might be) can teach the participants something. Has the trainer some knowledge, can he provide for some kind of technique or approach that can help the participants in their activities (whatever they are) and are the participants not already familiar with or even master these techniques or approaches. If the trainer can add nothing to the training, it should not take place. However, this is rarely the case. Not only because the trainer usually has a quality that most of the participants do not have, even if he/she has a lack of theoretical or practical knowledge with respect to a subject: the trainer knows something about the process of training. And this knowledge enables the trainer to create a situation in which the participants can learn something, if not from the trainer, then from each other. Of course, the trainer should always take the abovementioned circumstances into account: older participants, more experienced participants, participants with higher social status etc. The trainer should acknowledge the experience and expertise of the participants and take advantage of them. Invite your participants to share their experiences with the group. Bring all the experience and expertise of the participants in the open and discuss this in a plenary discussion. Do not give your own opinion first, and even consider not giving it at all (and restrict yourself to summarise what has been said). When a group of participants has a lot of experience and expertise, the trainer should rather act as a manager of the process than as an expert who is distributing profound knowledge. When you have one very experienced participant in a group with little experience, the trainer should consider giving the more experienced participant a special role. Acknowledge the expertise of the experienced participant, ask him/her to settle for a restricted role in favour of the participants that still have much to learn and let the experienced participant fulfil a special role; ask him/her for instance for separate comments at the end of each feedback session.

What if the participants and trainer have different opinions?
Usually, there is no absolute truth in our kind of business (trainings for political parties). The only thing that might be true is that a democratic political system is a better one than a non-democratic system. However, the answer to the question how a democratic system can be best designed largely depends on time and place. The trainer can tell the participants about models and the ways they have been used in other countries with a long democratic tradition. They can tell how politicians operate in those countries and what is or was successful and what was not. But this does not mean that this or that recipe also works in another country. Of course, a good trainer gives arguments for and defends the theories he/she tries to teach the students, but the trainer never imposes a solution. The trainer leaves space for the autonomy of the participant, without renouncing his/her own opinion. This is not merely a clever technique to avoid conflicts between the participants and trainer, it reflects reality. Usually, there is more than one acceptable solution to any complicated problem in society.

What if there are great level differences (experience, knowledge) within the group?
The solution depends upon the division between the experienced and non-experienced participants. When the more inexperienced participants greatly outnumber the experienced ones, the latter are asked to give the inexperienced ones some room. It often helps to give the more experienced participants a special place or role in the training. Ask them to hold themselves back in practice sessions or ask them to help the more inexperienced participants. Or (if there are only one or two) give them an explicit role as expert by asking for their opinion as experts after each practice session. Recognizing (in public) their greater experience and expertise usually creates room for self-restriction in favour of the inexperienced participants.
If they are more or less equally divided, it may be advisable to divide the participants in two groups and to give the more experienced group a more difficult assignment. The inexperienced group can still learn much by observing and commenting on the “performance” of the more experienced group. When there are more experienced than inexperienced participants, the trainer should ask the more experienced participants to take the inexperienced ones into account. The trainer can even consider linking an experienced participant as a kind of “coach” to an inexperienced one. However, this usually comes about in a more or less “natural” way.
Of course, it is preferable that level of the participants is more or less equal. This can be best achieved by asking the (local) organisers to take the necessity of equal levels into account when they select the participants.

What if the participants have a much lower level than expected?
This may occur at times. Usually, it will become clear at the beginning of a training period during the introductory round; after the other questions the trainer will ask the participants for their experiences up until now with respect to the subjects the training deals with and what the participants expect to learn during the course. If the level is lower than expected (or suggested by the local organisers), only one course can be taken, i.e. adapt the training to the level of the participants. Go down a few steps, make theory/sessions shorter and simpler. Put in more pragmatic practice sessions. As a consequence, it may occur that the scheduled programme cannot be completed. This is a pity, but it is always better to conclude half of the programme with success, than to follow a complete programme where the participants learnt little or nothing. The level of the participants is always a better measure than the expectation of the trainer.

How to make sure the training starts and stays interactive?
The main effort must be made before the training starts: when the trainer draws up the programme. He has to remember the following requirements when drawing up the programme:
- short pieces of theory

- alternate these with lots of workshops and practice sessions, in which the participants must be active
- if possible, schedule various experts and/or trainers
- carefully plan breaks and breathers

During the course of the training the trainers have to keep a close watch on the participants to see whether they stay alert and active. If the groups “slips away” (something that will inevitably happen, usually after lunch during the second day in a three days course), the trainer should take steps depending on the situation: call for a break, start a practice session or workshop as soon as possible or do something else which ends the passive situation and which “forces” the participants to become active.

What is the difference between a teacher and a trainer?
A teacher transfers knowledge (and sometimes skills) and then checks (or let somebody else check) whether or not the student can reproduce that knowledge in a way the teacher feels is right. A trainer transfers knowledge also, but the emphasis lies on the transfer of skills to apply the theory in practice. Moreover, the trainer respects the autonomy of the participant. This means that the participant decides what he/she accepts of the theory and skills the trainer offers. Teaching focuses on material to learn, whereas training focuses on the participant. The relationship between teacher and pupil on the one hand and the relation between participant and trainer are completely different or should be.

What if the trainer does not know the answer to a question or a problem?
First of all, be honest and admit that you do not know the answer. If you do not, the participants may very well notice this and then you will be even worse off. A trainer cannot be expected to provide an answer to every question and problem, especially when the question deals with a (possibly complicated) situation in a different country or in a different part of the country he comes from. Secondly, the trainer and participants can try to find an answer together. This can be achieved in various ways; at a plenary level by means of a brainstorm session, which the trainer can start by asking the participants what they would do in the situation in question, or even by making the question the subject of a special workshop, in which the participants try to deal with the question in little workgroups. There is a great chance that the trainer can put together the useful elements from the reports of the different workshops and construct an applicable answer in this way.