Moving from teacher to trainer (MTT1)

Resource 2: Building relationships with audiences

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**Key Point: Being a good trainer is not based on any scientific formula. Neither is it ad-hoc or random.**

Standing in front of an audience for the first time may be daunting. You may be feeling apprehensive about addressing a potentially mixed audience. These people may have come a long way, may have left behind classes of eager pupils, may even not want to be there, and may be expecting the trainer to perform; to give them answers. They may even want to take the trainer to task for the ills of the world – or at least the perceived shortcomings of, for example, Ofsted, the Local Authority, their headteacher, their colleagues.

**Session activity 1**

Think about a number of sessions that you have attended over the years. In pairs, come up with five bullet points describing how good trainers behaved.

The following points give some advice for mentally preparing for a session (you may wish to add to this list):

1. First of all, don’t apologise for being there. Try to appear quietly confident. Don’t feel you have to justify why you are there or say ‘I’m only a teacher… I’m sure you already do this better… I’m sure you’ve all heard this before.’ Think about how you would feel if you were a delegate and the trainer said these things. Would it inspire confidence?
2. Think in advance how you will set the right tone. How can you be pleasantly authoritative and reassuring whilst making delegates feel that you have a real understanding of their needs and expertise and their talents?
3. Remember that you are working with adults. This may seem like stating the obvious but it is easy – and we all do it – to fall back into the role of school teacher. Particularly when we feel under-prepared, that things have suddenly got tough, or that we are somehow not reading this audience correctly!

Widen this discussion to talk about features of effective trainers’ behaviour in establishing relationships with audiences. Audiences like to know that the trainer is in control without overtly controlling. You may find the following points a useful stimulus for discussion.

* Don’t spend much time, if any, on autobiographical details. This can be provided in advance, if necessary.
* Be judicious in your use of anecdote.
* Maintain eye-contact with delegates.
* Give a brief outline of how the session will develop.
* If you are working with a smallish group (12 or less) get them to introduce themselves. Could you use a language ‘game’ to do this?
* Try to remember their names.
* If you are working with a large group, the introductions can be time-consuming but you could ask them just to say their name and where they come from as they ask questions.
* The layout of the room will be very important in all of this (we refer to this in Section 4).
* Think about how you stimulate a situation or work through a teaching activity within the first 5–10 minutes of the session where they can work/ discuss in pairs or groups of three.
* Think carefully about how you will manage the feedback from these sessions of pair work. Verbal or flipchart? Set and stick to a brief time limit, otherwise the rest of the session may go awry. Does all pair work need feedback?
* When planning think carefully about the balance between trainer input, whole-group discussion, pair work/small group discussion.
* How will you ensure that discussions are reflective and analytical rather than simply descriptive? Give some key pointers/questions even for small bursts of discussion.
* Keeping the session on track will help build a sense of trust with the audience.
* When planning practical activities think carefully about what may or may not be suitable for adult audiences. There are examples in Section 5.
* Take great care not to put anyone in a potentially embarrassing situation either during an activity or linguistically. Doing activities in small groups or pairs is often a straightforward way of alleviating problems of language proficiency.
* Don’t be frightened of asking participants to indicate if they have very little French, German or Spanish. Experience tells us that they do not mind acknowledging this – indeed they often want to ‘confess’ but they do mind being put on the spot! You can then carefully set up group or pair activities to suit their needs and to ensure that they do not feel alienated, excluded or stressed.
* It is important to distinguish between ‘suspension of disbelief’ activities (i.e. those parts of the session in which it is clear that you are acting out the role of teacher and in which participants become the class) and treating adults as children. The first is part of effective training, the latter will only be seen as patronising.

All of the above should lead to creating an atmosphere of trust in which participants feel that they are being challenged in a reassuringly positive way, that the trainer is aware of their individual needs and that they are actually working through activities that are enjoyable and meaningful initially for themselves and ultimately for their learners.