

# EDUCATION METHODS



RESOURCES

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# EDUCATION METHODS

## INTRODUCTION

Trade Union education is not like going back to school: it is based on the belief that we should build on the ideas and experiences of members by working collectively, in small groups, to find solutions to our problems at work and in the Union. People learn by "doing" - not by sitting still and listening. So we use active methods of learning where everyone is encouraged to take part.

## Aims

Trade Union education should help members and stewards to:

- build confidence
- develop skills
- understand key trade union issues and arguments

## YOUR JOB

As a discussion leader your role is not that of an "expert", there to give out knowledge. Your job is to help trade unionists to talk over issues important to them by:

- setting the aims of the session
- providing activities to work from
- structuring the discussion and ensuring time limits are observed
- providing the necessary background information
- setting up small discussion groups
- making sure groups do not wander off the point
- encouraging everyone to participate
- taking the reports from groups
- helping the students come to a conclusion and prepare a plan of action for the future
- making sure the aims of the session are met

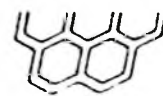
You will need to set a friendly and informal tone on the course from the outset. More people will feel able to contribute if the atmosphere is relaxed. Get away from the old "school room" style of education that will have been the last experience of learning most trade unionists will have had.

## FACILITIES

You will need to arrange for:

- A room, or rooms, big enough for groups to work comfortably. Think about the quality of:
  - \* heating
  - \* ventilation
  - \* lighting
  - \* acoustics
  - \* cleanliness
- Tables and chairs - make sure there's enough and they are easy to move around
- Ashtrays and waste bins
- Stationery - pens, paper, felt pens, flip charts
- Useful information - posters for the wall if appropriate, background resources to help students with problem solving
- Toilets close by
- Refreshments if possible, or find out how they can be most easily obtained
- Audio visual equipment if you want to show a video or cine film. Make sure the equipment provided matches your film
- Publicity to advertise the course in advance
- Materials to be used. Are they available:
  - \* from the Union?
  - \* from the TUC?
  - \* will you have to prepare your own? (If so you will need access to a typewriter and photo-copier).

The following pages in the Resource Book will give you some other useful ideas about preparing, writing materials for and running education sessions locally.



## AIMS

Meetings, discussions, courses, all types of trade union education work have **Aims**

If you are clear about what your aims are, then your education work will be improved and it will be more effective.

Being clear about aims means:

- you will have a better idea of what is relevant
- you will be clearer about what you should do
- you will know what the other people involved in your session will get out of the work
- you will have a clear set of goals or targets against which you can judge how well the session went.

## WRITING AIMS

- aims should be written for the participant - they should clearly say how the session will help them
- aims should include the skills to be developed
- aims can also include changes in a person's attitudes or knowledge

## **EXAMPLES OF AIMS**

### **Your responsibilities as a union rep**

To help you:

- know your responsibilities as a union rep
- look at how you should carry out these responsibilities
- make better notes

### **Your pay slip**

#### **Aims**

To help you:

- be clear about how pay and deductions are worked out
- develop some skills in working with figures

### **Women at work**

#### **Aims**

To help you:

- find out more about the problems women face at work
- identify priorities for action.

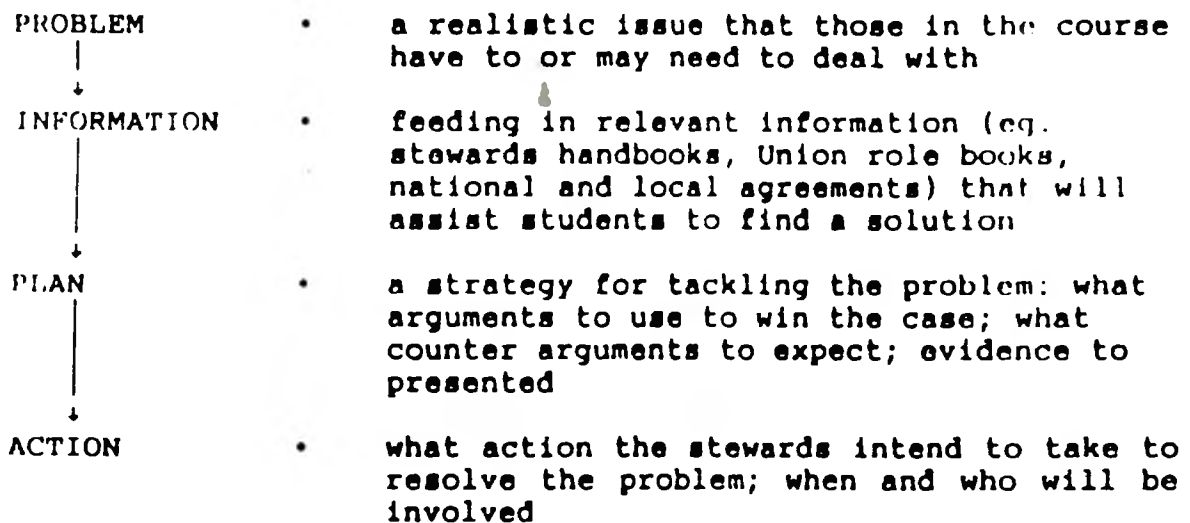
## STRUCTURING A SESSION

### The TUC Plan

If it is to be useful trade union education must reflect the job experiences and lives of those people taking part. There is no text book ideal solution to the problems stewards and members face. Trade union education aims to help them look carefully at their own real life problems and find solutions to them that will be acceptable to both members at work and people in the local community.

Discussions in small groups enables stewards to raise problems they come up against and talk them through with others, who will have their own experiences and ideas to offer.

The TUC build this method into all their courses. They call it P.I.P.A. This stands for:



## LEARNING BY DOING

We all learn more easily when we're doing something rather than being told how to do it by someone else. In trade union education this principle is applied through the idea of ACTIVITIES.

The basic structure of any education session centres on the activity itself:

- how it is introduced
- how it is carried out
- how the lessons learned are summarised and re-enforced

INTRODUCTION



ACTIVITY



SUMMARY

This forms the basic framework upon which trade union education is based.

On the next page is an outline of these three main parts of an educational session, and some things you should think about in a session.

## INTRODUCTION

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- Links ..... How does this session fit in with previous parts of the course, or with participants' union or workplace experience?
- Aims ..... What will the participants learn?  
How will the activity help them?
- Task ..... What is the activity?  
What materials will be used?  
How long will the activity take?  
How will people be divided into groups?

## ACTIVITY

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- Group Work ... Do groups understand the task?  
When should you join the groups, when should you leave them alone?
- Role play .... Do people understand the task?  
What role do you play?

## SUMMARY

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- Reports ..... How should groups report the activity?
- Summary ..... How should key points be summarised?
- Reinforcement. How do these points fit into the rest of the  
and course?  
consolidation
- Links ..... How does this session lead on to the rest of the  
course or back into participants' union or  
workplace activity?

## Planning and running your own session



### checklist

#### Planning

Careful planning is very important. Points to think about include:

- who is the session aimed at?
- what will the session be about?
- where and when will you hold it?
- how will you get people along to it?
- what do you want people to get out of the session?
- what will you be asking people to do?
- what information and materials will you need?
- how much time do you have? How will you divide it up?
- how are you going to structure the discussion to make sure it reaches a useful conclusion?
- how will you divide the group up and who will do what?

#### Running the Session

##### Getting it started

- explain what the aims of the session are and what you hope people will get out of it
- briefly introduce yourself and ask others to do so
- explain that you want to use the session to make links with people's experiences and problems
- get people involved in discussions with each other as soon as you can

### Getting the work set up

- if you're splitting people into groups think about how to do it and explain why you're doing it
- when you're setting the task, make sure:
  - \* its manageable in the time
  - \* it relates to people's experiences
  - \* it will help them to solve their problems
  - \* the task and timing are clear
- don't overload people with information
- keep an eye and ear on what's happening in the groups

### Leading a discussion

- think about how to take group reports
- encourage as many people as possible to join in
- don't talk too much or dominate: remember you're not a lecturer, you're there to encourage stewards to contribute to the discussion
- help discussion along by throwing questions back to the group
- if the discussion wanders, help to bring it back to the issue in question

### Summing up

- in discussion jot down points you want to pick up
- don't gloss over differences of opinion
- summarise the points that have been raised
- outline any future action the group have proposed as a result of the session

## **Using small groups**

There are a number of good reasons for using small groups as a way of resolving problems and discussing issues in trade union education.

### **EVERYONE TAKES PART**

In a group of three or four everybody can play an active part in a discussion. Those who are quiet or reticent will feel less inhibited about contributing their ideas and opinions - it is also easier for a small group to control especially boisterous or domineering people! Finding solutions to problems themselves is not only more interesting than passively listening to a lecture, it is more realistic and helps stewards to gain confidence and improve skills.

### **A BETTER ATMOSPHERE**

Working in small groups is a much less formal way of running a session. People can feel more relaxed and are able to chat to each other freely as a way of working through problems. It also helps trade unionists to get away from the idea that education has to be like the school room

### **SKILLS ARE DEVELOPED**

When small groups are preparing reports to be given to the rest of the class they will need to elect someone to chair their discussion and someone else to take notes. These duties can be shared out so that by the end of a course the majority of those taking part have had a chance to develop the valuable skills of chairing and note taking.

### **WORK IS DONE COLLECTIVELY**

Small groups encourage members to take a co-operative approach to solving problems. They can listen to and learn from the views and ideas of others in relation to an issue: as they should in the 'real world' back at the workplace. Just as important, work can be done at the pace and manner that suits each particular group. Small group work allows for that kind of flexibility.

## Designing activities

There are 4 main factors you should bear in mind when you are preparing activities for education sessions:

- aims
- information
- groups
- results

### AIMS

Sorting out the aims of an activity will help you to think through what the point of the activity is and what participants will get out of it:

- how will the activity help your members?
- what will members be able to do better as a result?
- what will they be clearer about?
- will they develop any skills?
- are the aims written from the participants' point of view?

### INFORMATION

Many of the activities used in trade union education sessions encourage members to learn by finding things out for themselves. To be able to do this they will need a certain amount of information to hand.

Will the information be:

- experience or attitudes of members taking part?
- newspaper cuttings?
- documents and agreements?
- union rule books and handbooks?
- official codes, regulations, statutes, etc?

In addition you, as the person running the session, will have to decide:

- should everyone have copies to take away?
- will certain information be there only for reference?
- will you ask those taking part to get information beforehand?
- will members have the skills already to handle the information? If not ensure that the activity helps them to develop those skills

## GROUPS

The way in which people form into small groups to do the activity can influence how effective the activity will be. The aims of small group work include to help course members to:

- work through their problems collectively
- create a less formal atmosphere
- allow members to learn from each other's experiences and ideas
- encourage everyone to take part in the discussion: not just a confident few

Possibility for dividing members into groups are:

- a list drawn up by the session organiser
- self-selection by participants
- grouping by workplace/section/branch
- women only groups
- a mix of experience, attitudes and background in each group

Different kinds of activities will require different types of groups to be set up. For instance sometimes it will be sensible for those from the same section to work together, when they are planning what action to carry out in their own section. Other times you will need a mix of people and backgrounds so that members can learn from what has happened in other areas of the union.

By asking each group to elect:

- a chair
- a reporter

You are ensuring that new skills are being developed, as well as hopefully making sure the discussion doesn't wander too far from the task set in the activity. If you are running more than one activity then ask the groups to elect different members to chair and report on the discussion.

## RESULTS

What will be the immediate results of the activity?

- a spoken report to the whole group?
- a poster display on the wall to refer back to?
- a leaflet or some writing that can be circulated to all course members?
- a meeting to consider what plans for future action can be made as a result of the activity and group discussions?

## Types of activities



### checklist

Not all group work is the same. There are different kinds of activity - and they require, and develop different sorts of skills.

Deciding on which type of activity to use in a session is important.

Below is an outline of the main kinds of activity used in trade union education work:

#### REVIEWING EXPERIENCE

Asking participants to report on, or develop lessons from their own experiences.

- Skills
- sharing experience
  - reviewing experience critically

#### ATTITUDE QUESTIONS

Getting people to respond to attitudes or statements, and to explain their responses.

- Skills
- putting arguments
  - listening

#### PROBLEM SOLVING AND PLANNING ACTION

Participants describe union or workplace problems and then work in small groups on a strategy for solving them.

- Skills
- working collectively
  - planning

## **FINDING AND USING INFORMATION**

Course members use documents (rule books, agreements, management reports and so on) to answer questions set by themselves or the tutor.

Skills      •      finding and using information

## **FINDING THINGS OUT**

Participants get information about their workplace or union. This might also involve finding out members views.

Skills      •      finding information  
              •      interviewing members

## **ROLE PLAY - See the Role play book**

This can include giving a report to a meeting, debating a motion, or talking to members about problems and issues.

Skills      •      giving reports  
              •      taking part in meetings  
              •      putting arguments

## **PRACTISING SKILLS**

All activities develop skills. In some cases this will be the main aim. Examples would be writing a letter, preparing a leaflet, and doing a press release.

## Language

The aim of language in any trade union education session is to communicate. The clearer your language is, the more effective the communication will be.

### PLAIN ENGLISH

Three simple ways of using clear language are:

- picking out key words
- avoiding jargon
- asking questions

### Key words

It is easiest to summarise a discussion, a meeting, and so on, by picking out the key words. Look at the posters used in course report-backs. The most effective make use of a few key words.

### Jargon

Using jargon means that you are communicating only with people who already understand the jargon.

Jargon can include initials, terms, abbreviations, technical words...

People might not pick up on jargon and ask what it means - they might not want to look stupid. But if they don't understand it means that communication has failed.

One way of dealing with this problem is to have a "jargon sheet". If a course member uses jargon which someone doesn't understand it gets written on the list - and the course members take it in turn to find out what the term means and write it up on the sheet. This technique makes it easier for people to ask, and makes everyone more conscious of using jargon - and of avoiding it!

Always encourage students to pick you up on jargon used as well: this will provide a good way for everyone in the group to learn and will help you to be more careful about the way you express yourself to members and stewards!

## Asking Questions

The most effective type of question to ask is one based on people's experience. This will stimulate discussion more than a general question, and will make members feel less nervous of responding.

## SENSITIVITY

The language we use tells other people about our attitudes and the way we view the world.

Trade unions are committed to equality and justice, and this means being sensitive to the ways in which language can be used to put other people down.

Examples of insensitive language can include:

- racist or sexist jokes
- built-in assumptions ( fireman, chairman and so on)
- insults based on disabilities

In education sessions there will be an opportunity to tackle this problem.

## Room layout

Trade union education work is a basic part of all trade union activity. It is not something separate done in special places and subject to peculiar rules.

Many people see education in terms of schoolwork - which they might not have happy memories about!

Trade union education is centred on the needs and activities of its students, and is built on learning through doing activities, using resources, and developing skills.

This means that the room used for trade union education should look nothing like the traditional classroom or lecture hall with "teacher" at the front.

Ways of making the room layout reinforce the democratic basis of trade union education include:

- arranging chairs and tables into small group working areas
- keeping tables free for resources you might be using
- using the available wall space
- not having a special 'place' for the tutor
- using the room this way right from the start

If you are doing sessions in canteens, social clubs and so on you might find the furniture is organised this way anyway!

## Conclusions

### GENERAL TUC APPROACH

These notes show the TUC approach to planning a course. Many TUC courses follow this general pattern, since it follows the logic that courses should start with the experience/attitudes of the students, help them to reconsider their ideas and develop new skills, and then encourage them to apply the lessons of the course in the real world.

### GENERAL POINTS

- build the course around activities. In practice you can run between 2 and 4 activities on each complete day of the course
- start the course by looking at the experience/attitudes/involvement of the course members
- ask them to bring along real problems, documents, examples to the course - perhaps in a pre-course letter
- think about a progressive order for the activities. Introduce basic skills early
- place activities requiring a fresh mind - such as looking at a new topic, or using a new information source - early in the day. After lunch concentrate on activities which consolidate learning - such as case studies
- review priorities for action/future plans at the end of the course - or at the end of each stage.



checklist

## General TUC Course Plan

### ACTIVITIES

**BEFORE THE COURSE/  
in between weeks**

Find documents/talk to  
members/get examples

**BEGINNING OF COURSE**

Introductions  
Discussing aims  
Preliminary survey  
Attitudes  
Identifying problems  
Basic skills

**MIDDLE OF COURSE**

Analysing problems  
Using information  
Developing plans  
Further skills  
Case studies

**END OF COURSE**

Review key issues  
Priorities for action  
Reports for members/union  
committee  
Assessment

<b>Number</b>	184
<b>Date</b>	21st May 1991
<b>Edition</b>	Second
<b>Title</b>	Education Methods - Resources
<b>WP Reference</b>	A:EDMETHODS.RES
<b>Disc No.</b>	10
<b>Author</b>	JOM
<b>Typist</b>	Sarah McL. mott