

Getting Off to a Good Start

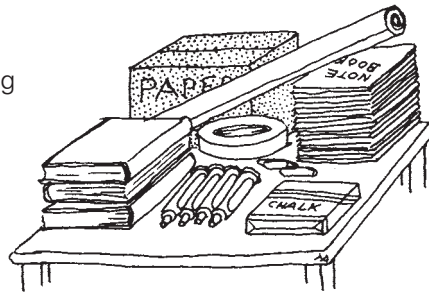
CHAPTER

4

BE PREPARED—EVEN WHEN YOU ARE NOT

The first days of a training program are often the most difficult—especially if the instructors are not very experienced. It is important **to have as much as possible ready ahead of time, including:**

- living and eating arrangements for students
- study area with places to sit and good lighting
- blackboard and chalk (white and colors)
- plenty of wrapping paper or poster paper
- crayons, pencils, and marking pens
- notebooks and textbooks for students
- whatever tools or supplies may be needed for building things, making teaching aids, agricultural work, and any other activities that may be planned with the students at the start of the course
- timetable and class plans for at least the first few days (see next page)



Students can help get things ready

Sometimes not all the materials and furniture are ready by the time the course begins, or the students may not all arrive the same day. In this case, you may want to spend a part of the first few days with students, helping to make benches, blackboards, flannel-boards, and other preparations. By doing these things together, the group gets off to an active start. People get to know each other through working together.

It is important that the instructors work together with the students, not just doing it for them and not just telling them what to do. By doing the job together as equals, a good learning relationship, as well as a friendship, begins.

But if you are going to start by making benches, blackboards, or other items, be sure you have the necessary supplies ready.



Making equipment or supplies for the course is a practical way to start. It helps people get to know each other.

A POSSIBLE TIMETABLE FOR THE FIRST WEEK

Here is a sample timetable showing classes and activities that might be planned for the first few days of a 2-month training program. Of course, you will want to plan each activity or class in more careful detail. (See Chapter 5 for suggestions.) In our experience, these first classes often run overtime, so many in this example are scheduled for 1½ to 2 hours, instead of only 1 hour.

WEEKLY PLANNING SHEET -- HEALTH WORKER'S TRAINING COURSE							AJOYA CLINIC AJOYA, SINALOA MEXICO	
WEEK NUMBER	1	DATES JANUARY 18 to JANUARY 24, 1979					SATURDAY	SUNDAY
TIME	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY			
7:00-			WORK IN	COMMUNITY	GARDEN		BREAKFAST	BREAKFAST
8:00-		BREAKFAST	HOPE AND DOUBTS small / large groups / group	CLINICAL ETHICS: Discussion and Role Plays	DISCUSSION: Abuses of medicines		PREPARE FOR COMMUNITY VISITS	
9:00-		BREAKING THE ICE Explain schedule; answer questions; show them garden, clinic, etc.	GAMES USE OF BOOK: Index, contents, vocabulary	Importance of Clinical History	ROLE PLAY: Balance between prevention and treatment		FIRST COMMUNITY VISITS	
10:00-			DISCUSSION: What are the main problems in our communities? (priorities)	OBSERVE CLINICAL AND DENTAL PRACTICE	OBSERVE CLINICAL AND DENTAL PRACTICE		Introduction: explain why and for how long	
11:00-		GETTING THINGS READY 1. whitewash walls 2. repair benches 3. paint blackboard		REVIEW CONSULTATIONS CLINICAL HISTORY: practice and role plays	REVIEW CONSULTATIONS HEALING WITHOUT MEDICINES: discussion/practice			SWIMMING IN RIVER
12:00-								TANNING CLINIC
1:00-								
2:00-		LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH		LUNCH	LUNCH
3:00-								
4:00-	MOST STUDENTS ARRIVE	Discussion: students' experiences with home remedies	DISCUSSION: What causes disease? STORYTELLING: "Not knowing it all" Stories from students	ROLE PLAYS: Bossy TEACHER AND GOOD GROUP LEADER Analysis	DISCUSSION: What makes a good health worker or instructor?		REVIEW FOR LATECOMERS	
5:00-		HAND OUT BOOKS	VOLEYBALL	GAMES	FOOTBALL		VOLEYBALL WITH SCHOOLTEACHERS	
6:00-	Informal welcome; show them living arrangements	GAMES					DINNER	DINNER
7:00-		DINNER	DINNER	DINNER	DINNER			
8:00-		TOWN MEETING: Introduce students to Community	FORM STUDENT COMMITTEES		MEETING TO PLAN NEXT WEEK'S SCHEDULE			

CLASSES AND ACTIVITIES IN THE FIRST FEW DAYS

The first few days are not only the most difficult, they are also among the most important. This is the time when the members of the learning group meet and begin to know each other.

Getting to know each other in a friendly, open way is perhaps the most important thing that can happen in these first days. There are a number of things you can do to help this happen. (See “Breaking the Ice,” page 4-6.)

During the first days there is lots of talking. People are getting acquainted. Many things need to be explained and discussed. On page 4-11, we look at some of the important things to discuss.

But there is also a danger of talking and discussing things too much! **Students come to learn specific skills.** They may not yet know that the art of listening and of sharing ideas openly in a group is one of the most valuable skills a health worker can master. They want to get on with more exciting things—like using a stethoscope and giving injections.

There are, of course, good reasons **not** to start by teaching how to inject or use a stethoscope. (See the next page.)

Nevertheless, new health workers-in-training are eager to start learning useful skills. Too much talk will discourage them. So from the first day of the course, include activities that help students master practical skills—skills they can put to use as soon as the need arises.



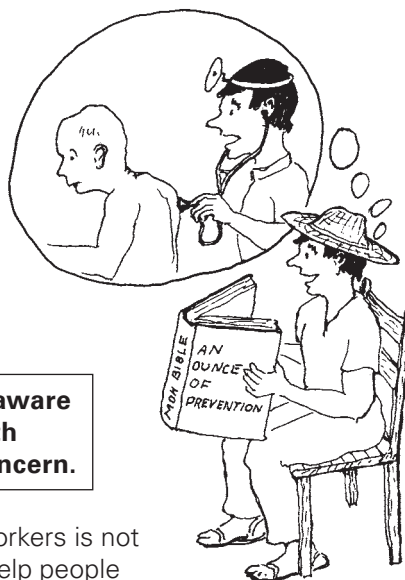
Begin teaching practical skills right away.

Taking student interest into account

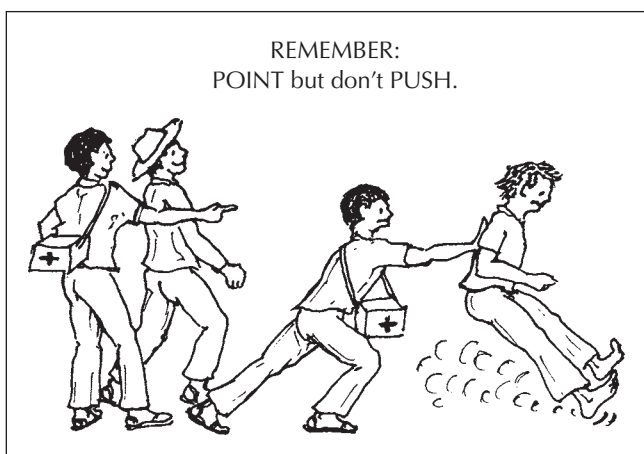
In the beginning, health workers—like most people—are more interested in treatment than in prevention. During the course, the importance of prevention and of health education should become clear. But at first—and often to the last, if secretly—the biggest interest of most health workers is in curative medicine. After all, the health worker wants to be appreciated. He therefore wants to help meet people’s felt needs. And this we must respect.

Only when the whole community becomes aware of the need for preventive action is the health worker likely to make prevention his first concern.

The challenge for both instructors and health workers is not simply to respond to people’s felt needs. It is to help people look at and understand their needs more clearly. But the process cannot be forced or hurried. People need to discover the reasons and decide to take steps themselves.



THE DREAM
AND THE REALITY
(WHICH IS WHICH?)



The health worker can point the way, but must not push—not if they want lasting results.

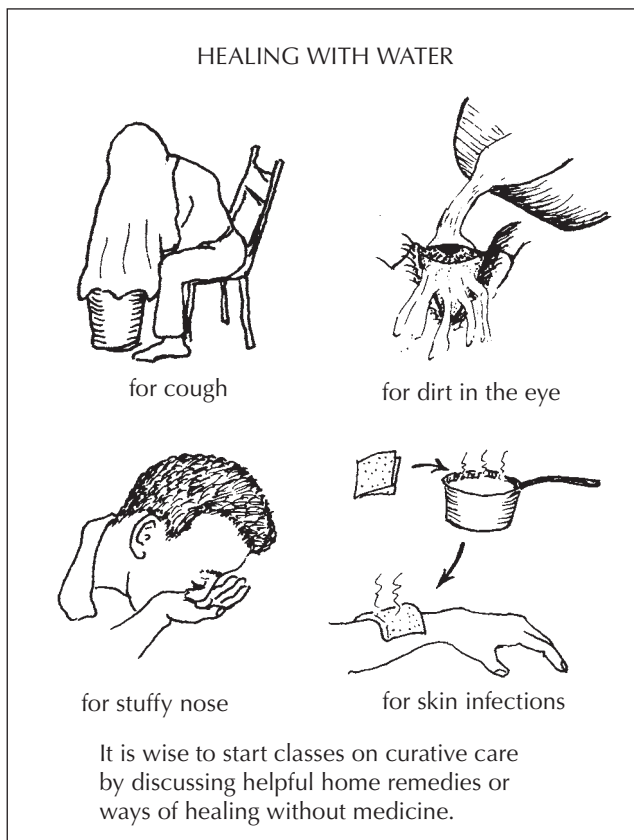
The same thing is true for instructors.

Whenever possible, **start where the students' interests lie. But be selective. Try to direct their interests toward meeting important community needs.**

If the students' first interest is curative medicine, start with that. But take care **not** to start by teaching frequently misused skills, such as how to give injections or use a stethoscope. Too often, doctors and health workers use the needle and the stethoscope as signs of prestige and power. The people see these instruments as magic. To reduce this problem, some programs do not teach how to inject until late in the course. This is probably wise. Consider beginning the study of curative medicine by looking at **useful home remedies** (see *WTND*, Chapter 1). Or start with ways of **healing without medicines** (*WTND*, Chapter 5). This is more appropriate because:

- It places emphasis on local traditions and resources.
- It encourages self-reliance.
- It lets students begin by speaking from their own experience.
- It helps take some of the mystery out of both traditional and modern remedies.
- It can help awaken students to the problems of overuse and over-dependence on modern medicines.

As you can see, this approach is partly preventive, even though it deals mainly with treatment.



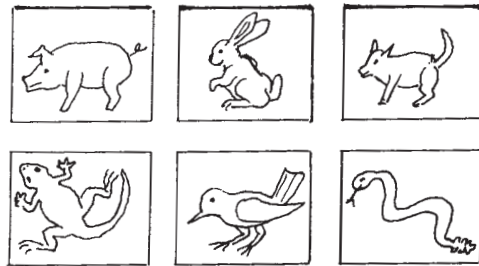
“BREAKING THE ICE” — methods to help a new group meet each other, relax, and start talking

When a group comes together for the first time, some people may already know each other, but many may not. Often those who are already friends will sit and talk with each other, but feel uncomfortable about speaking with those they do not yet know.

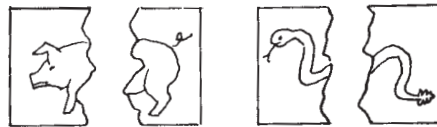
Various games or “ice breakers” can be used to help people get to know one another and feel comfortable about taking part in a meeting or a class:

1. PAIRING OFF FOR INTRODUCTIONS

Draw hearts, animals, or other figures on slips of paper. (Draw one figure for every 2 people.)



Tear each slip into 2 pieces.



Crumple the pieces into balls.



Put them into a hat and let each person pick one.



Now each person tries to find his “other half.”

Each pair of people with matching halves spends 10 or 15 minutes getting to know each other.

At last the group meets again, and everyone takes turns introducing his partner to the group.

2. MERRY-GO-ROUND OR "TRAINS"

The group divides into 2 halves by counting off—ONE, TWO, ONE, TWO—around the circle.



Then all the ONES form a circle, and all the TWOS form another circle around them.

When the leader says "GO," circle ONE runs in one direction and circle TWO runs in the other—whistling and puffing like trains.

When the leader shouts "STOP," each person turns to the nearest person in the other circle and introduces himself or herself. Each pair talks together about a topic the leader or someone else has suggested.

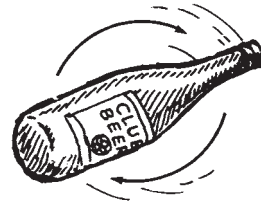
After a minute or two, the leader shouts "GO" again, and each circle at once begins to run as before until the leader again cries "STOP." This can be repeated 4 or 5 times.



Afterwards the whole group can meet to discuss what they learned.

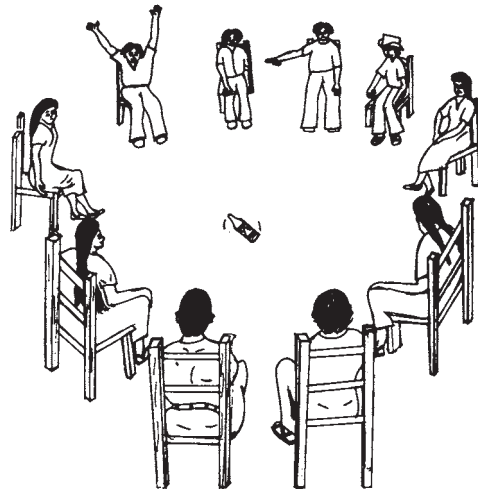
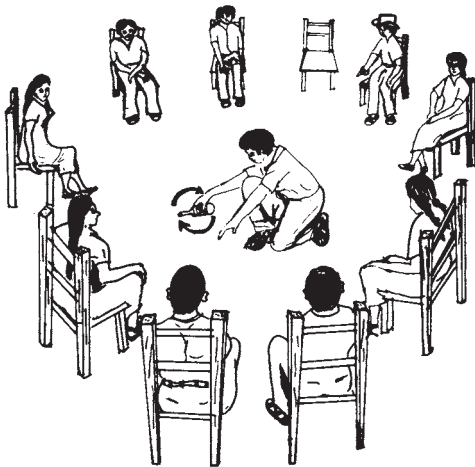
3. TAKE TURNS BY SPINNING A BOTTLE

This is a fair way to pick one member of a group to answer a particular question, start off a discussion, or do a certain job. If more than one person needs to be picked, the bottle can be spun as many times as necessary.



Everyone sits in a circle. One person spins an empty bottle on the floor in the middle of the circle.

The person the bottle points at when it stops is the one who is picked.



After he answers the question or does the job, the person who was picked spins the bottle again to see who will be picked next.

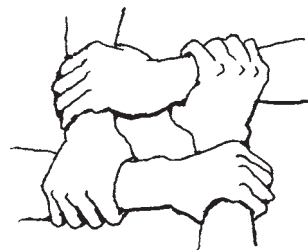
Silly? A waste of time? Yes, but. . .

"Ice-breaking" games may seem ridiculous. In fact, they often are. Some people may not like them or may feel they are a waste of time. Sometimes they are. But sometimes they can help a group that is too serious or stiff, to loosen up and begin to enjoy each other.

A friend who has worked for many years in community health says: "To waste time is to save time." Taking time to "break the ice" and help people begin to relate to each other openly can make a big difference in what people learn from the course.

We must never forget that, although latrines and medicines and vaccines are important, the most important factor that determines human health is how people work and live and share and learn together.

If we can all learn to work well together in our training program, perhaps we can do so with those in our villages or neighborhoods. And this would be a real step toward health! So remember. . .



To "waste time" getting to know and like each other may save time later.

THE WORKINGS OF A GROUP (group dynamics)

When a group of persons from different villages comes together for a training program, at first it is usually hard for everyone to share their thoughts openly with the others.

POOR GROUP DYNAMICS:
ONE PERSON TALKS, MOSTLY TO HERSELF.



Many people at first find it easier to listen than to talk, while a few find it easier to talk than to listen. **A good group leader looks for ways to help those who are silent to speak out.**

At the same time, he helps show those who are quick to speak how important it is to give others a chance.

Above all else, an effective group leader learns how to keep silent—and when he does speak, to limit himself to asking questions that help draw ideas out of others, especially those who say the least.

Getting the members of a group to talk openly with each other as equals is not easy. It is especially hard when people come from villages or communities where public meetings are controlled by officials or rich persons who have power. In such meetings, only certain individuals are expected to talk. Usually they make a speech, or just give orders. Lies may be told, facts covered up, laws violated, and the people listen silently. Often they feel they have no choice. Even when a vote is taken, most persons will not raise their hands until they see the man who owns the house they rent or the land they plant raise his. Long experience has taught them the cost of not remaining silent. (Silence can be enforced in many ways.)

In addition, because the group has come together to begin a training program or “class,” many persons will at first think of it as “school.” As we discussed in Chapter 1, for most of us school is a place where the teacher, or schoolmaster, is boss. When the student is asked a question, the “right” answer is not what he thinks or deeply believes, but rather what the teacher reads from the textbook. What the student thinks or feels is of small importance. In fact, the less he manages to think or feel, the better he is likely to get along in the classroom.

The experiences of many of the group’s members, then, both in village meetings and in school, often make them reluctant or afraid to speak freely and openly—especially in the presence of a leader with authority. It therefore helps if the group leader, or instructor, is himself a villager from the area. From the very first, **the leader needs to do all he can to show he considers himself on the same level with all the others.**

As group leader, your actions say more than your words. It helps if you:

- Sit in the circle with everyone else, not apart or behind a desk.
- Dress simply in local style (especially if you are local).
- Listen more than you speak.
- Do not interrupt, especially when someone speaks slowly or has trouble expressing himself.
- Invite criticism and admit your own mistakes.
- Be open and friendly.
- But do not overdo it. Be yourself. Do not try to sell yourself.
- Laugh *with* people, but not *at* them.
- Encourage others to take the lead as much as possible, and at the same time encourage them to give everyone else an equal chance.

Good group dynamics means everyone feels free to speak his mind, but is ready to listen earnestly to others. It is essential for effective learning and community well-being.

Help health workers understand this process so they can work toward good group dynamics with people in their communities.

GOOD GROUP DYNAMICS: EVERYONE INVOLVED



TEACHING GROUP DYNAMICS

At an educational exchange for village instructors of health workers in Mexico, the group leader helped people look at group dynamics. Without telling anyone why, he led 2 discussions on vague subjects like “the meaning of community health.”

In the first discussion, he allowed those who tended to talk more to dominate the discussion. He even encouraged this by asking the same persons to explain things further. By the end, one person talked for 15 minutes straight. Her ideas were good, but the other people were falling asleep or beginning to talk among themselves.

The second discussion was led in a way that got everybody taking part, with no one dominating. The discussion became lively and the group was enthusiastic.

No one realized until afterwards that the 2 discussions had been set up to study group dynamics. Then the leader asked the group to compare the 2 discussions, including the role of the leader and the responses of the group.

Everyone learned a lot, especially the person who had talked so much. But she took it well, and took care not to dominate the discussion again.

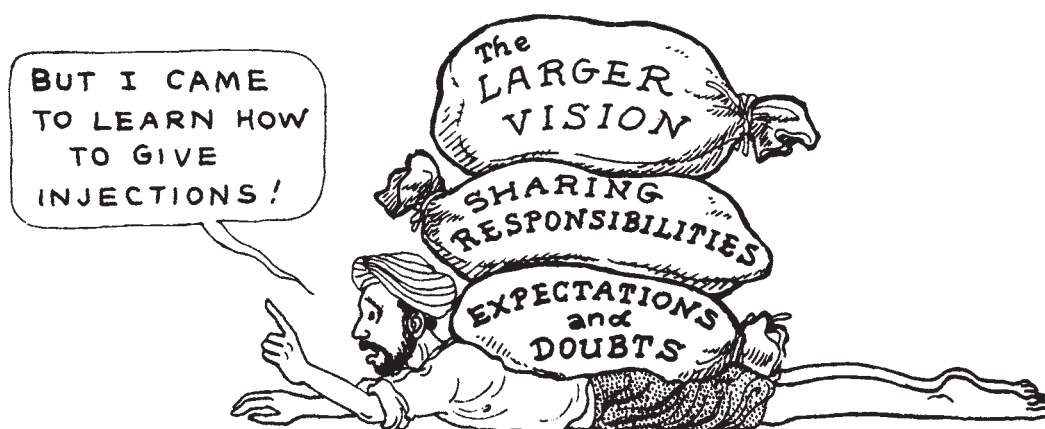
IMPORTANT THINGS TO START DISCUSSING IN THE FIRST FEW DAYS

To start a training course in a positive way, and to avoid misunderstandings, certain things need to be discussed or made clear during the first few days. You may want to consider scheduling group discussions in the following areas:

- **Hopes and doubts** (of both students and instructors) concerning the course
- **Sharing of responsibilities** and planning (students and instructors together)
- What are the **characteristics of a good health worker?** Of a good instructor?
- Different ways of looking at **health, illness, and being human**
- Goals, objectives, and **the larger vision** of the program
- **Precautions, warnings,** and recognizing our own **limits**
- **Students' experiences** of needs and problems in their communities
- **Need for balance** between prevention, treatment, education, and community action

CAUTION: Although all of the above topics are of key importance and can lead to exciting discussion, they involve a lot of very serious talking. Also, some people may not be used to thinking about these ideas or may be afraid to discuss some of them openly. So in leading these discussions, **try to be sensitive to the feelings, fears, and needs of each member of the group.**

Because these are all “heavy” subjects, it is wise not to weigh people down with too much at once. Space these discussions between classes and activities that are practical, deal with “lighter” subjects, and in which students learn by handling, making, and doing things.



Try not to burden students at first with too many heavy discussions.
Balance these discussions with learning of practical skills.

Hopes and doubts

Many training programs find it helpful to spend one of the first discussion periods giving everyone a chance to express his hopes and doubts about the course. Each student and instructor is asked:

- “What do you hope to learn from or get out of the training program?”
- “What fears, doubts, or uncertainties do you have about the program?”

Giving everyone a chance to express his expectations and doubts has three advantages:

- It starts people talking with each other about things that really matter to them.
- It helps students realize that their ideas and concerns are important, and will be taken into consideration in planning the course.
- It gives instructors ideas for adapting the course to better meet the students’ desires and needs.

All this sounds good on paper, but will it work? Will new students, mostly strangers to each other, speak openly about their hopes and doubts?

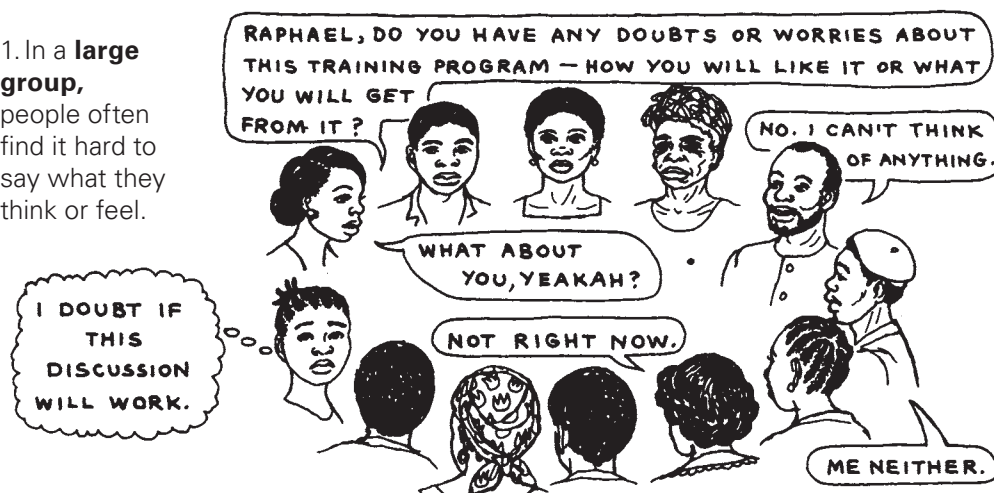
Often they will not—at least not if asked in front of the whole group.

But if they split up into small groups of 2 or 3 persons, they usually will feel more comfortable about expressing their feelings. One person in each group can be chosen to take notes during these discussions, and later report to the whole group. It can be surprising how many important concerns come to the surface.

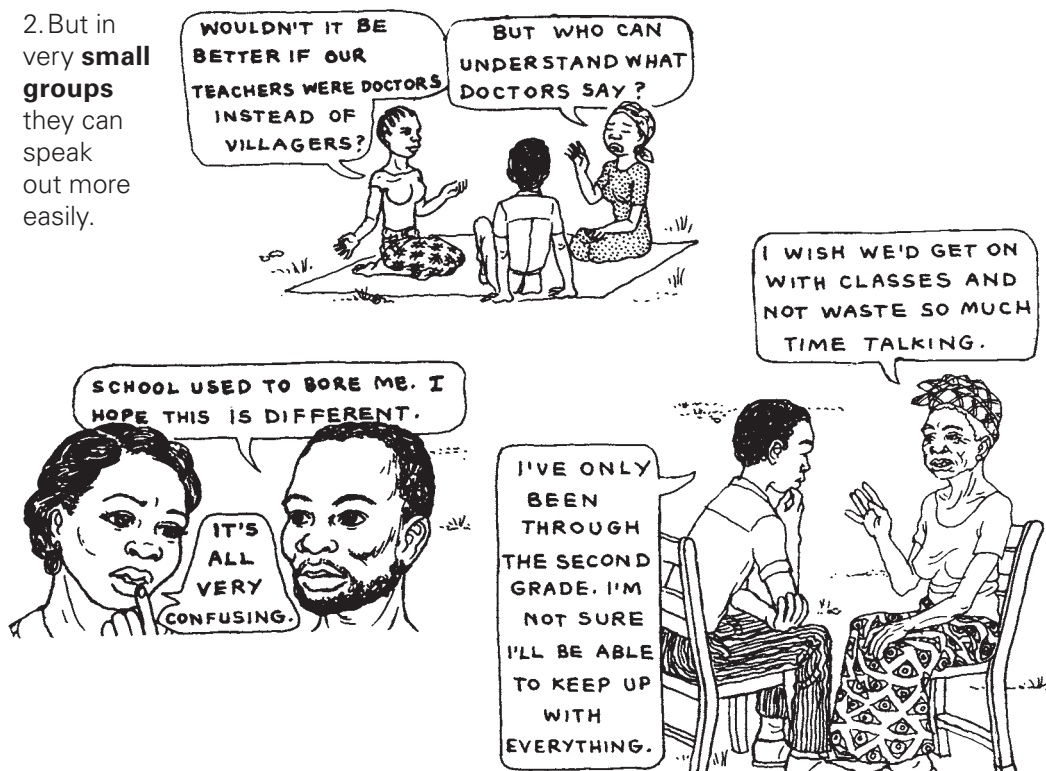
GETTING PEOPLE TO EXPRESS THEIR DOUBTS

(the advantage of starting discussion in very small groups)

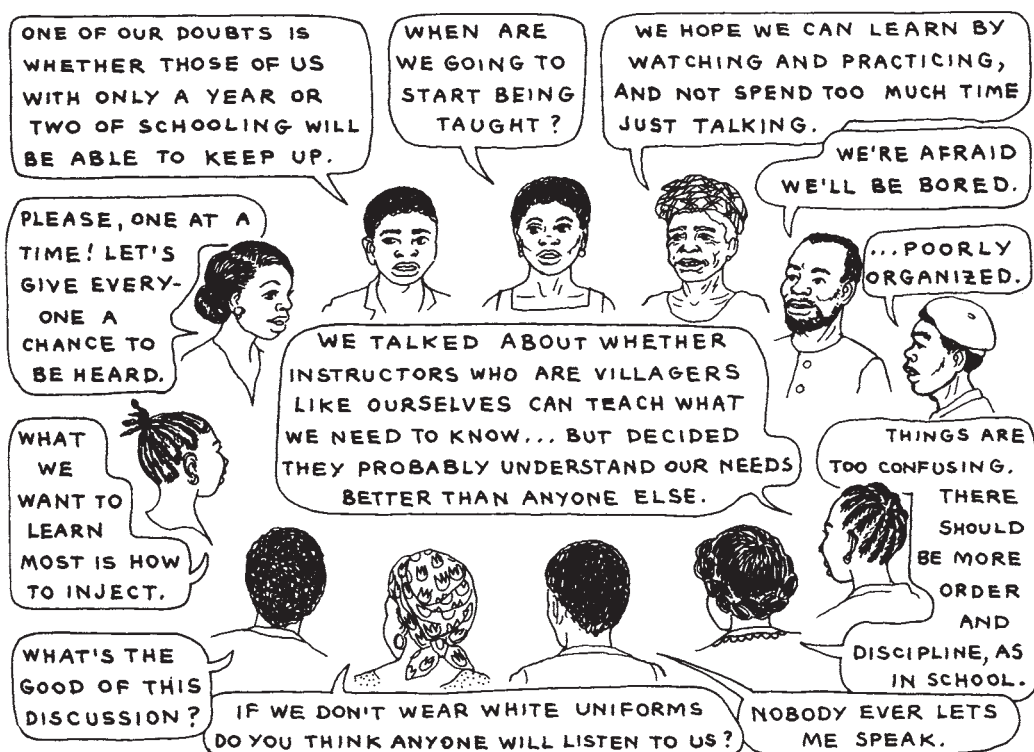
1. In a **large group**, people often find it hard to say what they think or feel.



2. But in very **small groups** they can speak out more easily.



3. So it makes sense first to get people saying what they think in small groups. They can then go back and report to the big group.



STUDENT COMMITTEES

The day-to-day preparations, organization, and running of a training program are a lot of work. If students can take charge of some of these responsibilities, a great load is taken off the instructors and shared by everyone. Students and instructors become working partners. It also gives students a chance to learn leadership and management skills.

Several student committees can be formed to take on the different responsibilities. This can be done during the first days of the course. If instructors serve on these committees, it is important that they take part as equals and do the “dirty work” along with the students.

You may want to consider any or all of the following committees:

PLANNING COMMITTEE: decides what the daily and weekly schedule will be, which classes will be given when and by whom, etc. (Having instructors on this committee is very important. But if a few students also take part, it is a valuable learning experience.)

CLEAN-UP COMMITTEE: makes sure that the meeting and working areas used during the course are kept clean and neat.

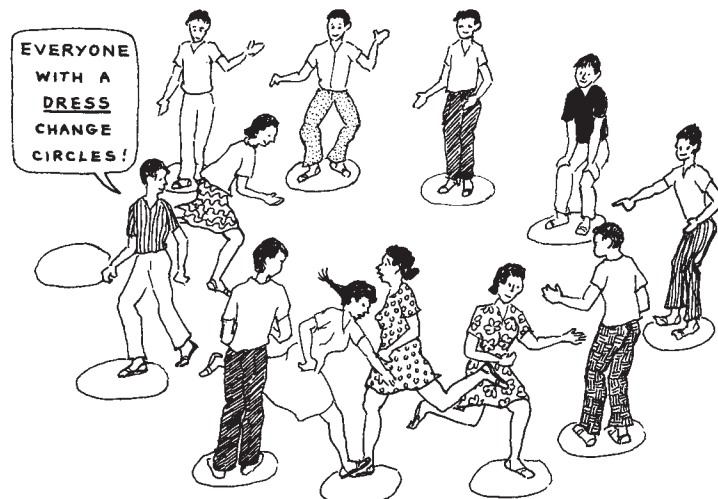
RECREATION COMMITTEE: organizes group games, short stretching exercises between classes, joke telling, riddles, songs, and field trips. Plan some activities for free time before or after classes, on weekends, or whenever the group has been sitting still for too long.

EVALUATION COMMITTEE: leads the group in constructive criticism of the course in general, the content of classes, the instructors, the teaching, everyone’s learning attitudes, etc. The committee helps to address problems, improve the ongoing course, and make suggestions for future courses. (Evaluation committees are discussed further on page 9-15.)

RECORDING COMMITTEE: takes notes, makes copies, and distributes sheets of important information not covered in books. (Participation of instructors is valuable here, too.)

In a 2 to 3 month course, responsibilities can be rotated every week or so. This gives everyone a chance to work on each committee.

THE RECREATION COMMITTEE CAN HAVE THE GROUP PLAY SHORT, ACTIVE GAMES BETWEEN CLASSES.



For example, draw circles on the ground—one fewer than there are players. The person who is “it” calls out an article of clothing, or a color. Everyone wearing that clothing or color has to run to another circle. Whoever does not find an empty circle is “it.”