

QED

experiential
learning

CREATIVE COURSE DESIGN

Some Notes

A Creative Approach to Experiential Learning

The programme aims to acquaint people with a course design and delivery method pioneered in the former Czechoslovakia, where it's often called "Dramaturgy". The method helps people to discover solutions to whatever issues currently concern them. The aims of the training are thus to enable people to:

- *understand themselves and their world;*
- *discover the power and meaning of relationships;*
- *improve citizenship;*
- *develop their power of thought*
- *"go against the flow"*

Methods

Dramaturgy: A term borrowed from the theatre. It's more than a catch-all term for a course design process however, conferring on users a unique mental framing of that process.

In Britain, we tend to design programmes to meet the needs of delegates (as expressed by whomever is the buyer), moving systematically forward in an orderly manner so that we can demonstrate at each stage how the proposal will meet the expressed need. Very professional. Very systematic.

Move the paradigm to a theatrical one and the logic changes – it becomes more important to produce an *event* which will stimulate and touch the heart than to produce one which will fulfil training needs. As one Czech practitioner put it:

".... it's like an art of putting pieces together so that it's a balance of activities – so that it's on the right place at the right moment for these people who come on this course, and it has to be flexible so that you can change it....."

Dramaturgy is not exclusive. It encourages the use of as wide a variety of training media as possible, and promotes the use of imagination in the delivery of training.

It's important to understand that dramaturgy is **not** theatre. It's a process for conceiving and perceiving courses. It may involve theatre, but the unrolling plot of a programme (see it more as a dramatic event) is not the same as, for example, the increasingly popular use of actors *qua* actors in training courses in Britain. Neither is it the same as teaching people theatrical techniques to help them with presentation skills.

Other features

No standard programmes: There's no such thing as a "standard" programme with this approach. Every course is unique and original.

Wide choice of media: In British development training generally, the outdoors is seen as the main medium, although others may be used from time to time. In this approach, the outdoors is just one option. Others are particularly art and drama, but anything may be brought into play because (to quote a trainer):

"We think that every person has something which is easy for them to do and other things which are beyond their zone..... it's not art itself; it's finding creativity in people....."

DRAMATURGICAL APPROACH	TRADITIONAL APPROACH
Multiple media – art, outdoors, music, , video, drama, audio, "happenings"	Dominated by outdoor media, others also used.
Constant on-course staff reflection and redesign of programme, based on evolving perception of delegates' needs.	Constant on-course staff reflection on whether the course is meeting its pre-agreed objectives.
Multiple (changing) objectives	Objectives often clearly fixed beforehand
Programme subject to constant change as objectives change	Programme subject to some change if change is seen to meet objectives better
Surprises expected. Unpredictable outcomes expected	Predictable outcomes valued
Dramaturgy and Traditional Outdoor programmes	

The use of a variety of media has other benefits in that it allows instructors and delegates to exercise their imagination. This

mind-opening approach seems to be increasingly important to any development training with pretensions beyond compliance with competency-dictated demands. The ability to learn specified sets of behaviours only equips people to deal with the immediate demands of their current existence. Provoking the imagination may well be infinitely more useful, helping them to think (and see) for themselves, not to simply behave as they've been programmed.

Exercises – “No-one expects the Spanish Inquisition.....”

"It was like a lifetime of experiences/lessons compressed into two weeks. It was like an experiment where I experienced tests of every capability I thought I had as a human being, and more. I used every sense, every skill, every limb, every milligram of energy in the shortest space of time possible"

I am reluctant to give too much detail, as dramaturgy requires that each exercise is only part of a whole. Nevertheless, much energy and creativity goes into design, a common factor being to aim for the unexpected, with the result that a kind of surrealism often features, helping to open otherwise closed minds. Delegates confirm this:

"..... I used neurones I knew I had, and created connections between neurones that have never been used.."

"...you don't know what's going to happen next.....it kind of makes you more alert...to expect the unexpected and just cope with it"

All this may well have beneficial effects in allowing people to address a multiplicity of abilities and talents - in effect, to employ multiple intelligences.