



"Marker" is a regular column in Coyote, written by Mark Taylor, looking at issues in training and hoping to encourage debate. Feedback from you will be really welcome.

You Read **any** Interesting Training Course Reports Lately?



Once upon a time, someone somewhere decided that, if you get money for a training course, you should produce a report about it. This is quite a logical thing to request and it makes sense to document activities, but the logics of actually doing it - that is a different matter.

Most of the things we do in life, we just do them. Maybe we tell other people about them, maybe we even write a letter or an e-mail - we seldom write reports about them. At some point during a preparation meeting for a training course, the hot subject comes up: who is going to write the report? Suddenly, the bird sitting on the tree outside the window becomes incredibly attractive, or the colour of the laces of the person sitting opposite. Eyes do not meet anymore. At last, somebody volunteers or makes the stunning suggestion that the person who wrote the grant application should do it. Then the team is able to get down to the "real business" of constructing the course.

What could be passing through the minds of the training team when they think about the report?

- quite obviously you can only know what happened in a training course by BEING THERE! a report will never be able to give you the real flavour of the event

- I won't be able to contribute as I can't write good English/French/Russian or whatever the language has to be
- what if someone takes (or steals) our ideas and uses them in their training courses?
- look, we have to write a report - it is just a fact of life - so let's get the job done
- even if we produce the best report in the world - who is going to read it apart from our funders and the participants?
- it will be great to have a report, to remind the participants of what they experienced and give them some tools to use back in their own projects

What are the choices available?

The team has to decide what the report is for, who the readers should be and how much effort and resources they want to dedicate to its production. One of the most important considerations will be whether or not the team sees the course as a self-contained project, or as a contribution to the wider picture of knowledge we have about training. Some organisations take great care to write reports which analyse both process and content of courses; they

are kept in-house and not easily available to outsiders. Such an approach helps the organisation to develop, as the reports are very useful for teams which are looking to prepare similar activities. At the other extreme we find reports which are kept to the bare essentials: the programme; a fairly boring day-by-day description of what happened; a one page conclusion stating that everyone was very positive about the course; and a list of participants. Most reports end up being somewhere in the middle with both strong and weak points.

Get the participants involved

Last year I was observing a training course, where a team member was introducing the second day's programme and telling the participants about the previous evening's team meeting, "...we talked about the request of many of the participants to have a collection of the methods used in the course. Here is our response". He stepped towards the flip chart and cut a piece of tape holding a roll of paper. The paper unrolled revealing the words:

**YOU
DO
IT!**

And they did.

Other course teams choose to delegate responsibility to the participants to write and compile the whole report during the course itself. This can produce some very strange results, which is only to be expected when participants are sitting at computers very late at night full of strange intercultural substances and international viruses. One approach which is quite common is to divide participants into teams with responsibility for particular days, they then have the task to describe and evaluate the day and collect all the methods used. Using the resources of participants in this way has some great advantages: a) participants decide what is important for them and b) the report is finished when the course is finished. The process can be fairly stressful and without some form of editing, the differing reporting styles can be confusing for outsiders. Enthusiastic gathering of materials makes for mammoth reports - I just found an exciting new example which totals some 250 pages, which means nearly 9000 copied pages for just participants and team to get a copy.

Use a "reporter"

Some organisers give themselves the "luxury" of employing someone who is only there to gather

impressions, materials and questions in order to write the report after the course. As one trainer put it to me recently, "...it's great to have a person to do the boring stuff". That is a rather sad way to put it, but there is a certain validity in the statement. Having an extra pair of eyes and ears around can also help a team evaluate its work each day. (A step further on from this, would be definitely worth considering within the Partnership Project's series of training courses: engaging external evaluators to assess the courses on the basis of agreed criteria.)

Wait a minute, why doesn't the team write the report?...

Also a possibility and quite common, as it is felt to be fair and it ensures that the trainers responsible for particular elements in a course get to write up those parts of the programme. The reader can be relatively sure that care has been taken to describe the methodology used and adapted for that particular course. What is difficult with this approach? Any hope of objectivity goes out of the window, the trainers are in the middle of the process and may miss many important details of what happened. Getting people to write up "their" part of the programme after the course can be a thankless task as some trainers are more interested in planning their next project!

What happens to the report after it has been written?

Who cares?

Sorry, of course this is an important question. Much will depend on the responsible organisation and who funded the course. There are no statistics available to help us get a European overview of report distribution. Reports of Partnership Project courses are all available from the European Youth Centre. Some organisations send their reports around to others who they think will be interested and some have started to put their reports on the Internet. The picture remains very patchy. There is a wealth of experience around, it is just very hard to find it. It would be nice to see a compendium of training course reports taken from the Youth Directorate and European Commission archives one day.

But then, who would read it?

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