



by Mark Taylor

MaRKeR

Monkeys, watching the watchers, fashion tips and toilet roll holders

"Marker" is a regular column in Coyote, written by Mark Taylor, looking at issues in training and hoping to encourage debate and reflections. Feedback from you, dear reader, will be really welcome. Shiny pieces of gold would also be welcome as we enter the Chinese Year of the Monkey, according to the Hsia calendar...

Knowing that our attention span gets shorter every day, and that Coyote appears but twice per year, it seemed efficient to include more themes in Marker. Response to this experiment in the last issue was positive, so what comes next is the result of many concentrated sessions over the past couple of months, resulting in a series of mini articles. Don't blink your eyes, you might miss something...

On a roll

Knowing that I am a person who likes spending some quality time on the toilet, I received a wonderful present a few years ago from one of my loved ones. It is a toilet roll holder in the form of a little man on a unicycle – as you pull the paper on the toilet roll the little man's legs go up and down and the wheel goes round. Perfect. At least I think so. In our bathroom we also have a stick on a base and this serves as a practical place to store spare toilet rolls. What I cannot understand is that otherwise perfectly normal people have started to take the paper from the stick rather than the unicycle. Perhaps they don't want to disturb the little man or, maybe, their vision of logic is just different from mine? If only the little man on the unicycle could speak.



Watching the watchers

On a couple of recent training courses I have had the great chance to observe researchers/observers watching the process. They are very professional people and most of the time they do everything possible to blend into the background – and they do know that it is impossible to have no effect on the things they are observing. At the beginning it is a little disturbing to have these note-takers around. Then, gradually, you start to get used to them and notice how exciting it is for both participants and team to be asked to reflect on the course and their involvement from the outside. Crumbs, we are being taken seriously here – other people are actually interested in what we do and think! And, because I have to explain myself here and now, this affects the depth of my learning...

What are you wearing for the plenary session? The workshop? The farewell party?

Plenary:

old T-shirt from Macedonian intercultural campaign, hiking trousers, colourful socks, boots

The workshop:

old t-shirt from Macedonian intercultural campaign, hiking trousers, colourful socks, boots

The farewell party:

pink lycra body stocking with ostrich feathers? or suit, shirt, tie, glittery waistcoat, black shoes? Or, maybe, have a shower and put on old Captain Beefheart t-shirt, hiking trousers, colourful socks, boots.

And you?

Thinking in blocks 2

Those programme blocks are still worrying me and others, if to judge from some of the e-mails I received. Some ways to get away from the blocks, or at least to demonstrate the links between them:

At the start of a day, (or a block!) refer back explicitly to previous elements in the programme; Use different coloured string to show the horizontal themes running through the course; Introduce a new way of working by handing around a bunch of lavender (thanks Teresa!) or other lovely smells, and bring them back again; Present the blocks in huge ice cubes – watch them melt over time.

"Teaching and learning" – is that really what we do?

Continuing with the subject of researchers watching training courses. One very powerful tool, and not one to be taken lightly, is that of asking researchers to input some of their observations and findings back to the course. We did that and very interesting it was too. As you will see in the article by Bryony Hoskins and Paul Kloosterman earlier in this issue, the communities of youth workers and researchers use different terminology to describe situations and their work. Both times the researchers referred to "the quality of the teaching and learning" in the courses. As a member of the community of youth worker trainers, this was really strange to hear. I am not a teacher, we are not teachers, we don't teach. Yes you do, said the researchers. We need to go into this further...

Year of the Monkey

It would appear that the year of the Monkey presents us with many opportunities and many dangers. Let's take the opportunities!

References and contact:



The Year of the Monkey: <http://www.raymond-lo.com/main/monkey.asp> [accessed 30.11.03]

Paddy McAloon featuring Yvonne Connors: I Trawl The Megahertz (EMI Liberty)

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