by Mark Taylor

MISTAKES, BOATS, LOVE, ACRONYMS AND THE POWER OF TRIANGLES

«Marker» is a regular column in Coyote, written by Mark Taylor, looking at issues in training and hoping to encourage debate and reflections. Triangular feedback is especially welcome.

Learning from our mistakes

As someone who is also an advocate of experiential learning, I was reminded recently that we should be a bit careful in our claims for it. Yes, I have been reading again and this time about a fictional character called Sir Arthur Streeb-Greebling who was the invention of Peter Cook, the best comedian Britain ever produced. When asked if he felt he had learned from his mistakes, Sir Arthur replied: "I think I have, yes, and I think I could probably repeat them, almost perfectly".

"The best way for me to answer is to tell this story:

As part of an external project evaluation, we decided to hold discussion groups with teachers who had been trained in developing pro-tolerance workshops in their schools. When asked what it was like for her to participate in the project, one of the teachers said:

"The best way for me to answer is to tell this story:

Once upon a time, a long time ago, there lived a man who said he believed in God. One day it started to rain and did not stop. It rained and rained. It rained so hard that the roads turned into rivers and water started to come into the houses. The man climbed onto the roof of his house to escape the water. A short time later, a boat came to his house and the captain shouted to the man: "Come into my boat and I will take you to safety!". The man replied: "No, I will not come – the Lord will save me". So the boat went away.

And the rain kept raining and the water got higher. Late that night another boat arrived and the captain shouted to the man: "You must act quickly, please get into my boat and I will take you to safety!". Again the man replied: "No, I will not come – the Lord will save me". So the boat went away. And the rain kept raining and the water got so high that it reached the top of the house and the man had to hold onto the chimney to keep from drowning. A third boat came to the man's house and the captain shouted: "This is your last chance! Get into my boat and I will take you to safety!". Again the man replied: "No, I will not come – the Lord will save me". So the boat went away. And the rain kept raining and the water got so high that the man drowned.

When he arrived in heaven, he asked God: "My Lord, why did you not save me? I waited for you for so long!". And God replied: "But, my child, I sent you three boats!".

For me, this project was the third boat and I got in it!"

An impressive story, which also made an impact on the funders of the project. If you have any such stories, please let me know.

Is love (at least part of) the difference?

Over the last few months, I have been discussing differences between training for various target groups – or perhaps I should say "clients" in this instance... Georges Wagner explores relationships between trainers and participants elsewhere in this edition of Coyote and he makes valuable points concerning often hidden social needs. If you are invited to work as a trainer outside the NGO sector you will find that these needs are rarely, if ever, talked about. One of my closest friends even goes so far as to say that the big difference in working in the business world is that there is no love involved.

Participants (and especially their employers) do not love their trainers and their trainers do not love them - the process has always to be at the service of the product. They pay, you deliver. End of relationship.

Take the short cut!

How many times have you seen in a training programme or on a flip chart or as part of a Power Point presentation the following appearing:

ICL
**HRE**
NFE
PDP
FEAR

We even use these abbreviations in speaking together. Ah, acronyms, don't we just love them?! And I must be honest, I start to hate them. Within a restricted group of people who know what they mean, acronyms do indeed have their uses. The problem, for me at least, is that too often they are used outside such groups and make those who do not know feel really stupid and excluded. Think about it...

The power of triangles

It may well be that my brain is getting smaller as I grow older and yet I can't help being increasingly attracted by triangles. For instance, triads make much more productive discussion groups than randomly selected "buzz groups". When starting with strategic planning it can often be useful to try and define the three most important elements and then attach further triangles to each one. Triangles can also be very useful in helping us think "outside the box", to get away from either-or thinking. Did you know, by the way, that our traditional view (based on Euclid's theories) that the interior angles of a triangle have to add up to 180° is not always true? If you draw a triangle on a globe with the top at the North Pole and take the other two points on the Equator, then the angles only add up to 90°!

And, of course, there is the famous triangle for evaluating team work of:

Process

Product   Person
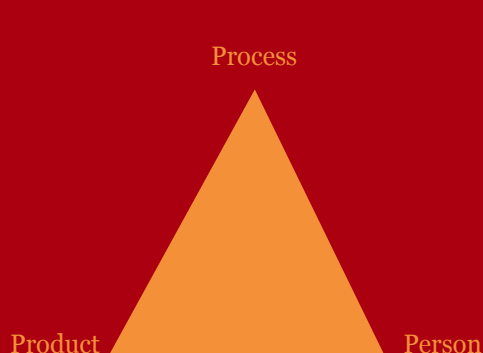
Last week we invented a new triangle for use as a filter for choosing methods:

Group of participants

Trainer's style   Context
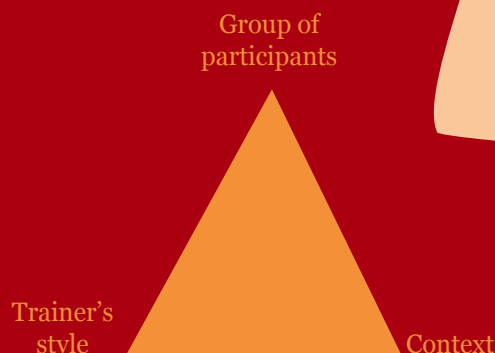
No, it's not anything spectacularly new! Still, when used in conjunction with some connected triangles it really seemed to help participants choose the methods for their workshops...

Do you have any nice triangles to share?

References, influences and sounds

William Cook (ed.) (2004): *Goodbye Again - The definitive Peter Cook and Dudley Moore,* Century. **ISBN:** 1844134008

Marian Keyes (2005): *The Other Side of the Story,* Penguin. **ISBN:** 0140295992
There are three sides to every story!

Flann O'Brien (1993): *The Best of Myles na Gopaleen,* Paladin. **ISBN:** 0586089500

Flann O'Brien (1993): *The Third Policeman,* Flamingo. **ISBN:** 0586087494

Tinariwen (legendary poet guitarists and soul rebels from the southern Sahara desert): *Anassakoul* – on Independent Records Ltd

The Arcade Fire: *This Must Be The Place,* Live with David Byrne

Georg Riemann was the 19th century mathematician from Germany who explored the geometry of triangles on globes. Thanks to Martini **for this.**
More about him here:
http://www-groups.dcs.st-and.ac.uk/~history/ Mathematicians/Riemann.html

Madzinga! Report on a training course from experiential through intercultural learning:
www.outwardbound.be/madzinga
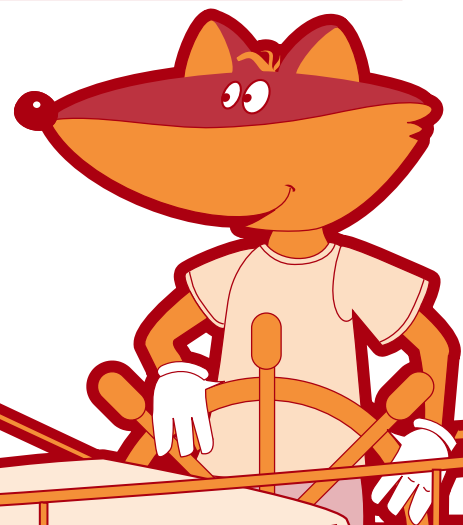
Contact :

brazav@yahoo.com

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