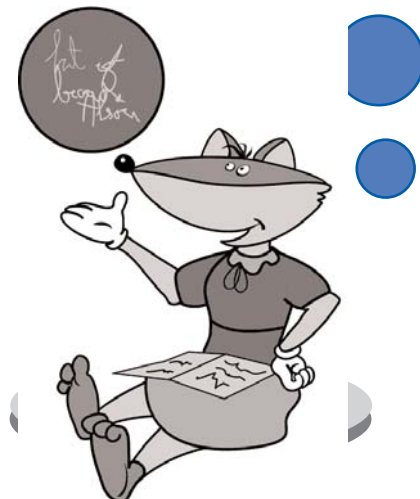


Telling Tales

by Mark Taylor



After five issues of Coyote looking in this methodology section at "Where do you stand?", we felt it could be inspiring to look at another generic form used in training: telling tales and stories which help us reach the parts that other activities never do. Tales generate images in our heads and appeal to emotions, often leaving things open to several interpretations – great stuff to start discussions and introduce themes. If you have tales you would like to share in this section, please let us know!

This time we look at two little stories related to prejudice and racism.

MARY

Prejudices and stereotypes are schemes which help us to understand reality; when reality does not correspond to our prejudice it is easier for our brains to change our interpretation of reality than to change the prejudice. Prejudices help us to complement information when we do not have it all. Siang Be – a trainer and therapist living in Berlin - demonstrates this process by asking his audience to listen to the following short story:

"Mary heard the ice-cream van coming down the street. She remembered her birthday money and ran into the house".

You could interpret this passage like this: Mary is a child, she would like an ice-cream, she runs into the house to get some money so that she can buy the ice-cream. But where do you find any of this information? Try changing any of the nouns in the passage ('money' to 'gun', for instance) and see what happens.

GOLD STAR

A primary school class comes in from their break. The teacher asks little Alice: "What did you do during your break?" Alice replies, "I played games in the playground." The teacher replies "That's good. Go to the blackboard, and if you can write 'games' correctly, I'll give you a gold star to stick in your book." Alice does so and gets a gold star. The teacher asks little Billy what he did during the break. Billy replies, "I played games with Alice in the playground." The teacher replies, "Good. If you write 'play' correctly on blackboard, I'll give you a gold star to stick in your book." Billy duly does so, and gets a gold star. Then the teacher asks little Ahmed what he did during the break. Ahmed replies "I tried to play with Alice and Billy, but they threw stones at me." The teacher says, "What? They threw stones at you? That sounds to me like blatant unjustifiable racial discrimination. If you can go to the blackboard and write 'blatant unjustifiable racial discrimination', I'll give you a gold star to stick in your book."

Consider the little "story" above, (it was sent to me as one of those forwarded e-mail jokes which slow down the internet). What kinds of messages are contained in it? The scene probably never happened, but it does draw attention to some of the difficulties in trying to analyse if human rights are being promoted in any given situation. School is often a place of non-rights, to use the expression of the French philosophy professor Bernard Defrance. It has been known for teachers, school directors and students to disobey the law or to infringe on the physical or moral integrity of others. Such things can also happen if people are ignorant of the law or when they are confronted with dramatic situations which destabilise them, like violence, expulsion or exclusion. How do we transform our schools into places of rights? Who needs to be involved? What roles can the informal education sector play?

So, that is a first go at telling some tales. Let's hear some of your stories.

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