

Reviewing for Fun

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'Physics is Fun' is the title of a school text book that is firmly installed in my memory (the title, not the contents). The title reminds me of the Ministry of Truth slogans in George Orwell's 1984: 'War is Peace', 'Freedom is Slavery', 'Ignorance is Strength' ... 'Physics is Fun'.

I actually quite enjoyed Physics. Especially when the experiments went wrong. But even those lessons were not my idea of 'fun'. That's the trouble with fun. Everyone has their own idea of what it is - from school students on the one hand, to school text book writers on the (very distant) other.

I am not going to fall into the trap of imposing my idea of fun on others, but I do have a few tips, insights and stories that may help you bring a little more fun to reviewing.

Why bring fun to reviewing in the first place? I know that some kinds of fun are insensitive and can impede learning, but it is also true that fun and learning can make excellent partners. And that certainly includes 'learning from experience' - even if the original experience was not a bundle of laughs.

In 'Reviewing for Development' I wrote that:

"We can respond to the need for FUN by including playful exercises such as 'Empathy Tests' or 'Fortunately, Unfortunately' (an alternating round), or by including independent reviewing tasks that end with a performance such as a poem, a song, a replay, a dramatic presentation. Of course, the best fun just happens, but it helps if you create expectations that reviewing sessions can be both fun and serious. Better still if you avoid associating 'serious' with learning and 'fun' with energisers! Techniques like 'Turntable', 'Action Replay' or 'Gifts' tend to generate a healthy mixture of fun and serious within the same technique."

<http://reviewing.co.uk/articles/reviewing-for-development.pdf>

This article on 'Reviewing for Fun' takes fun a little further and points to some of the most 'fun' pages at <http://reviewing.co.uk>

ICE BREAKERS (that review *past* experiences)

THE WORLD'S WORST ICE BREAKER

This reviewing exercise is primarily for training trainers. Ask people to tell stories about their worst experiences with ice breakers. Sharing such misery can be a fun way of learning about the pitfalls to look out for when using ice breakers. This reviewing exercise gives you a good opportunity to respond reassuringly to any fears and concerns that people may have about being asked to do silly things. You now have the sillyphobic vote, but there could still be some ice to break. [*Warning: fun not guaranteed! On one occasion this became a humourless moan - so be quick to follow up with an acceptable ice breaker. If it is a trainer-training event, work with the group to produce a list of opposites which becomes a recipe for the*

perfect ice breaker - for this particular group. Which might just happen to be Brief Encounters ...]

BRIEF ENCOUNTERS (reviewing successes)

This is a reviewing exercise that allows people to have lots of brief one-to-one conversations about their successes. It is an ideal first exercise because you can start the exercise promptly and then quietly introduce latecomers into the exercise as they arrive. You can introduce different themes with other sets of questions, but for most purposes 'success' provides a good starting point. To give you the flavour, here are some of the success-searching questions:

- What is one of the most mouth-watering meals you have cooked?
- What was your most recent success?
- Who inspires you and how are you a bit like them?
- What was your smallest success ever?
- How did you learn to dance?
- What's the closest you have been to becoming a pop star?
- What is your recipe for success?

All 49 success questions are listed at:

<http://reviewing.co.uk/success/icebreaker.htm> together with stories from trainers who have used Brief Encounters.

ICE BREAKER (reviewing *present* experiences)

THE EXPRESSION GAME (a 'heart-on-the-sleeve' exercise) I originally devised this game as a trainer-training exercise to focus on what the learner in a 'learner-centred' process is experiencing. Not very sophisticated, but quite thought-provoking and playful. Not suitable for the very start of a course as it puts individuals on the spot and can give them too much to cope with.

It is a variation of a well known game in which there is one less chair than there are people. The chairless person stands in the middle continuously calling out their feelings (such as cool, pressured, special, excited, tired, isolated, happy) while others change seats. The person in the middle tries to sit in a recently vacated seat, which (if successful) results in another person becoming the chairless one. Variation: anyone who is looked at by the person in the middle must call out their feeling (just once) as soon as they are looked at (and ends up in the middle if they don't). Another variation: take more than one chair away so that more than one person is in the middle. It may then feel a bit less lonely in the middle - with each person asking the other: "How do you feel now?"

TELLING STORIES: TAKING TURNS TO TELL A GROUP STORY

FORTUNATELY, UNFORTUNATELY (for a balanced view)

This is one way in which a group (of any age) can tell the story about its performance. One person starts with a sentence beginning "Fortunately ...". The person on their left continues the story with a sentence beginning "Unfortunately". Passing is allowed but the over-riding rule is that sentences should alternate.

Example:

"Fortunately we allocated time for planning."

"Unfortunately we didn't read the full brief."

"Fortunately I noticed the mistake."

"Pass."

"Unfortunately you didn't mention it at the time."

This exercise is particularly useful for groups that are over-critical or under-critical of their own performance. This is because the alternation can help them to achieve a more balanced view. And for any group, it brings out achievements and problems that can be analysed in more detail later in the review. Warning: it can be fun.

Variations: <http://reviewing.co.uk/rounds.htm>

THE STORYTELLER'S CHAIR (for recalling events and details) This is another way for a group to tell its story. One person sits in the storyteller's chair and starts giving a detailed account of what happened. If any listener thinks the storyteller has omitted any detail, they stand up and change places with the storyteller and continue until challenged - and so on. If at any point you want to speed things up, you can jump ahead in time and continue from a new starting point. People may be reluctant to sit in the chair if they feel they might get stuck there, so allow people to leave the chair whenever they want. If a memory test does not provide enough fun or challenge, then invite storytellers to tell the story as if they are an outsider e.g. a reporter, a customer, a boss, or other stakeholder.

Variation: EMAG YROMEM (telling the story backwards - and why)

<http://reviewing.co.uk/stories/starters.htm#yromem>

TELLING STORIES: FROM AN INDIVIDUAL TO A GROUP

SOLO CHALLENGE (when individuals report back to the group) Immediately after the 'solo challenges', news and interest value are hot, and report backs are fresh, improvised and unrehearsed. In fact the report back session is often the highlight of the exercise. Everyone has a tale worth telling about their personalised challenge - and there is typically plenty of variety, emotion and humour in these tales.

<http://reviewing.co.uk/toolkit/solo.challenge.htm>

THEATRE OF THE ABSURD (really active listening) When an individual has a story to tell, the audience's attention can wander. Not so in Theatre of the Absurd! This is real audience participation: everyone takes part in the story as it is told. The storyteller sees their story come to life in front of their eyes as they tell it. This is not a technique to be sprung upon a docile group or a new group. It works best if the group has already experienced a less challenging version of action replay and if you start with a story that lends itself to instant improvisation.

<http://reviewing.co.uk/stories/replay.htm#theatre>

TELLING STORIES: TELLING A GROUP STORY TO A WIDER AUDIENCE

SHARING LEARNING

Communicating learning to a wider audience can be fun - especially if using drama-based methods. Groups respond well to such challenges if they have already experienced action replay or other active reviewing methods as part of their learning.

The wider audience will often expect entertainment with some serious messages mixed in, and with any luck this is also what the group wants to provide. If they need a structure then showing where they have come from (perhaps a journey of ups and downs) can be followed by showing how they are changing and then showing their dream future or future vision. If the drama ends in fantasy, some straight talking outside the drama (in the form of an epilogue) can provide a down to earth ending.

Another useful structure for a performance is overstatement, understatement and true statement. See:

<http://reviewing.co.uk/stories/replay.htm#exaggeration>

Ways of sharing learning through presentation and performance are described on this page: <http://reviewing.co.uk/toolkit/sharing.htm>

UNLIKELY TO BE A BUNDLE OF LAUGHS

- guided reflection (unless the guide takes listeners to fun places)
- feedback sessions (except gifts and, maybe, predictions)
- evaluation (unless presented as a court scene)
- force field analysis (unless in the form of snakes and ladders)
- action plans (unless acted out, or unless they include fake/fantasy items that others have to guess)
- interviews (unless in the Big Brother diary room).

FUN THOUGHTS

- Fun sometimes accelerates learning. And sometimes slows it down.
- Fun turns up when it is least expected and most needed.
- Fun is sometimes pure fun and nothing else.
- The best opportunities for fun are often at the early stages of a review when people are telling the story of what happened.
- Fun breaks the ice and accelerates group development - but some groups get stuck at fun and go no further. Other groups may not experience much fun until they know each other really well and feel relaxed in each other's company.

Don't avoid reviewing because a group needs or wants fun. Just file away some of your favourite ideas from this article in that cluttered fun corner of your mind - and remember that reviewing can be fun! Don't be too surprised if your fun ideas get serious or your serious ideas turn out to be fun. Be ready to accept that the group may have a better sense of timing. And that fun follows no rules!