

Hammer It Home

A Metaphorical Toolbox for Trainers

Training Magazine Conference 2010
February 3, 11:00 – 12:00
Session Number 708

Presented by

Brian Remer
The Firefly Group
339 Bullock Road
Guilford, VT 05301
802.257.7247
brian@thefirefly.org
www.thefirefly.org

Goal: to discover the role of serendipity in making learning both memorable and engaging

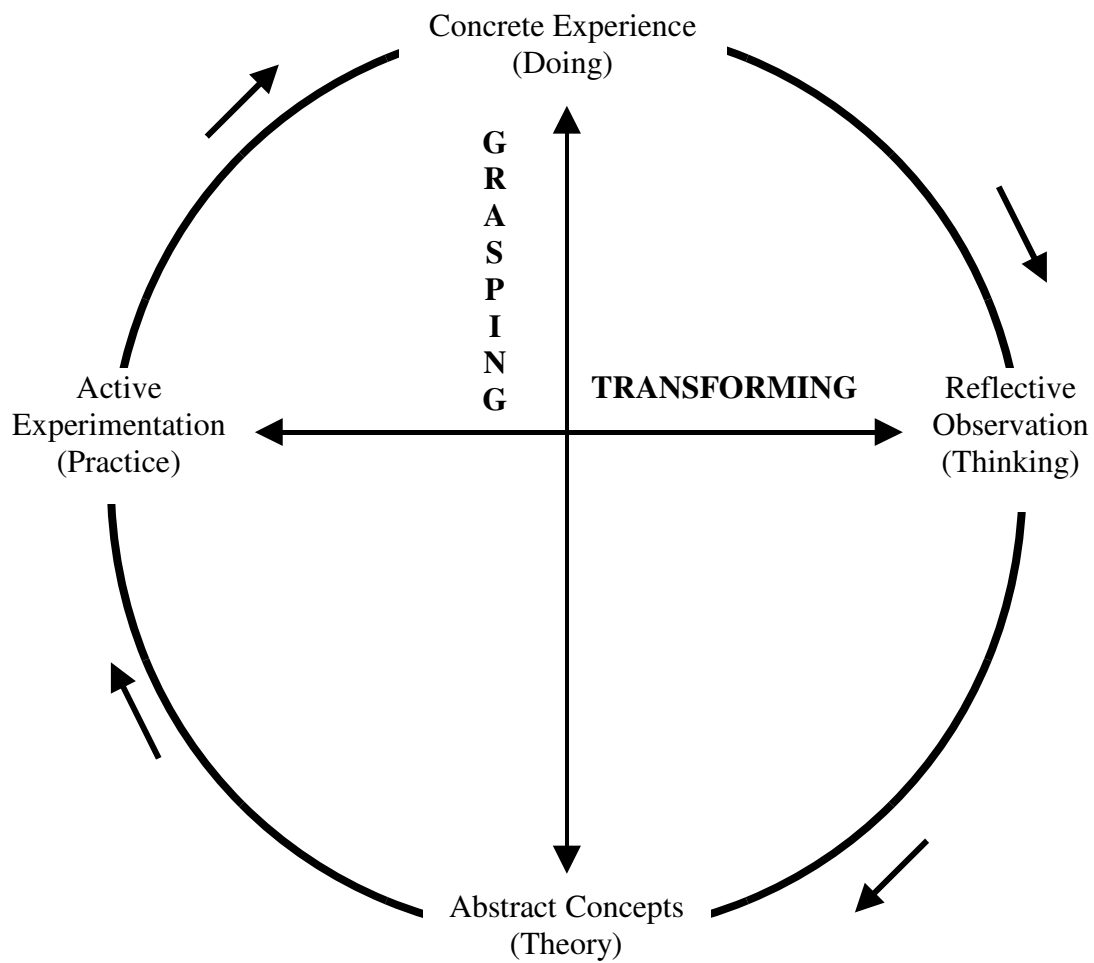
Objectives: *Participants will be able to:*

- I. Describe between three and six specific techniques for using metaphor in instructional systems
- II. Describe at least three reasons metaphor can be effective for learning and creativity
- III. Identify at least one metaphor technique and adapt it for immediate use in their own work situation

Session Level: Beginner, Intermediate, Advanced

Brian Remer is a designer of interactive strategies for training, facilitation, and performance improvement. As the creative learning director of The Firefly Group, he ignites a spark of inspiration for collaboration, continuous learning, systems thinking, and serendipity.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle



Mystery Theater

An activity that draws upon participants' showmanship to review learning points.

Time: 15 to 30 minutes

Materials: a box of unusual, unrelated objects (one box of the same items for each group)

Divide participants into teams of four to six and give each team a box containing five mystery objects. The objects should be a mix of items unusual and common with no obvious connections between them. Sample objects might be a string of beads, a tea strainer, a fly swatter, Silly Putty, and a can of Spam. Give each team the same mix of five items.

Here's one way you can present the activity: "All the world's a stage and now it's time for the grand finale. The task for your team is to create a short skit related to something important that you learned today. We call this *Mystery Theater* because our props manager, who is something of an eccentric, has assembled all the props you'll need in your own box. (We just don't know what's in your box yet!) In her wisdom, the props manager knew that you would be able to use your mystery items in whatever skit you created. So, you must use all the props in your box and you must use them to represent something *other* than what they really are. Make sure everyone on your team participates. You have ten minutes."

After the preparation time, give each team a few minutes to perform their skit. Be prepared for a lot of energy and humor! At the conclusion of each skit, invite the audience to identify the important learning points that are related to the day's topic. Make a list of these on newsprint and be prepared to distribute it to participants as a follow-up.

Discussion:

- ◆ How well did your team work together?
- ◆ What elements made each presentation successful?

TRAINER'S NOTES

Why is acting with odd props effective? In *Mystery Theater*, people are presented with a challenge that really stretches their creativity. And in that stretch to connect the organization's ethics policy with a yellow yoyo, for example, people gain new insights, make links to other things they've learned, and improve their retention.

Variations:

- Use it at the beginning of a workshop and people can make skits about their expectations.
- In a session of several days, people can use acting to give feedback about the program at its midpoint.
- Give each team a unique box of props so everyone is working with different resources.
- Specify which specific learning points are to be included in each skit.
- Use it in a teambuilding workshop as a barometer of team effectiveness. Who led? Were all included? How were decisions made?

Five – Ten – Five

An activity to summarize the major points of your workshop.

Time: 15 minutes

Materials: Flipchart, markers, pens, paper

Ask participants to call out words related to your session topic. Generate a list of five words and post them on the flip chart. Next, ask people to call out five more words that have nothing to do with the workshop and are unrelated to each other. Post them on the flipchart also. This becomes the list of ten key words.

Invite people to choose a partner or make a team of up to four people. Challenge them to write *five* sentences related to what they have learned using all *ten* key words in *five* minutes. They can mix and match the key words in any way they see fit as long as all ten key words are used.

Start your timer!

At the end of five minutes, have teams or partners share their statements. As they do, check off the key words they use.

Award prizes or applause for humor, wit, practicality, lasting impact, or ease of recall.

Discussion:

- ◆ What new insights did you gain about the workshop topic by writing your ten statements?
- ◆ What statements were most surprising?
- ◆ Which key words were most difficult to use?
- ◆ If you were to play this game again, what different words would you add to the key word list?

Be prepared to distribute the statements as a follow up.

TRAINER'S NOTES

Variations:

- Ask each team to generate a list of ten key words. Have them trade their list with another team then write five statements with their new list.
- Use Five – Ten – Five at the beginning of the workshop to surface expectations.
- Have teams post and illustrate their statements on newsprint.
- Send the list of key words to participants in an email after the workshop. Ask them to send their five statements to you. Post the statements on your website.
- Market your workshop. Send the key words out ahead of time. Ask, “What connection do these ten words have with the session topic? Come to the workshop and find out!”

Chiji Cards

A ready-made tool that uses metaphor to reinforce learning.

Time: 30 minutes or longer depending on size of group

Materials: Chiji Processing Cards available from The Institute for Experiential Education, 115 Fifth Ave. S., Suite 430, La Cross, WI 54601, 608 784-0789.

Chiji Processing Cards are a deck of 52 cards with color images. The pictures are varied and are open to interpretation. Examples include a lightening bolt held in a fist, a turtle, a broken vase in the desert, a sunset, an empty highway, and an hourglass.

The cards come with instructions and several ideas for their use. They are very effective as a way to get people thinking metaphorically which is a good technique for deepening understanding of an issue.

To use in a wrap up activity, ask participants to think of something important they learned in the session. Give them a few moments of silence to collect their thoughts.

Spread the cards on a table or distribute two or three to each person. Ask people to choose a card that is symbolic of what they learned.

Give everyone two to three minutes to share their card and its relationship to what they learned.

Discuss:

- ◆ How did your understanding of the topic change as a result of listening to what others shared?
- ◆ What can you do to remember the connection between the image you chose and the important things you learned today?

TRAINER'S NOTES

Alternative card decks:

- *Table Talk Cards* from the JOAT Co. 800-997-5676
- *Illusions in Art* from Y & B Associates Inc., 33 Primrose Lane, Hempstead, NY 11550
- *Soulcards* from the Center for Touch Drawing, PO Box 914, Langley. WA 98260 360-221-5745.
- *Expression Cards* from The University of Oklahoma, www.ettq.ou.edu.

Grandma's Attic

A metaphor technique to surface expectations or articulate a vision.

Time: 20 minutes

Materials: A wide and varied assortment of objects such as small toys, curios, things found outdoors, etc. at least one per person.

Assemble a collection of odd, unusual, and unrelated objects. Collect items from around your home or work setting choosing objects that are fun, uncommon, or especially interesting. While gathering your items, walk quickly around the room taking things off of shelves and out of cupboards that catch your eye. Don't worry about whether anyone else might see them as being relevant. (In my collection, I have a fish-shaped squirt gun, a golf ball, a pocket Etch A Sketch®, a beanbag animal, a fossil, a maraca, a turkey feather, a can of Spam, a cassette tape, an old toothbrush, and a kazoo to name just a few objects.) Make sure you have more than one item for each participant.

Spread the objects on a table. Instruct participants to think about why they came to the training. What do they hope will be the outcome? How do they expect it to be different? Give people 2 to 3 minutes to choose an object that is a metaphor, or somehow represents, one of their expectations.

Let people take turns introducing themselves, showing their object and sharing their expectation. Encourage people to keep their sharing short (30 seconds/person) so everyone has a chance. (For a large group, ask people to share only with those at their own table.) As expectations are identified, write them on newsprint.

Discussion:

- ◆ What is one metaphor that someone else came up with that you also find meaningful?
- ◆ What generalizations can you make about people's expectations?
- ◆ What insights about group members have you gained by hearing them share their metaphor?

TRAINER'S NOTES

Variations:

- Use this exercise as a closer for your workshop. Ask people to find a metaphor for the most important thing they learned
- Ask people to bring their own object to the workshop. Spread the objects on the table. Instruct people to choose any item as their metaphor other than the one they brought.
- Send people outside to find an object from the environment to use as a metaphor.

Comic Relief

Effective training is no laughing matter – but it could be if you use the comics pages from your Sunday paper.

Time: 20 minutes

Materials: Several dozen color comic strips from the Sunday paper

Personal Inspiration – Planning a new presentation? Do your research, thinking, and writing then set it aside for a few days. When you are ready to look at it with fresh eyes, turn to the comics. Read through them and ask yourself how each might relate to your topic. If you are grounded in your topic, you will find a comic strip that connects. Then flesh it out by asking what metaphorical association each character has with your topic. Use your insights to inform your presentation.

Event Theme – Choose a comic strip that you feel has some connections to your workshop theme. Be strategic and ask participants what new insights the comic strip reveals for them after you cover each major learning point. Notice how people's thinking becomes more profound when they are asked to derive new meaning from the same comic several times.

Icebreaker – Cut several comic strips apart into their individual picture panels. Distribute the panels randomly to participants and have them find the folks who have panels from the same strip. Have them put their panels into the correct order and introduce themselves as they read their whole strip to the rest of the participants. Ask them to describe how their comic is a metaphor for the training topic.

Extreme Learning – Ask people to reflect silently about the topic and find a comic that is a metaphor for their views about it. Share comics and metaphorical meanings with the rest of the group. Use to explore learning points, write action steps, or review.

Get Creative – Distribute comic strips with the words blacked out. Ask partners to write dialogue for the comic characters so the strip illustrates a key learning point.

TRAINER'S NOTES

Newspaper comics are cheap and readily available. In a few weeks you can easily save enough for a year's worth of workshops – especially if you gather them from more than one paper each week.

People like the funnies. Everyone has their favorite and is able to identify with specific characters. Written as they are for mass consumption, they speak to contemporary themes and can be easily related to current issues. It is this aspect of the Sunday comics that makes them valuable as a training tool.

Variations:

- Instead of comic strips, try using pictures from a magazine like *National Geographic*. Ask people to choose a picture to tell a story that relates to the learning topic.
- Have on hand a variety of super hero comic books. Ask your participants to list the main points of the learning topic. If there were a super hero who was an expert in that topic, what super powers would that hero have?

Confucius Says . . .

“It is better to play than do nothing.” So said Confucius in what is perhaps one of his lesser known quotes. In this activity, you can capitalize on the playful nature of this well-known Chinese philosopher to help your participants summarize the day’s learning, wrap up the workshop, or just end the day on a high note.

Time: Five minutes to 25 minutes depending on your purpose

Materials: One fortune cookie per person, paper and pens (optional)

Ask people to think of three to five things they learned during the day’s meeting or training event. Have them write their ideas on a paper. Either full sentences or a few key phrases are fine.

After a moment, distribute one fortune cookie to each person. Explain that, once people read the fortune inside their cookie, many will be surprised to find that it has special relevance to one of the things they learned today. Give them a moment to read their fortunes and be alert for anyone who expresses surprise or delight at what they find.

Invite people to share their fortune and explain how it relates to what they learned. Encourage those who had a strong reaction while reading their fortune to be sure to share. If volunteers are not forthcoming, ask one or two people to read their fortune and invite the whole group to figure out how that fortune relates to the day’s session. Applaud the efforts of the group and thank them for their commitment to learning.

Discussion:

- What additional thoughts or comments can you add to the fortunes that were read?
- If you were to write an original fortune that relates to the day’s session, what would it be?
- What are some specific ways you can apply the wisdom of these fortunes on the job?

TRAINER'S NOTES

Variations:

- If you are worried that no one will find a fortune that relates to what was learned, relax. Give people plenty of time to consider their fortune and someone will always find one that clicks.
- This activity is especially appropriate for the end of a strategic planning session or any meeting where people leave with specific follow-up assignments.
- Use this activity at the beginning of your session to elicit expectations.
- Have people work with a partner or in small groups to choose a fortune and determine its relevance.
- Ask people to read their fortune adding an extra identical phrase at the end. Choose a phrase that’s relevant to your group such as “...on the shop floor,” “...when providing customer service,” or “... while leading a team meeting.” What new insights can be gained about the topic through this juxtaposition?

Why Use Metaphor?

Reason	Example	My Application
1.) Complete the experiential learning cycle by transforming data that has been grasped experientially or theoretically		
2.) Capitalize upon the brain's superior powers of association and the inherent human need to derive meaning from experience		
3.) Align you with your trainee, client, student, or partner creating rapport		
4.) Create shared experiences; Others often build upon them		
5.) Describe a potentially difficult situation, experience, or problem		
6.) Offer alternative information		
7.) Provide additional – and sometimes novel – ways of resolving problems		
8.) Help people think and reflect on their lives		
9.) Enhance memory because of its simplicity of thought		
10.) Inform the unconscious, the seat of virtually all attitude and behavior		
11.) 'Re-frame' or show a situation in a different light		
12.) Stimulate the imagination; Spark creativity		
13.) Add playfulness		

When to Use Metaphor

Situation	Example	My Application
1.) Beginning of a workshop (expectations, check-in with participants)		
2.) Focus group attention		
3.) Illustration of a key point		
4.) Recurrent theme in a workshop, course, or someone's personal life!		
5.) Debrief an activity		
6.) Explore a topic at a deeper level of meaning		
7.) Enhance brainstorming and idea generation		
8.) Add meaning to evaluation by adding an interpretative dimension		
9.) Increase creativity during design of lessons		
10.) End of a workshop (evaluation, summary of content, creating action steps)		

Cautions in Using Metaphor

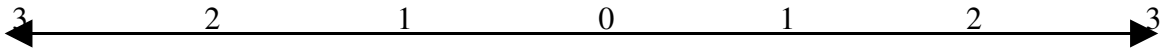
Point of Caution	Why this is a Concern	Possible Solution
1.) People may not understand the analogy		
2.) People may interpret the analogy very differently from what you intended		
3.) People may see too much or too little similarity between their situation and the analogy		
4.) Debriefing is critical for fidelity with content		
5.) Optimal balancing of metaphor use determines maximum impact		

The Strategic Use of Metaphor

Invention

Give people an analogy

Ask people to invent
their own analogy

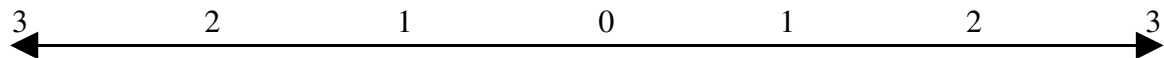


Possible Result:

Selection

Think of the reality
then choose a metaphor

Choose a metaphor
and decide how it
fits with reality

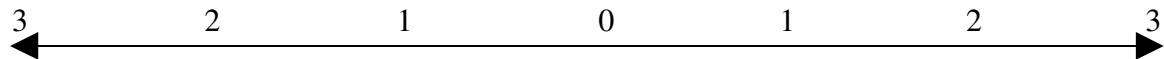


Possible Result:

Presentation

Introduce (predispose)
people to the analogy

Present the analogy
and explain later

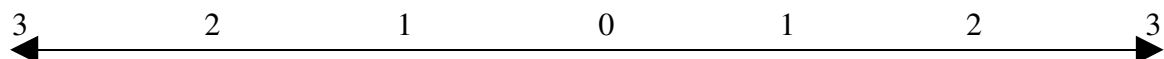


Possible Result:

Interpretation

Reveal/explain
the analogy

Let people draw their
own conclusions



Possible Result:

Hammer It Home: Resources

Managing by Storying Around by Armstrong, D.M., 1995.

Working with Groups to Enhance Relationships by Marie-Nathalie Beaudoin & Sue Walden, Whole Person Associates, 1998.

The Mind Map Book by Tony Buzan and Barry Buzan, Penguin Books, 1993.

Hare Brain, Tortoise Mind by Guy Claxton, HarperCollins, 1997.

Creativity by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, HarperCollins, 1996.

True Tales and Tall Tales: The Power of Organizational Storytelling by Beverly Kaye and Betsy Jacobson, Training and Development, March 1999.

Training to Imagine by Kat Koppett, Stylus, 2001.

Tails for Trainers by Margaret Parkin, Kogan Page Limited, London, 1998.

Think Like a Genius by Todd Siler, Bantam Books, New York, 1999.

Using Art in Training by Annette Simmons, Training and Development, June 1999.

Chiji Processing Cards – Deck of 52 cards with color pictures. Spread them on a table or distribute two or three to each person and ask participants to choose one that is symbolic of the topic. Available from The Institute for Experiential Education, 115 Fifth Ave. S., Suite 430, La Cross, WI 54601, 608 784-0789. Alternatives: *Table Talk Cards* from the JOAT Co. 800-997-5676; *Illusions in Art* from Y & B Associates Inc., 33 Primrose Lane, Hempstead, NY 11550; Expression Cards, The University of Oklahoma, University Outreach, www.ettq.ou.edu.

Kevin Eikenberry (www.kevineikenberry.com) Enroll in “Vantagepoints” and get a story every two weeks. Use the online metaphor-generation process to create a metaphor for any situation.

The Firefly Group (www.thefirefly.org) At Brian Remer’s site you can find articles about training, use of metaphor games, a free monthly newsletter, and 99 Word stories.

Trainer’s Warehouse (www.trainerswarehouse.com) Trainer’s Warehouse sells supplies, toys, certificates, and training games of all kinds.

Sivasailam Thiagarajan (www.thiagi.com) “Thiagi” is the most prolific inventor of training games on the planet. Visit his site for free games, a free newsletter, and many books to make training interactive.