

OUR APPROACH

Our approach is **'bespoke'**; we tailor and deliver learning interventions (often using roleplay to facilitate the learning) to be an ideal fit to our clients' requirements. We take time to understand the organisation, the culture, the programme and what needs to be delivered. We design to fit this reality and to serve the needs of the individual learner.

We create learning encounters that use actors in scenarios that are absolutely real and believable to ensure a useful, enjoyable, positive and often powerful experience for all.

Quality of feedback is fundamental to our ethos and we offer specific insight for the learner, prompting them to reflect and encouraging them to consider other perspectives. This has high value and personal impact.

We foster a safe 'learning laboratory', working confidentially and supportively, challenging and encouraging the individuals and teams we work with to experiment and apply new learning.

In assessment situations we carefully calibrate the approach and level of challenge to achieve reliable consistency.

From initial contact, the process we follow will be built around our client's requirements. We will take a detailed brief, before creating our response and we remain in close consultation, tuning the delivery to hit or exceed all requirements.

"Teaching is more than imparting knowledge, it is inspiring change. Learning is more than absorbing facts, it is acquiring understanding." (William Arthur Ward)

We work both directly with client organisations and in partnership with other learning and development providers

THE THEORY THAT SUPPORTS OUR WORK: A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO OUR THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

By our Associate, Dr Richard Feltham PhD AHEA

'What we learn to do, we learn by doing' (Aristotle, 384-322 BC)

Here we provide a short summary of key academic theories that inform our work. Learning through simulation provides an immersive encounter where insights are gained through experience and in which learners can reflect, analyse and adjust their own behavior to

successfully influence the outcome. New skills are acquired in a high challenge, low risk environment.

We'll look at examples of theory from three levels, from a 'big picture' overview of learning theory, through to a medium perspective of experiential learning ending on a 'close up' of one aspect of our work with a focus on interpersonal awareness and emotional intelligence.

The Big Picture: How we learn

Learning is both a psychological and a social process. The theory of **Constructivism** aims to explain the internal psychological aspects of how we as adults learn. It identifies how learning happens in two ways. It is either constructed through *assimilation* of new experiences that fit a learner's existing cognitive structures or through *accommodation* when the learner must adapt their thought processes when they encounter unexpected situations.

Social Constructivism develops this theory by emphasising the importance of the social context of learning. At its most straightforward this means learning happens most successfully when a facilitator provides a 'scaffold' for learning which is then withdrawn to promote independence. Simply put, the theory tells us that old fashioned passive 'chalk and talk' teaching methods are far less effective than when the learner is actively central to the process, as they are, for example, in facilitated role-play.

Methodology

Knowledge of theories of effective leadership and communication are of little use if the learner lacks the skills required to exercise them in the real world. For this reason, **Experiential learning** lies at the heart of our practice, where we can weave between theory and practice on demand. The structure of our methodology is supported most notably by Kolb's work that demonstrates that we 'learn by doing'. He provides the notion that understanding is not fixed, but that it evolves through experience. Kolb identifies four stages of experiential learning, which are:

- Concrete experience
- Reflective observation
- Abstract conceptualization
- Active experimentation

For learning to be effectively assimilated, all four stages of the process must be worked through. A flexible learner-centred approach is necessary; to account for an individual's preferred learning style and existing knowledge. Kolb's model provides a framework for our experiential work and with the addition of experienced trainers, facilitators and our skilled actors who are able to

generate credible characters, it provides for a powerful learning encounter with long-lasting impact.

A key problem with any learning is to what extent the newly acquired knowledge and skills transfer to improved performance in the real world. Human beings and challenging social contexts are too complex to guarantee the outcome of any learning. That said, we can however increase the odds of success by placing the learner at the centre of the learning encounter and flexing to meet the unique needs of each individual we work with. The high fidelity and credibility of our simulations further closes the gap between the simulation and the real.

This process aims to build a high degree of confidence in the skills under review, an approach underpinned by Bandura's theories of **Self Efficacy**. This central and influential theory places an individual's confidence (or 'self efficacy') in their own abilities as key to the achievement of tasks and goals. His ideas are less concerned with an individual's skills, but more with their confidence as the key component to their successful execution. Bandura identifies four steps for building self-efficacy that can be worked through as a cycle and repeated:

- Rehearsal
- Incremental challenge
- Reflection
- Vicarious learning

We weave Bandura's methods for building self-efficacy into our work, thereby ensuring that delegates have the confidence to succeed in the real world, outside the supportive atmosphere of the training room.

Close up on practice

Expert facilitation supports 'eureka' moments and the conditions for learners to gain new insights. Luft and Ingham provide a graphical model of **interpersonal awareness** that identifies how we all have 'blind spots' which we are unaware of. Various tools for psychometric profiling such as Myers-Briggs, SDI, Insights, and 360 reviews can identify these theoretically; role-play can identify them through the concrete experience of the interaction. The structured feedback generated from the evidence of a role-play can provide a powerful stimulus for behavior change and help people to explore the way in which they work, potentially breaking limiting patterns of behavior, building emotional intelligence and awaken people to new possibilities without jeopardy.

Selected bibliography

- BOLTON, G. M. & HEATHCOTE, D. (1999) *So you want to use role-play?: a new approach in how to plan*, Stoke-on-Trent, Trentham.
- BANDURA, (1986), *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory* in Marks, D, (2002), *The Health Psychology Reader*, London, Sage
- BRADLEY, P. A. P., K (2003) *Simulation in Clinical Learning*. . *Medical Education* vol.37, (Suppl. 1):1-5.
- BURNS, R. (2002) *The Adult Learner at Work: The Challenges of Lifelong Education in the New Millennium*, Crows Nest, Allen & Unwin.
- FELTHAM, R. (2012), 'A critical stage for learning? Efficiency and efficacy in workplace theatre-based leadership skills development', *Journal of Arts & Communities* 4:3, pp 251-264
- ILLERIS, K. (2011) *The Fundamentals of Workplace Learning*, Abingdon, Routledge.
- JARVIS P, H. J. G. C. (2003) *The theory and practice of learning*, Abingdon, Routledge.
- KOLB, D. A. (1984) *Experiential learning: experience as the source of learning and development*, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall.
- KOLB, D. A., RUBIN, I. M. & MCINTYRE, J. M. (1984) *Organizational psychology: readings on human behaviour in organizations*, Englewood Cliffs ; London, Prentice-Hall.
- KOPPETT, K. (2001) *Training Using Drama: Successful development techniques from theatre & improvisation*, Sterling, Va., Stylus.
- LUFT J & INGHAM C, (1955), *The Johari Window, a graphical model of interpersonal awareness*. Proceedings of the western training laboratory in group development, Los Angeles, UCLA
- MOON, J. A. (2004) *A handbook of reflective and experiential learning: theory and practice*, London; New York, Routledge Falmer.
- QUAY, J. (2000) *Experiential and Participation: Relating Theories of Learning*. *The Journal of Experiential Learning*..Fall 2003 Vol.26 pp105-116.
- SCHON, D. A. (1991) *The Reflective Practitioner. How professionals think in action*, Aldershot, Ashgate.
- YARDLEY-MATWIEJCZUK, K. M. (1997) *Role play: theory and practice*, London [etc.], Sage Pubns.