



PLAY4 REAL

Theatre: the Space to Play “What If...?”

a residential weekend programme for
The Open University Business School
(www.open.ac.uk/oubs)

CASE STUDY

Why this might be relevant to you:

Designed as part of an interdisciplinary course for MBA-level students, the techniques and approaches used in this project are also highly relevant to business organisations facing one or more of these needs:

-  to experience the power of metaphor as a means of articulating and sharing tacit knowledge
-  to discover the relevance of storytelling to resolving business issues and problems
-  to play with performance in order to find different, more effective ways of putting a message across to an audience
-  to unlock creativity for individuals
-  to develop a more creative culture throughout a department or organisation
-  to create a safe space within which those who are new to a highly interactive style of learning can experience its power for the first time, without feeling disadvantaged alongside others more used to such techniques
-  to bring a multinational, cross-cultural mix of delegates together and generate a sense of mutual trust and openness in the sharing of experience
-  to boost individuals' sense of fun and confidence through 'having a go' at articulating issues and interacting with colleagues in more creative ways.

The Context

'Creativity, Innovation and Change' is a masters level course offered by the Open University Business School (OUBS). It includes a weekend Residential School that complements the academic requirements of the course with an exciting variety of opportunities for participants to put theory into practice.

The emphasis of the Residential is on equipping managers with creative techniques for problem-solving.

A team of tutors offers various mainstream workshops running concurrently throughout the weekend, from which attendees choose one series. All the workshops aim to enhance individuals' own understanding and growth – and enable them to apply what they've experienced back in their own organisations in order to promote a more creative climate.

In addition to this intensive 2-day programme, participants can also opt for short evening workshops that give them 'taster' introductions to alternative approaches.

Residentials take place in various locations in the UK and mainland Europe, and attendees represent a wide mix of nationalities and career backgrounds.

The Brief

Lin Sagovsky of Play4Real was invited to join the team of regular course tutors as a guest facilitator at an OUBS Residential School in Leiden, near Amsterdam.

The requirements were to design and deliver:

- ✎ a 2-day **mainstream course** on creative problem-solving using the techniques of the theatre for participants of the masters-level 'Creativity, Innovation and Change' programme
- ✎ 2 short '**elective**' **sessions** as a taster for non-participants of the core course.

The **mainstream course** needed:

- ✎ to boost participants' practical understanding of the power and relevance of creativity in the workplace
- ✎ to allow participants to share and focus on specific issues of real concern to them, in which they could anchor problem-solving techniques and make a journey from puzzlement to clarity

- ✎ to encourage participants to develop as 'reflective practitioners' by regularly making time, during a very intensive two days, for them privately to identify and consider learnings, and to map their sense of progress in resolving their chosen issue
- ✎ to give participants the opportunity to try out their own facilitation skills in preparation for applying the techniques in their own workplaces.

Each member of the tutor team was free to design a course to fulfil these aims in whatever ways he/she felt appropriate.

The brief for the **elective sessions** was similarly flexible: simply to give all Residential attendees an opportunity to experience a flavour of the Play4Real approach to learning.

The Play4Real Response

✎ 'Play it by Ear'

A high degree of flexibility was essential in both planning and delivery, for several reasons. First, it's part of the nature of the Residential that workshop sizes, participant profile and precise timings remain unpredictable, since students make their own choice from the tutor team's alternatives on arrival.

Second, participants are new to each other; some were also entirely new to experiential or arts-based approaches to learning. So we needed swiftly to establish a safe group atmosphere in which people felt comfortable about sharing workplace experiences and trying out techniques which to some were wildly unfamiliar.

The wide variety of cultures represented also made it vital to ensure that all our material was wholly accessible to non-native English speakers.

✎ Our Mainstream Course: 'Theatre – the Space to Play "What If...?"'

Of the many different precepts and techniques described in the OUBS course manuals, we chose to focus mainly on **metaphor**.

This provided a structure within which we could:

- ✎ explore the power of metaphor in order to identify and articulate a problem for individuals, and then

- ✎ build that into shared expressions of concerns - and a tryout of resolutions - through dramatised performance.

A group of 9 participants journeyed through:

- ✎ metaphor as a means of facilitating individual disclosure and group openness
- ✎ differing perceptions and interpretations of the same image or metaphor
- ✎ the effect of spatial relationship and personal physicality upon sense of self and others, especially in relation to tackling challenging issues
- ✎ reliance on control vs. intuition, especially when collaborating in a pair or team
- ✎ empathy and commitment to others' problems
- ✎ presentation to a wider audience, building a series of metaphors into multi-layered storytelling about the 'past, present and future' of a problem faced or challenge overcome
- ✎ ownership, letting go, and celebration of resolutions and learnings.

✎ **The Elective 'Tasters'**

1. Speak with Confidence

A 1-hour 'whistle-stop tour' of some key techniques for developing spoken voice. A highly practical session on how to bring presence to the delivery of a message using:

- ✎ stance and posture
- ✎ relaxation
- ✎ breath control
- ✎ placing of the voice
- ✎ tone
- ✎ articulation.

2. Interact with Confidence

A 2-hour workshop exploring personal impact on others through physical demeanour and body language.

The group played with differing levels of personal 'status', and each participant was then given a brief opportunity for individual coaching in 'master-class' style.

What People Said about the Course...

I never understood what metaphor was all about when I read the course books. Now I really understand how it could work and I'm excited about using these techniques in my work.

Silvana Torosian, MBA student

So many different things to take away and try! I have a whole list – and I'll begin by getting rid of the tables and sitting in a circle whenever I hold a meeting!

Andres Romann, MBA student

Many thanks, again, for the great residential school in Leiden. It really helped me to reflect and to pay attention to things and activities that I used to consider useless.

Dr. Claudiu Prisecaru, Executive Director, SanProdMed, Bucharest

Thanks for your greatly-valued contribution to the success of our Resi. Your ratings are first-class; for a 'Creativity Innovation and Change' rookie they're especially impressive, and we'd be very pleased to see you again next time around! I hope the experience was as useful and pleasant for you as it evidently was for your students. Thankyou.

David Mayle, Course Director