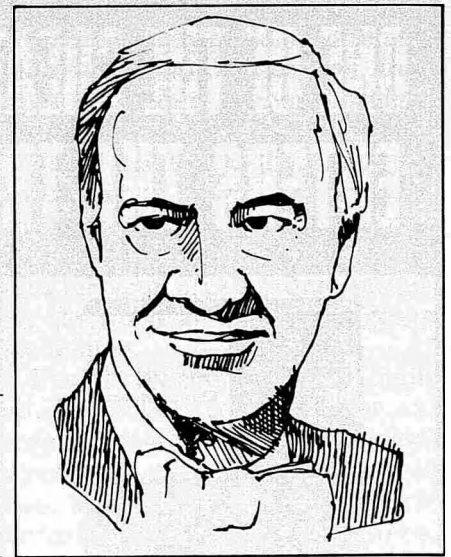


MALCOLM KNOWLES ON . . .



"TRAINING AS AN ART FORM"

Last fall I did a series of one- and half-day workshops with the Los Angeles Chapter of ASTD, one of which was on "Program Design." My central theme in this workshop was that a training program could be thought of as an art form, and I found that the quality of my programs had greatly improved when I used principles of art in designing them.

As I was describing my experience with this way of thinking I noticed three of the participants getting more and more animated. When I couldn't contain my curiosity any longer I asked them what was happening. All three identified themselves as former art teachers and explained that they were simply excited that their discipline could be so useful in designing training. They urged me to put my ideas into print, and I promised to present them in a future column. So here goes.

I use the concept "art form" broadly here, of course. Training programs cannot be an art form in the same sense that poems, paintings, sculptures, cathedrals, plays, symphonies and the dance are art forms. They cannot be free, creative expressions of human feeling that are ends in themselves. But training programs can possess many of the same qualities that cause the true art forms to be aesthetic experiences. They can be experienced as ugly, plain or beautiful. And the proposition I am making is that the aesthetic quality of a training program can

directly affect its educative quality.

What are the qualities, then, that make an art form an aesthetic experience? And how can they be applied to designing training programs?

The elements that make up a form are line, space, tone, color, texture and rhythm. The task of the designer of aesthetic experiences is to combine these elements so as to create a sense of order; a good work of art is one that has unity, that presents a satisfying composition. Let's brainstorm how these elements might be applied to the designing of training programs.

Line is the sense of direction, continuity and movement in a design. Some of the ways "line" can be expressed in a training program are:

- By a dynamic integrating theme; e.g., "Career Enrichment Program" conveys a feeling of motion, whereas "Job Skills Courses" seems static.

- By indicating progressive sequences of activities participants might choose to follow; e.g., from "Understanding Human Behavior" to "Sharpening Your Communications Skills" to "Improving Team Work."

Space is the shape of a program in terms of its length, width and depth; and *space patterns* are the relationship of the various units of a program within the limits of that shape. Some of the ways "shape" can be expressed in a training

program are:

- By clear definition of the limits of the program in terms of purposes, clientele, content and methodology — how the "shape" of this program differs from the "shape" of other programs the participants have experienced.

- By manipulating the length of time of individual meetings (short to long) and terms (five week, ten week) and by making them uniform or varied across the units of the program.

- By varying the depth of the activities; e.g., from light to heavy, elementary to advanced, exploratory to intense.

- By specifying the limits in size of the various activities.

- By manipulating the physical settings; e.g., type and size of meeting rooms, library space, lounging areas and location (in-plant vs. in a resort).

Tone is the shading or relative emphasis in a program. Some of the ways "tone" can be expressed in a training program are:

- By conveying a primary concern for people and their wants vs. for subjects and their requirements.

- By indicating whether the emphasis is on the participants and their personal growth or on the "teachers" and their proficiency or on the company and its goals or whether these are in balance.

- By the "tone of voice" used in presenting the program; e.g., is it presented in cold, formal, paternalistic terms or in warm, personal,

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caring terms? The format and language of printed materials used in the program often convey one or the other of these tones.

Color is the hue and intensity of a program which enables one to apply such descriptive adjectives to it as bright or dull, warm or cool, informal or formal, lively or dead, inspiring or depressing, and friendly or aloof. Some of the ways "color" can be expressed in a training program are:

- By portraying the program in announcements and publicity in bright, warm, informal, lively, inspiring and friendly terms.

- By providing comfortable, warmly decorated, informal physical facilities.

- By maintaining an atmosphere of warmth and friendliness in the way meetings are conducted.

- By selecting faculty and resource persons who are colorful, person-centered, inspiring, and supporting them in expressing their individuality and creativity.

- By releasing the colorfulness of the participants in the program by making use of their varied experiences as resources for learning; e.g., through group discussion, simulation exercises, team projects, student presentations, etc.

Texture is the tactile feel of a program — how it feels to the touch. A program might "feel" rough or smooth, soft or hard, broken or connected, spotty or even. Texture is not a quality that is created separately from the others, but is determined by how well the qualities of line, space, tone and color have been handled.

Rhythm is the relationship among the units of a design in terms of time and type of activity. Probably the most common rhythm in all of education is the dirge — a series of uniform blocks of time with a single type of activity, as typified by the one-hour lecture from 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. But it is possible to design programs with a fox trot, waltz or

tango rhythm (I haven't tried a disco rhythm yet). I don't know of anyone who has expressly set out to design a program according to a particular dance rhythm, but I do know that I have personally participated in programs (especially non-ASTD national conferences) with a monotonous rhythm.

By varying the patterns of short and long sessions, large and small meetings, light and heavy sessions, it is possible to add greatly to the aesthetic quality of a design. And there is one other aspect of rhythm I'd like to say a few words about — the rhythm between generalization and application or abstraction and experience. The traditional rhythm in education is lecture/discussion, lecture/discussion (generalization or abstraction first, then application or experience). The more we learn about the natural process of learning the more we realize that this rhythm is

the reverse of that in nature. And so, especially in adult education, we are providing the learners with an experience first (simulation exercise, case problem, field experience) from which generalizations can be drawn and to which abstractions can be related. The new rhythm is experience/lecture, experience/lecture.

For a long time there has been a controversy in education over whether it is a science or an art. Of course it is both. We do have a foundation of knowledge about how people learn and a body of theories about the application of this knowledge to teaching (but, unfortunately only recently have we been getting theories about its application to the facilitation of learning). And we do have a body of literature about the art of teaching — most of it contributed by intuitive teachers. But in traditional education the scientific wing

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of the controversy has held sway, with the result that designing education has been seen as essentially an engineering function — a mechanical operation in which materials and energy are structured so as to produce prescribed outcomes. Teachers have been trained to behave like engineers — to construct efficient structures (usually courses) for manipulating objects (students) into behaving in prescribed ways. They even have blueprints (teachers' manuals) to direct them.

For some kinds of education, such as basic machine operation skills, this scientific model may be appropriate to some degree. But for most kinds of education — and certainly the more important kinds — it is not. For people are more than objects. They are feeling, valuing, need-meeting, goal-seeking, creative, thinking organisms. They are attracted to beauty and repelled by ugliness. And so we need an artistic model for education.

No wonder so many training programs are experienced by their participants as dull, dry, mechanistic, standardized packages of imposed content. This is the legacy of the engineering model. But perhaps as we come to understand more clearly the insight that education *can be* an art form, training programs will come to be more beautiful to behold.

For those of you who would like to dig more deeply into this line of inquiry, let me pass along a few sources of information and inspiration that I have found to be most useful:

Patricia K. Cross, *Accent on Learning* (Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 1976).

Kenneth E. Eble, *The Craft of Teaching* (Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 1976).

Nathaniel L. Gage, *The Scientific Basis of the Art of Teaching* (Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1978).

Cyril O. Houle, *The Design of Education* (Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 1972).

Patricia A. McLagan, *Helping Others Learn: Designing Programs for Adults* (Addison-Wesley, Reading, Mass., 1978).

Henry N. Rasmusen, *Art Structure: A Textbook of Creative Design* (McGraw-Hill, New York, 1950).

Louis Rath, et al, *Teaching for Learning* (Merrill Publishing Co., Columbus, Ohio, 1967).

— Malcolm S. Knowles