Dale’s “Cone of Experience”

For as long as I have worked in the fields of training and instructional design I have carried the same quote on my curriculum vitae and work-related emails. It is credited to Benjamin Franklin, but is paraphrased from someone else much earlier on. It reads as follows:

“Tell me… I’ll forget, show me…I’ll understand, involve me…I’ll learn.”

Is this not Dale’s “Cone” in a nutshell?

Translation: If I verbally receive, I am more likely to forget. If I visually receive, I will do better, but if you let me participate…if you let me do stuff…boy will I work miracles for you.

Other quotes that are quite apt and support Dale’s “Cone of Experience” are:

I am always doing that which I cannot do, in order that I may learn how to do it. – Pablo Picasso

Experience is a dear teacher, but fools will learn at no other. - Benjamin Franklin

These quotes may be an oversimplification of Dale’s continuum, but for they seem to describe his belief that learners make more use of more abstract instructional activities such as verbal symbols, if they have built more concrete experiences to give meaning to them.

While I will readily admit to having used all of the 10 categories of instruction previously discussed on the boards, our trainers, as much as possible, like to stay on the enactive side of the spectrum. We use predefined role plays, games, field visits to patients, and shadowing experiences for several practical reasons. The first is that it’s easier on the trainers on the back end. There is still much planning and organizing in order to ensure that the learning outcomes are realized, however the following benefits makes that a worthwhile endeavor.

(1) The burden of keeping the student’s attention is no longer solely on the trainer. The responsibility is shared by each individual in the class. (2) Enactive learning is more fun. Students enjoy being active participants. They are able to use more senses than if they had simply read the manual. (3) The trainers learn also. Valuable information comes from observing the participants in each “event”. We are able to gauge behaviors and reactions of current students to plan for future classes. We continue to refine activities to include “answers” to questions previously asked within particular exercises.
We are a small company by most measures, but our employees work in several states. It is not practical for them to fly in for a classes like Negotiation Skills and Conflict Management due to cost, and scheduling. In cases like these, associates are relegated to using an off-the-shelf, web-based program that would cover the same subject matter in a different manner.

We are currently looking to redesign a particular manual (2- huge binders) and the associated PowerPoint presentation (144 slides) partly because of the overuse of graphics. EVERY page has a little icon of some sort on it. It also has examples (screen prints) of EVERY screen on the computer system, as well as a copy of EVERY application used in EVERY state for EVERY program.

I believe in design as proposed by the folks at Creative Training Techniques. They say when designing Divide material into the “need to have”, “the nice to have” and the “where to go”…

Most of the icons have no purpose other that they are “cute”. These “nice to havens” will be replaced by icons that are representative of something important (i.e. alerts, notes, etc.) many of the screen prints will also disappear. Students who use the system will not be using the manual to follow what’s on the screen. As for the state applications, that is definitely a “where to go”. We will be placing all the applications in ONE binder for each office, categorized by state and referenced by program. If someone needs to see what one looks like they can find it in a centralized location accessible to everyone.

We took a page from the book of elementary education in that we have 4 large colorful bulletin boards located in several areas within our building. Two of them entail a graphic of diagonally positioned lightning bolts that represent the rising number of approvals per month for the two service lines.

The “Life Cycle of the Flea” board in our book caught my eye particularly. One of the bulletin boards captures “the life cycle of an application for assistance”. It is patterned after the life cycle of the butterfly, has pictures representative of each stage and short descriptions of the process: from the first call to our office (larvae) to approval from the caseworker (butterfly).

The fourth bulletin board has a huge oak tree made out of poster board that we have cut and colored pink and purple. We call it our training department’s “Tree of Knowledge”. In it there are “branches” with flashcards that double as leaves. On the cards are topics discussed in the course of training as an associate. Students can track their progress at a glance, rather than searching for their syllabus.