WHAT IS A CRITICAL FRIEND?

A critical friend can be defined as "a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critiques of a person’s work as a friend. A critical friend takes the time to fully understand the context of the work presented and the outcomes that the person or group is working toward. The friend is an advocate for the success of that work."

The role of the critical friend is therefore a strategic one and can be important in assisting improvement. It is essentially a role of support and challenge. Critical friendship has also been described as less formal than mentoring or coaching and probably best described as “a professional relationship based on mutual regard and the willingness to question and challenge.”

WHAT MAKES A GOOD CRITICAL FRIEND?

An effective critical friend is someone who:

- You trust and respect
- You have a strong relationship with, or believe you could develop a relationship with
- Provides honest and critical feedback
- is a skilled observer and listener
- Is able to ask provocative/stretch questions
- Provides balance between support and challenge
- Understands you and/or the context very well or takes the time to develop this understanding
- Provides a different perspective/new eyes
- Provides critique utilising higher order thinking
- Is available.

People learn best from peers “if there is sufficient opportunity for ongoing, purposeful exchange”. The critical friend process enables this exchange.

Critical friends do not:

- Assume a directive role
- Offer solutions to problems or provide “quick fixes”
- Rush to judge
- Impose agendas of their own
- Undermine the authority of others.
Why analysis and de construct a workshop method?

Analysis and evaluation is hard work and time-consuming. The reward is that it can give us the ability to do things beyond the best of our present available knowledge, move our practice forward and give a space for self-reflection.

Workshop: Bertrand

Notes for deb:
Workshop leader is a social worker that studied for 2 years to be a theatre animator, very interesting combination. The workshop was in French, Myriam helped me to translate.

Before the workshop starts, please find out the following

Is this workshop part of a series of workshops?
Yes

If yes, how many in the series of workshops
The workshops have been delivered for one 3-hour session every 3/4 weeks since September 2012

Is this a ‘one off’ workshop?
No

How are the participants chosen? Volunteer? Selected by the artist?
Volunteers, they choose to participate and are a strong group

During the workshop please consider the following

Numbers and participants

How many people are participating? 7, plus the workshop leader and a social worker

What is the average age of the group? 25 +

In your opinion is the group too big / too small? The group is a good size, though some people are away due to holidays.
What is the demographic of the group consider both social and economic. I am not sure, perhaps Myriam will know this?

Information about the environment that the workshop is taking place in.

Is this the usual space for this workshop? If yes then continue, if no why not
Yes

Is the space big enough? Yes

Is the space clear of clutter? Yes

Does the space have adequate light and air? Yes

In your opinion does the environment add to or detract from the quality of the workshop experience?
It adds to the experience, it's a large room, good light and clear of furniture, there is a separate room that is used as a meeting room and for refreshments.

Is the atmosphere welcoming, do participants feel comfortable?
I believe so yes, there is a very good atmosphere when we arrive, the group seem close and relaxed with each other, and we received a very nice welcome by everyone.

Materials

If any materials were used how were they categorised or laid out?
Yes, during the improvisation exercises
The materials were laid out on the floor in categories, hats, and shirts etc. some in random piles

*When materials are categorised, laid out clearly and discussed it helps participants to make more informed choices.

Was access to materials and resources clearly explained? Yes
Participants use ‘props’ on a regular basis, they appeared familiar with the materials

Are there enough materials for everyone to use? Yes

Communication and language

Did the workshop leader communicate his/her role and position in the workshop and explain the role of the participants?
Roles already defined, this is an established group

If there is a social worker or other professional attending the workshop has their role and position been explained?
Yes, she attends the workshops, the group knows her role, she fully participates as a group member but she also supports those in the group who have difficulties and need support. (This was very interesting for me, as we do not have this kind of combination of artist and social worker together in UK)

Meaningful participation depends on the level of information the participants have.

Did the participants have sufficient information on all key elements of the workshop?
Yes, at the start of the workshop, the group sit down together have a coffee and discuss the workshop content. *

*This is metacognition: thinking about the thinking needed before the workshop happens, this makes participants more relaxed and at ease with the process. Very important!

The participants might come from different backgrounds. Did the workshop leader communicate in a language that was understood by all of them?
Yes
The workshop leader has excellent communication skills, it appeared that everyone knew what was going to happen, no one seemed confused or looked like they didn’t understand

Did the participants understand the workshop and what was going to happen during it?
Yes, the group discussed this before the start

Thinking time

Meaningful participation needs time: Did the workshop leader spend enough time explaining the workshop to the participants?
Yes, at the meeting at the start but also as the workshop progressed, the workshop leader discussed what was going to happen and explained the process, it appeared to be very clear and the workshop leader became a collaborator as well as leader during the workshop.

Did the group have enough time for reflection and for formulating any suggestions or questions before and during the workshop?
Yes, during the whole process the group had plenty of time to think and make decisions as well as suggestions
Was the workshop long enough in duration?
Yes

* As a general rule people can only focus and concentrate on any one task for around 45 minutes, there was a break for chocolate and the exercises were all a manageable length, nothing went on for too long, perfect balance.

Was this the normal length of the workshop?
Yes

**Listening to participants**

Did the workshop leader listen and were they willing to accept other people’s ideas?
Yes
The participants offered suggestions and the workshop leader took on board their suggestions and listened carefully. After one exercise about a market, the workshop leader reflected with the group about what they had just done, what happened.

Did the workshop leader understand the wishes and desires of the participants?
Yes
This is an established group and it appeared that the workshop leader understand the level of participants needs

Did all the participants engage fully in the workshop?
Yes

* As an observation, one member of the group who attended was distressed and visibly upset about a situation at her home when she arrived, the group, the workshop leader and social worker offered her lots of support, she fully engaged in the workshop because her needs had been met and she had been fully listened to and felt safe, she was able to forget about her problems during the workshop.

Did the workshop leader have an awareness of the needs of the participants during the workshop?
Yes, the workshop leader understood the needs of the group, he was gentle and supportive and managed the workshop very well, and the workshop appeared to me to have been pre planned very well to fit the needs of the group.

**At the end of the workshop**

Was proper attention paid to the diversity of the participants?
Yes / No
In my opinion the group was not too diverse
Did they all have an equally good experience?
Yes, it appeared so, even though there was some discussion with one participant not being so happy with a particular exercise and the intervention of another participant in the exercise, this issue was discussed all together and resolved (I think it was but it was in French!) the participant felt secure enough to voice this issue, this means they feel safe and their needs are met within this workshop environment and group.

Was there any time for the group to reflect on what they had just done?
Yes
After each workshop the group sit down together and review and reflect on what they have just done and what they would like to do next

*Learner generated content is a core part of the workshops evolution; it is led and directed by the needs and desires of the group.*

Was any feedback collected? If yes, was it explained how this feedback would be used, for example to structure a later workshop.
Yes
The workshop leader appeared to be flexible and had the ability to change his plans to meet the needs of the participants, this shows a level of self-confidence in his practice and an understanding of how to evaluate and listen and be able to change and redirect his plans to suit the needs of the group.

Was the feedback accepted by the workshop leader as valid? Did the workshop leader take this feedback on board?
Yes (see previous answer)

In your opinion:

What worked well during the workshop?
Workshop leader has excellent communication skills; he understands the needs of the group. Workshop leader is gentle, clear and appears as an equal with the participants, no apparent hierarchy. He is very encouraging and supportive
Participants have respect and trust in the workshop leader
Workshop leader has excellent listening skills

All participants are on board and enrolled in the process, all fully engaged and participating
Participants seem very relaxed and confident
They can ask questions and be heard and listened to.
The group appeared to have fun
There is a lot of humour and a feeling of solidarity and support
The group and leader and social worker all relaxed and at ease
The group fully welcomed the participant from Iddac who joined in, very supportive and gentle with her
This was an excellent example of a workshop method, the group are co creators of their own process, the workshop leader is understanding and excellent in all aspects of workshop delivery and understanding of the group. This workshop was a joy and a pleasure to watch for me, I thoroughly enjoyed all the interaction and felt very accepted and supported by everyone.

What aspects were not so successful and need to be reviewed and re worked?
Nothing!

It was pointed out that it is difficult to integrate new members into this established group, as an observation, I think new members would feel at ease as the group is very accepting, maybe the challenge is enrollment of new members not integration??

Notes:
Workshop leader said he would like his position and role to shift more into that of collaborator and less of leader. (It already happens in the group but he would like that to be more)

From the Grundtvig application form:
One of our core objectives is to create a shift in awareness of trainers/creative professionals, to enable them to think about how they can develop creative workshops together with learners; in doing this impact is different as co created creative engagement has deeper meaning. Creativity is a key component in the shift from pedagogical (I teach, you learn) to andragogical (we learn, we co-create) and finally to heutagogical (I learn, I create / self-directed learning)

Observation:

Pedagogy:
This workshop method has shifted away from a standard pedagogy of “I teach, you learn”

Andragogy:
This workshop method has reached this point of development between the workshop leader and the group (we learn together)

Heutagogy:
This workshop has possibly began the process of “I learn” and “self directed learning”, though this would need deeper analysis involving the participants, including evaluation and validated learning feedback from all participants, this could be a very interesting process to develop in the group.

Self-actualisation
During the workshops I believe participants reached a level of self-actualisation, their needs had been met, they had been heard, felt comfortable and safe trusted in the process and could express themselves fully.
Self-actualisation is a term that has been used in various psychology theories, often in slightly different ways. The term was originally introduced by the organismic theorist Kurt Goldstein for the motive to realise one's full potential. Expressing one's creativity, quest for spiritual enlightenment, pursuit of knowledge, and the desire to give to society are examples of self-actualisation.

Carl Rogers similarly wrote of "the curative force in psychotherapy - man's tendency to actualise himself, to become his potentialities... to express and activate all the capacities of the organism."

The concept was brought most fully to prominence in Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory as the final level of psychological development that can be achieved when all basic and mental needs are essentially fulfilled and the "actualization" of the full personal potential takes place, although he adapted this viewpoint later on in life, and saw it more flexibly.

Self-actualisation can be seen as similar to words and concepts such as self-discovery, self-reflection, self-realisation and self-exploration.