

Inside the Theatre of Business: Performance and Corporate Presentation Training

Daniel Johnston

Abstract

How are theatre-techniques used in business training? Do theatre-making skills represent a unique field of knowledge? In this case study, I consider the National Institute of Dramatic Art's (NIDA) 'Executive Presenter' two-day course in Sydney, Australia, and attempt to counter a simplistic notion of theatre as magical practice. Performance techniques are complex, historically and culturally-contingent processes for making and sharing meaning (McAuley 2008). I describe exercises from the course in some detail – including elements of space, voice, body, structure, awareness, spontaneity, and rehearsal – and suggest that we can understand these presentation skills in a relationship of continuity with everyday meaning-making, rather than as a magical art form. On the one hand, NIDA trades off and reinforces the popular mystique surrounding acting. On the other hand, the course introduces simple and effective techniques of verbal and non-verbal communication. Ultimately, my investigation considers the claim made in marketing the course that 'public speaking can come naturally to you.'

Keywords

Performance theory; corporate training; theatre; theatricality; social performance studies

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