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The Fun Bus

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**TECHNICAL NOTE NO.
15**



THE FUN BUS

NOTE WRITTEN BY: ROBERT RUSSELL

SUMMARY:

This note describes a Nonformal Education project in Massachusetts that used music, puppetry, and drama to involve local people in a series of workshops focussing on town issues.

Technical Note 15 was produced by the staff of the Fun Bus project that visited five rural farm communities in Western Massachusetts over a five month period. This report is not a final evaluation of the project but rather presents to the reader the experiences and findings available at the time of writing.

The project was financed through a grant from the Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities and Public Policy and other support from the Center for International Education of the University of Massachusetts. It was MFHPP's intention to give wider visibility to professionals in the humanities field interested in applying their skills to the problems of everyday life in America. The Fun Bus Project brought the Academic Humanist's skills to groups of townspeople from the project areas via intense and often emotional workshops where people attempted to come to terms with their feelings about their town and its problems. In all cases, the Fun Bus involved professional academics from the town's own population, making their participation more meaningful.

While the Academic Humanist was a key part of the Fun Bus project, he/she was never presented as an authority or expert, but as one who might be able to share with townspeople his/her unique and hopefully well-informed opinion. As an experiment in integrating the well-educated professional with community problems and the average townspeople who have to deal with those problems, the Fun Bus should be of great interest to community development planners. Issues were entirely identified and defined by the participants of the workshops. The possible solutions and responses to these problems were framed and molded by those same people in cooperation with the Academic Humanist. As a community development technique, popular culture was demonstrated as a medium that adapted itself well--perhaps even ideally--to a totally client-directed and controlled communications philosophy.

The international development community is showing more and more interest in the uses of popular culture as a communications tool in development programs. Building on Center work in Ecuador and Ghana, the Fun Bus was one such program that delighted its participants and demonstrated the power of the communications media that it used in achieving its limited but significant goals.

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INTRODUCTION

The Fun Bus was a community development project that employed the performing arts to focus community consciousness on local issues and problems. Comprising a staff of performing artists and community development personnel, the Fun Bus traveled to four rural and one urban community in Western Massachusetts during the Summer and Fall of 1975.

In each town, the team organized a series of workshops for local citizens to facilitate the discussion of important town issues. Once issues and concerns had been substantially discussed, the workshop participants were assisted to create theatrical improvisations, puppet shows, and musical pieces around a number of these issues. These "skits" were subsequently rehearsed and perfected to a performable quality. At the end of two weeks the Fun Bus spent in the town, all the workshop groups (puppetry, music and drama) presented for the entire community an event billed as the "Town Show."

Inspiration and Support

The Fun Bus drew its inspiration from a nonformal education (NFE) project that the University of Massachusetts conducted in rural Ecuador in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and under financial support from the U. S. Agency for International Development office in Quito. This project was instituted in January, 1972 and terminated in June, 1976. Its mandate was the creation of a wide range of new educational materials and delivery systems that would serve the out-of-school adult population. Of the many "materials" that emerged from the project's activities, the

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"Feria Educativa", or traveling education fair, was one that drew considerable attention from the University of Massachusetts consultants working with the project.

The "Feria" consisted of a troupe of young people (some college students and some village facilitators working with the nonformal education project) who traveled to a number of rural villages with a puppet show, simulation board games, literacy games, a small theater group and other innovative learning materials that had been developed previously by the NFE project. The troupe spent three to five days in each village where they recruited local people to participate in the management of the games and learning materials. They were also able in that short period to involve a number of townspeople in the theater and puppet productions. The Ecuador NFE staff hoped that through the use of life-simulating game materials and a socially provocative style of theater, their audience's consciousness about social conditions that fostered frustrations and poverty would be enhanced. The "Feria's" actual operating life was relatively short, but its potential as a powerful consciousness-raising tool was well established.

When staff people from the NFE Ecuador project visited the Center for International Education at the University of Massachusetts to conduct a two-day workshop on principles of consciousness raising, interest in the "Feria Educativa" developed among graduate students who wished to explore its transferability to a rural Western Massachusetts setting.

At the same time, several individuals at the Center had wanted to have a learning laboratory available locally for graduate students interested in

domestic applications of NFE. A mobile NFE learning laboratory, using the communications techniques of the "Feria Educativa" to promote the discussion of political and social issues, seemed to be a formula worth exploring.

The Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities and Public Policy (M.F.H.P.P.) had just announced that its board of directors was entertaining proposals in the area of applied humanities. Their mandate was to create new situations where "academic humanists" could interact with the public in the discussion of important contemporary problems and issues. Since both the "Feria Educativa" and the derivative Fun Bus design intimately involved people in the discussion of important public issues, the Foundation was approached to explore mutual areas of interest and shared objectives. At their behest, the role of the "academic humanist" was incorporated into the design of the Fun Bus. The role emerged as one critically important to the success of the Fun Bus, and provided opportunities to observe the dynamics of interfacing a nonformal education project with a formal university system.

As soon as a dialogue of mutual interests and objectives was clearly established with the foundation, a pre-project survey was undertaken among community leaders in a number of local towns. They were asked to consider the appropriateness and utility of having a mobile drama and puppetry troupe assist townspeople in the discussion of local issues. Most leaders felt that a project that gathered a cross-section of townspeople together for the purpose of discussing local issues under any conditions would be welcome. Following the survey, a final proposal was written and submitted

to the foundation. Although the project was considered highly unorthodox in its approach, the foundation funded it for the Summer and Fall of 1975. This grant was augmented by additional funding from the Center for International Education and the project was begun.

Some Basic Questions and Assumptions

Many writers including Colletta (1975) and Mead (1955) have implied that the field of folk arts, as a new horizon for developers, holds tremendous possibilities as well as potentially disastrous pitfalls. The Fun Bus project was an attempt to further clarify these potentialities and stumbling blocks for people working in the community development field.

While developing a proposal for the Fun Bus, the director did a brief search of the available literature for descriptions of other projects of a similar conception or design. Little related information could be uncovered in the community development or folk arts literature; the Fun Bus was unknown territory. The project thus was based on a greater number of assumptions and questions than on conclusions derived from other's experiences. The questions that emerged generally fell into three categories: broad questions about the social and educational implications of the Fun Bus design for community developers; questions of staff characteristics, skills, interpersonal relationships and training; and questions about implementation procedures for a project that depended on the establishment of high quality relationships with townspeople over a very short period of time.

Of the first category, one question which was fundamental to the project concept was: How can the performing arts be integrated into

community development programs, when most other developers have been trained in more conventional techniques and methods of community development, and are used to literacy-oriented materials, working in hierarchic organizations and operating in what is really the "business and industry" of development. Would these developers react positively to association with artists, i.e., individuals whose world views, behavioral norms and life styles are quite different from their own? We wanted to explore what the implications would be for any development project that attempted to incorporate the world views of a society's artists with the world views of politicians, professional development personnel and international funding agencies. It was anticipated that bringing the world of organized planned national development together with the world of artists and performers might tend to set up "cultural clash," even within a very homogeneous society.

A second major question related directly to the funding agency's rationale for support. Is there a more innovative way to draw the professionally educated townspeople, with his or her expertise, into the decision-making processes and institutions which ultimately affect the quality of town life?

The Fun Bus staff, at the suggestion of the M.F.H.P.P., decided to hire local residents who were also college or university professors to act as consultants to the project. They were called "academic humanists" and they played a key role in bridging the gaps between the Fun Bus staff and the local townspeople, and between local problems and the world of academic learning. The M.F.H.P.P. was particularly interested

to see the "humanists" developing new interaction behaviors and to learn how those new behaviors might be incorporated into the mainstream of academic life.

A third issue that the Fun Bus design reflected was the development of a client-centered approach to problem solving. More and more developers are struggling with a rhetoric that says that if development information about life problems is not clearly perceived by the clients as being in their best interest, then the development message will fall on deaf ears (Rogers, 1973; UNESCO, 1972). However, the argument continues, if the target audience is involved in the creation of the message, then the chances that it will be perceived as locally useful and meaningful will be high.

Historically, development programs have entailed the creation of messages by one set of people to influence the behaviors of another set of people. Today, many development specialists contend that projects should follow the path created by the expressed needs of the client group. This approach puts a modicum of project control in the hands of the target population; it fosters the possibility that the development message actually will be used by and useful for the client group; and it helps establish a more equitable and communicative relationship between project staff and their target population. The Fun Bus design went to an extreme to explore what would happen when a project was conducted without a stated agenda for development. The design insured that all of the issues being dealt with would be client-centered and generated; there was no other overt or covert learning agenda.

A fourth question, of somewhat higher order, concerned the relationships between client participation, quality of entertainment and message credibility. Generally, the more attractive any particular communication event appears, the more attention and concentration the audience will bring to bear on the message. Since the Fun Bus would be spending only two weeks in each town, training unskilled people as actors, actresses, musicians and puppeteers, and presenting their creations to the entire town population, it was assumed that the level of theatrical perfection reached would not be high. This led to a number of questions. Could the Fun Bus begin to define message credibility as a function of entertainment quality, and the ratio of local people to professional actors in the production? Specifically, would the use of local people, because they were known and trusted by their fellow townspeople, lend to the performance the credibility it would otherwise lack because of less professional techniques used by local actors? Would local actors be able to communicate in ways and on levels unavailable to professionals?

The second category of concerns dealt with staff selection and training. The issues revolved around the skills that would be needed to carry out the project successfully. As a community development project it implied a need for people with one set of skills; but since it was also an entertainment project, it also required people with skills in the performing arts. The design assumed that the staff would achieve a high degree of trust with local community residents; strong interpersonal skills were thus also necessary. Would such trust be easier to develop with staff recruited from the target towns, or should they come

from the local university's department of community development or school of theater arts? The staff actually were recruited from among university students who answered a call for people interested in working in a community-based arts program. People from the target communities were also recruited, but none responded.

Once the staff had been selected, the question of training became preeminent. Given the varied backgrounds of the staff, training had to be designed to develop skills in theater workshop processes, community development and consciousness raising. Overall, a balance was sought between training for community development skills and skills in the performing arts.

Another issue that the project developers struggled with was what techniques would be used in the field. Taking techniques from the "Feria Educativa" and methods from the NFE project in Quito, traditional theater exercises and other sources, the planners catalogued a broad range of possible programmatic responses to local situations, and the staff were trained for the few that seemed most predictable. A wider range of community development techniques than was originally anticipated was eventually used and incorporated in the project.

Even as field application of the project began, more questions about the training and skills of the staff emerged. Staff were being asked to deal with a project design that had little available precedent and to work in situations where the variables were as unknown as the constants. What kind of staff people would not only be able to handle a demanding work schedule, but also to tolerate the high level of am-

biguity and lack of role definition that would characterize their daily life style?

THE CULTURAL SETTING

Western Massachusetts is an area characterized by a rich history, beautiful panoramas and a dynamically changing present. It was the scene of the first American "civil war" (Shay's rebellion in the late 1700s), and was at one time the major industrial center of the state. At the beginning of the 1900s, new forms of transportation and new sources of energy forced abandonment of hundreds of small, locally owned water-powered manufacturing plants. Agriculture emerged as the only viable economic base for the area, and until the late 1960s, it was the only growth industry for small communities.

Dairy products, tobacco, potatoes, squash and other popular vegetables were and still are the most important agricultural products. However, beginning in the 1940s and continuing into the present there has been a widespread decline in the economic viability of the small, family-operated farms. At this time, the days of significant agricultural production in New England are numbered, and the farmers are the first to be aware of it. Many agricultural and economic authorities predict that unless there is major legislation enacted to protect productive farm lands from higher property taxes and urban encroachment, the 1990s will see almost no functioning family farms in Massachusetts.

Since the 1950s there has been an astounding migration away from large urban areas back to the rural towns, mostly by the professional and educated class. They go there seeking a traditional value system and life style that is not available in urban areas, and commute to their urban jobs over the well-developed state highway system.

For the last twenty or thirty years, there has been an ever-growing friction between the "natives," as they call themselves, and these "newcomers." Natives increasingly are being nudged out of power and influence by the more highly articulate, competitive and educated newcomers. As a result, natives are finding themselves strangers in the only environment they have ever known. This change is usually slow enough so there is no crisis or sudden movement of power; psychological adjustments can be made. However, in one town where the Fun Bus operated, the entire elected town government (historically all natives) had in the last election been replaced by newcomers. In almost every town where the Fun Bus operated, townspeople expressed their frustration over this issue.

Rural, and to some extent urban New Englanders, have a number of traditions and values on which they pride themselves. They revere family and town life greatly and there is a tremendous sense of town identity. As long as the values of the town survive, if a "change" is for the better, natives will go along with it.

Another tradition is their sense of democratic process. New England is the oldest and one of the few regions in America with a system of town government based not on the representative town government model but on the "one person, one vote" direct participatory democracy model. All town business is carried out at a yearly meeting where each and every town member who has something to contribute is expected and urged to speak out on the issues. Custom demands that each person be listened to with respect and consideration. Decisions affecting town policy are made collectively, not through representatives. People respect and pro-

tect each other's privacy and right to be different. "Hippies" live alongside natives with little or no open hostility. Differences are to be respected and tolerated. Perhaps this is one reason why the Fun Bus staff were accepted into community life as quickly and openly as they were. Although obviously outsiders and different in appearance from the average townspeople, the staff always were listened to carefully and openly as they presented their ideas.

Families are either farm-oriented or professionally oriented; small, nuclear situations are the norm. But, in the larger farm families, there are aunts and uncles, grandmothers and grandfathers living together and close economic associations are maintained with local relatives. The staff observed that information about the Fun Bus was often communicated among townspeople along blood lines; and groups of relatives often participated together in the workshops.

Unlike other areas in the rural developing world, Western Massachusetts is an area free of any overt poverty. Townspeople that the staff worked with generally had no pressing life or death survival situation facing them. This factor may have been the source of one frustration the staff felt during the project: almost all of the issues that emerged from the workshops were of a "convenience" nature. Issues reflected the quality of life, but never seemed to touch on survival itself. People were fairly affluent. There was no starvation, there were no epidemics, and unemployment seemed to be at a tolerable level.

In each town there are quite a number of well-organized public service societies for men, women, couples and children. Some are school-

oriented, some church-oriented, and some business-oriented. There is no lack of opportunity for people to gather together and attend to the business of life. Usually more organizations form than the population can support, so there is a constant and often intense competition among the organizations for members. Most people belong to at least one or two organizations; and about one-fourth of the population is fairly active in some form of public service.

The problems of race relations, crime and political extremism are all issues that people pride themselves in not having to confront. The natives are fairly homogeneous descendants of Western Europeans (within this group there are quite a few distinct ethnic groups in each town). Newcomers are slightly more diverse, but value their "trouble-free" environment no less than the natives.

In most cases, although there are distinct differences in a town's social and ethnic makeup, people (including newcomers) still pride themselves in their ability to meet emergencies as a unit or team. No one in a village is let to suffer a major disaster without the help and aid of other townspeople. The desire to maintain this particular ethic against the onslaught of new ideas and fractionalizing social pressures was a constant theme in all the towns that the Fun Bus visited.

THE PROJECT DESIGN

The Fun Bus design was based on practices that use client-centered workshop techniques to generate message content and performing arts media to communicate this message among the clients. A high level of client participation pervaded all phases of the design. The client group comprised residents of five communities in Western Massachusetts and included youth and adults, both in and out-of-school.

The following sections will describe specific techniques that the Fun Bus staff used in their activities, and will provide a more detailed account of the design. The reader should bear in mind that the Fun Bus, conceived and executed as an evolving experimental model, did not employ all the techniques described all of the time. In some situations, there was not the time or staff to implement everything. The following descriptions of techniques and procedures represent a synthesis of the experience.

The goal in any particular town was, if anything, ambitious. To accomplish it, it was necessary within a two-week period to inform a community about the Fun Bus presence, its objectives and purposes, and to recruit from five to twenty-five local people who would participate in a series of workshops on a regular basis. Workshops had to be coordinated in a way that would generate a high level of disclosure and trust to assure that the product, the "Town Show," would deal in a truthful way with important issues. Groups of people had to be trained in puppetry, theater and music. It was necessary to write and rehearse scripts and music, and then to organize the logistics for a performance

that would be free and open to the whole community. Advertising and public relations work were necessary to make the show a success; questionnaires had to be distributed to elicit feedback from all of the people who had had contact with the Fun Bus; staff had to facilitate the performance, and then be ready immediately to move on to the next town. Before the Fun Bus arrived in the first town, there was a one-month staging and training period during which it became apparent that to do all these things in a two-week period might well be absolutely impossible. The practical answer was an advance team.

The Advance Team

The most basic problem in implementing the design was gaining an introduction to, and entry into a community--its institutions, and its daily life. Referrals from people who had worked with the Fun Bus in other communities or from individuals and organizations familiar with the project proved to be the best method for contacting new communities in which to work. In one situation, a local arts council provided the referral; and in the case of the first town, contacts made during the proposal writing stage gained the Fun Bus an invitation. Once initial contact was made, there remained a need for considerable advance work to compile information about the community, identify sources of support, arrange for local accommodations, and gain the backing of local leaders.

Ideally, two staff people would use about one-fourth of their time to organize at least two meetings with town leaders and about three meetings with representatives of local organizations in the next town scheduled. The team would try to communicate with new people along

familiar lines of communication. If the team could say to an individual, "Mr. So-and-So in Conway suggested we call you," it carried more credibility than "Hello, this is the Fun Bus."

In practice, the team contacted an individual by telephone and asked him or her to arrange a meeting with friends, town and local organization leaders, who might be particularly responsive to the Fun Bus program. The advance team then had an evening meeting with the group, and if everyone felt comfortable with the Fun Bus program, a two-week strategy was developed with the meeting group acting as advisors. Later, after a number of contacts with townspeople and group meetings, the team created a demographic "map" of the town. Where the different social groups lived; which influential institutions had most members; information about the church organizations, service organizations, and their leadership; and any other useful information the townspeople seemed eager to give were the data the advance team compiled about a town.

The advance team later interpreted this "map" for the rest of the Fun Bus staff. Thus, when the Fun Bus arrived in a town, the staff knew a fair amount about the town, had developed a strategy for action, and had made some fairly substantial contacts with key people in the town. Unvariably, some of these people would continue to work as workshop volunteers during the two-week workshops.

The Fun Bus had a number of criteria that had to be met before a decision to go into a town was made. It was considered absolutely essential that three situations obtain. First, there had to be a local "academic humanist" available who would commit him or herself to work

closely with the staff as a consultant. This implied that he or she would attend as many of the workshops as possible, would serve as the master of ceremonies at the final performance, and would be committed to developing evaluation data about the Bus's program. Secondly, some local institution, either political, service or religious, had to be willing to sponsor the Bus during its stay in town. This was required to assure the staff that a number of people in town would share a vested interest in the success of the project, and to enhance the Fun Bus's credibility through its association with a familiar and local institution. Thirdly, the staff needed a place to stay that would be as comfortable and secure as possible. It was not easy to find free accommodations for eight people for two weeks with all the comforts of home. Of the three criteria, the last was the only one ever compromised. As one can see, the advance team had a tremendous amount of business to complete before the Bus ever arrived in a new town.

Choice of the Local Organization
and the Academic Humanist

A major question the funding agency and the staff wanted to explore concerned how the civic role of the professional academic in a town could be developed. New England is no different from anywhere else in the rural world: the academically trained person finds few ways in which to apply his or her academic training to problems of the rural community. To address this issue, staff always sought to identify a local resident who was also a college or university professor to work closely with the project. It was hoped that through intense participation in project work-

shops, these individuals would bring their professional expertise to bear on problems discussed by other town participants.

There was usually no problem finding someone in the towns who qualified as an "academic humanist." What was difficult was finding a person who could give the Fun Bus the amount of time and energy that was necessary. The person was asked to participate in all of the workshops and to apply as much of his or her academic expertise as possible to the issues being discussed. He or she was then asked to prepare a few paragraphs on the background of each issue dealt with by the workshop volunteers. At the "Town Show," the "academic humanist" was expected to serve as the master of ceremonies, introducing and commenting on each skit, musical piece and puppet show. Throughout the two-week period, he or she advised the staff concerning the background of the issues and the politics of the community. The work was very taxing, so the Fun Bus paid these individuals for their time and advice.

Both the Fun Bus and the "academic humanist" derived major benefits from their association. The Fun Bus staff quickly came to understand the complicated political and social situation in which they were working through the counsel of the "academic humanist." The "academic humanist," on the other hand, enjoyed a learning experience about the town, and developed new perspectives on his or her role there. The townspeople participating in the workshops also developed a new view of the academic's skills and abilities.

As was already stated, a necessary precondition for entering a town was the recruitment of a host organization to sponsor the stay and

to provide local sanction for the project. Part of the advance team's responsibility was to meet with the leadership of a number of town social organizations, and to request from the most supportive their official sanction and sponsorship. This proved to be no easy task since many people, while sympathizing with the ideas and objectives of the project, didn't want to sponsor something that would be controversial or which might seem frivolous. However, when it became clear that the Fun Bus sought to provide a community service under the organization's name, and that there would be no cost to the townspeople, the organization usually became more interested and supportive. It was always made clear that the staff did not expect the organization's leadership or membership to participate if they didn't wish.

The strategy of involving both a local academic person and a local institution was to a very great degree the strategy that prompted townspeople to quickly accept the Fun Bus into their confidence and trust. It also helped to begin each cycle in a new town with a group of local people who had a vested interest in the success of the Fun Bus.

Advertising and Telephone Lists

Americans are fortunate in having a high percentage of literacy and an extensive, reliable telephone system. In the towns where the Fun Bus worked, almost every family had a 'phone and access to a regional daily newspaper. In designing the project, the planners decided not to depend on newspapers to communicate the nature of the project since the cost of publication would be high. It was also felt that this was not the kind of information easily conveyed through print media; informa-

tion about the Fun Bus could better be conveyed through lines of communication and friendship that were already established.

Members of the host institution and the "academic humanist" were asked to generate telephone lists of friends and personal contacts. After being briefed on the Fun Bus rehearsal schedule, these individuals would call their friends on the Fun Bus's behalf. As the staff briefed those members of the community who would be telephoning their neighbors, it was made clear that the general description of the Fun Bus should include an invitation to spend an evening with the Fun Bus staff. The 'phone callers were advised to explain that the goal of the meeting would be to give townspeople an opportunity to ask questions, to see what the staff could do with their talents, and to participate in a workshop where the objectives of the project would be made clear. Staff also tried personally to contact as many people on the streets as possible, to invite them to this first "explanation meeting."

To promote the first meeting, there was attempted in one town a fairly innovative strategy. The staff, with some local volunteers, published a town newsletter during the first four days of the two-week visit. The staff and local volunteers took to the streets and interviewed town residents on important issues in town life. The newsletter included about ten "man on the street" interviews and a separate section describing the Fun Bus project. An invitation for people to attend the first meeting was also extended to the public. The newsletters were distributed to as many townspeople as possible, and many copies were left for free distribution in the stores and shops about the town.

As communication strategies were developed from town to town, it was found that it was much more effective to have townspeople talking with each other about the project than to have the Fun Bus staff, who were strangers, attempt to communicate directly with the public.

The telephoning strategy was useful only for the Fun Bus's introduction to the community. After the first workshop, word of mouth and the "gossip grapevine" became the most dynamic channels of local communication concerning the project. Although often the information passed between people about the project was not very accurate, it was nonetheless information: it did spark questions and curiosity.

The First Meeting

The culmination of all the introductory activity was the "first meeting." Usually occurring during the first four days of the two-week cycle, the meeting was designed to accomplish a number of key objectives. First, it was necessary to explain to a broad cross-section of the population why the project was in town. Second, staff wanted to conduct an introductory workshop using techniques that would demonstrate to the participants what the final performance would be like. Thus, the first meeting often was conducted like a theater production workshop.

As there was little information concerning the kind and number of people who would be coming to this first meeting, workshop leaders often had to change workshop tactics and design after the participants arrived. Participants' varying ethnic backgrounds, ages, political orientations, expectations and willingness or unwillingness to do anything

participatory provided situations which tested the creativity and spontaneity of the staff. Each "first meeting" turned out to be quite different from every other.

Nonetheless, the format for the first meeting or workshop usually followed a fairly consistent formula. It was designed to include four basic phases: introduction; needs assessment; improvisation; and sharing or presentation.

To open the introductory phase, the staff described the project objectives and then suggested, as a demonstration, a simple and unthreatening exercise. This was intended to encourage people to function in an active participatory mode rather than a passive one. Each person was asked to pick one other person in the room whom they didn't know very well. Each member of the pair was instructed to interview the other, discover five positive characteristics about him or her, and then, when the group reconvened, present what was learned to the rest of the group. It was found that this was a very exciting and unthreatening exercise that inevitably got people to relax and trust what was happening to them. In some situations, this first exercise took so long that the participants felt it a natural stopping place, and the meeting adjourned with an invitation to return with more neighbors on the following night. In other situations, it was appropriate to continue the workshop right into a needs assessment phase.

This second phase, the most important of the workshop, was begun by dividing the participants into groups of three with a staff member as a facilitator. The facilitator's role was carefully and unauthorita-

tively to keep everyone in his/her group focused on the tasks described by the workshop leader. Each person was instructed to generate, through discussion with the triad, a list of five factors or conditions of town life that made him or her feel particularly bad or good. People were not asked what their opinions were. They were asked to describe their feelings toward and personal experiences of these factors or conditions. The distinction between feelings and opinions meant the difference between generating a list of ideas about problems and generating lists of problems that touched deeply on fairly fundamental and authentic concerns of each individual. This was usually a fairly subdued and introspective session. As soon as everyone had generated a list of five or more issues that really had a bearing on his or her well-being, people were divided into new groups of four.

At this point, participants were asked to share the lists with each other, to discuss them, consolidate them, and identify one or two issues that people held most in common. Ultimately, each group would, by consensus, find one issue with which each person could identify and about which each could share experiences.

The facilitator at this point moved the group into the improvisations phase by asking questions designed to generate a dramatic scenario based on the identified issue. The scenario might replicate someone's real experience or it might be a fictional composite. It could be symbolic or realistic. The key at this point was to have each member of the group help to generate a scenario about an issue that affected him or her personally.

The scenarios were worked on for about one-half hour, and quickly rehearsed. At the end of the evening, each small group of four performed their scenario for the entire workshop membership, thereby completing the presentation phase.

Staff found that the most creative session always was the first one. Here was developed the groundwork that became the basis for all subsequent rehearsals. The first one or two workshops were high in originality and creativity. At subsequent workshops (usually with the same people) it was necessary to tune and refine the experiences of the first workshops into performable skits. What then became nightly rehearsals were actually developments of the original workshop, and the energy and enthusiasm generated in the first workshops had to carry the group through fairly tedious and lengthy reworkings of the original five to seven improvisations.

During these rehearsals, staff had to concentrate on creating dramatic settings, training individuals in stage presence and voice development, and conveying skills pertinent to the technical aspects of theater production. There was usually little time to develop new ideas for skits.

It should be noted that at the end of the first workshop, the participants were invited to perform in the "Town Show," as actors, puppeteers, or musicians, whichever medium suited their fancy. While almost everyone enjoyed the first workshop, not everyone wanted to perform in front of his or her neighbors. It was found that relative anonymity of working behind a puppet stage was very attractive to many persons, and

the troupe never had a lack of people, both adults and children, to produce one or two very ambitious puppet plays about town history. There were usually local musicians eager to play in a small orchestra organized by one of the staff as well.

The Performance

During the two weeks of rehearsals, recruitment, training and public relations activities, word about the performance got around to townspeople quite fast. Announcements were placed in the local papers, posters went up at appropriate points in the village, and, about ten days ahead of time, colorful "sandwich board" advertisements were set out inviting the entire town to an evening of free entertainment that, it was promised, would deal with topics of interest to all.

By the end of the two-week period, townspeople were quite impatient to see what the Fun Bus people were trying to do. The hall in which the performance was scheduled would fill to capacity, the last murmur of activity in the audience would subside, and the performance would begin.

THE EVALUATION

The Fun Bus staff hired a three person team from the University of Massachusetts to design an evaluation for the project. It was necessary to know how effective the Fun Bus model was in accomplishing its initial goals. Was the Fun Bus an effective way to involve townspeople in discussion of issues germane to public life through the perspective of the humanities? Did people feel that drama and music were appropriate media through which to accomplish development? Were there some indicators that would signal if the level of consciousness around specific town issues was raised? These were among the questions the staff wanted to explore.

The evaluation forms were designed by the evaluation team after a series of meetings with the Fun Bus staff, both in the field and at the University. The format of "fill-in-the-blank" questionnaires was chosen and questions to evoke both specific and open-ended responses were designed. Some of the questions were not directly related to project goals, but the evaluation team felt it would be useful to include such questions in order to explore the more subtle, interpersonal dynamics of the design's implementation.

The evaluators designed a set of questions for each category of participant. "Workshop volunteer," "active and involved local participant," "academic humanist," "performance audience" and "Fun Bus staff" were the participant categories. In the first town the questionnaires were sent out at the time of the performance; in subsequent towns the evaluation was conducted at varying points in time after the performance.

In one town the questionnaire wasn't sent out until almost nine months after the performance. Both immediate and long-range reactions to the project were explored. A cursory reading of the evaluation data indicated the following.

While most of the audience participants agreed that attending the performance was a worthwhile way to spend the evening, they did not feel that they had learned any new information about the issues through the skits. Some respondents from the audience indicated that while the performance did focus attention on specific town problems, it didn't go far enough in posing solutions for those problems. While offering solutions to the problems presented in the skits was not one of the goals of the Fun Bus, because it raised expectations about those problems, people expected that some solution would be presented as the problem was highlighted. Almost everyone agreed that dealing with town problems in a format that was light and humorous was a refreshing and original way to by-pass the emotional prejudices that most people had toward some issues. This indicated that drama and music are viable ways to deal with public problems.

Although there were few indicators within the evaluation forms with which to measure changes in peoples' attitudes, many audience participants often spontaneously cited new awareness of a different point of view as a result of their exposure to a skit. One man told the staff that while his mind hadn't been changed about a particular issue, he did understand after the performance why other people had opinions different from his own. Another person stated that despite his apathy to-

wards the town, seeing the performance had challenged him to take a more active role in town affairs. One woman wrote in an audience questionnaire that although she had been hurt and rejected by people of a particular faction in the town, she now saw it as her obligation (as well as that of other people) to try one more time to make friends with this group.

Although many of the professional dramatists who were consulted before the Fun Bus began its recruitment drive said that it would be impossible in the course of two weeks to organize townspeople, generate musical, dramatic and puppetry pieces, rehearse them and organize a successful performance, the Fun Bus demonstrated that it could indeed be done. Not only was it done, but it was done in a way that often proved meaningful for the participants.

Many of the performers who worked with the Fun Bus expressed delight at having discovered a part of their personalities that they never before knew existed. The great majority of the participants were not experienced theater or puppetry people. For them, the ability to use drama in expressing their frustrations and feelings about town life was a profound and important experience.

Similarly, nearly all the "academic humanists" who worked as consultants to the project indicated that it had brought them a deeper understanding of their community, its problems, and, in some cases, the prejudice that the natives felt for the newcomers. The "academic humanists" had also become much closer to other townspeople as a result of the project. A new relationship had developed between the academic human-

ists and the town participants, a relationship that could have become the motivating force of an action group if the project had been able to follow up and encourage these new associations after the Fun Bus left the town.

The potential for creation of an action group was also evident in the behavior of the workshop participants. At the workshops, these individuals demonstrated a high degree of self-regulation and discipline when talking about possible solutions for problems. Although the skits usually didn't go so far as to suggest solutions to the problems, discussions about possible solutions were an important part of the needs assessment phase of the basic workshop procedure. In this sense, the participants themselves became town planners and community development workers during the short time that they interacted with the Fun Bus.

Many participants recognized this and approached the staff after the performance with a sense of disappointment that their work would not continue--that their training now seemed to lead them nowhere. By the time the Bus left town, there had been created a cadre of townspeople who had together undergone a terrifically unifying experience, had focused their attentions on very specific town problems, had organized their thinking around possible plans for action, and had acquired some very substantial skills in communicating with their neighbors. They were a team ready to go somewhere with their skills, consciousness and energy.

While the evaluation data indicated that the people who were first in line to participate with the Fun Bus were those who involved them-

selves readily in any new town activities, the data also revealed that close behind them were an entirely new group of townspeople who had become involved in local affairs through the project. These came from the ranks of those who identified with the arts, those who were interested in dramatics, puppetry and music. The Fun Bus staff had tapped into a section of the town's society that ordinarily was not involved in the discussion of town issues and events. A new group of townspeople had become involved in the discussion of local events and problems.

The evaluation data also supported the notion that even in a society where a highly developed sense of entertainment prevails, people will respond to and enjoy seeing a less-sophisticated kind of entertainment. The key to this was in the subject matter. At all times, the skits and their messages were designed and executed by and for local people. The performers were not outsiders but friends and neighbors of the audience. This lent a high degree of credibility to the messages conveyed by the dramatic presentations. Their credibility with the audience seemed to have no relationship to the degree of artistry perfected by the actors and actresses.

Finally, it was observed that the Fun Bus activities helped people to evaluate their traditional values in light of their contemporary problems. Often it was surprising how the traditional, New England Yankee heritage was the source of decisions and observations about how a common problem should best be handled. The experience tended to reinforce those values that held out a useful solution, and encouraged re-evaluation of values not so useful.

Although there were surprising and substantial successes realized in confirming the basic assumptions of the design, the Fun Bus project was not without its problems. These problems generally can be identified as of two types: problems in selection and training of the staff, and problems with the design.

The Fun Bus was an experiment. While the staff sought to investigate the hows, whys and wherefores of using art forms for consciousness raising in community development, and to explore new and useful roles for the "academic humanist" in the community, they had no forewarning of the complex and highly emotional interpersonal problems that emerged. Hired only after the initial proposal was written, the staff had little opportunity to participate in formulation of the basic working assumptions and goals of the project. This gave them a feeling of being employees hired to do a job, and of not being really in charge of what was happening to them as the frustrations of the work emerged.

Townspeoples' perceptions of the skits, staff members' changing concepts of their own life situations, last-minute changes in scheduling, necessarily rigorous work schedules and a life style that offered little privacy, time off or "creature comforts" combined to produce a working environment fraught with frustration and anxiety. The staff were constantly being called upon to function in situations that demanded more skills and energy than seemed to be available. Nonetheless, they were always able to produce a consistently good "Community Show."

The staff sometimes worked sixteen hours a day, seven days a week, and all lived in an often primitive and uncomfortable environment. Cook-

ing, washing clothes, lack of personal free time, and the everpresent pressures to produce a program while working in highly changeable and sometimes ambiguous situations were all factors that contributed to making the Fun Bus experience a draining one for the staff. The good feelings and sense of satisfaction generated at the performance lasted for about a day, and then the realization that it was immediately on to the next town and the next set of unknowns would settle in.

The staff of eight began the project with few common concepts or practical experiences about either community development or consciousness raising which could be applied to the complex social and professional work problems that emerged during the implementation of the design.

These problems led us to re-evaluate our training period. The project was basically a community consciousness-raising tool, using the performing arts as its communication medium. Should staff be trained in consciousness-raising techniques or dramatic techniques? Before the project moved into the first village, the staff had little basis on which to determine what skills would be needed most.

The one month which staff spent together preparing for the project was devoted to production of hardware, training in the technical aspects of dramatics, and development of theater exercises that would contribute to the team's ability to function as a cohesive unit. While this approach succeeded in producing a cohesive feeling among the staff, in other respects the training proved to have been insufficient to meet the skill demands the project eventually placed upon them.

Of the eleven staff who eventually worked with the Fun Bus, only two had any professional training in community development concepts or procedures. It is felt that a higher ratio of trained community development workers could have helped to offset many of the frustrations encountered by the staff.

Once the project commenced, staff encountered a traditional and well-documented problem that many developers face in trying to organize a cross-section of a town's population around a common point. Factionalism in the towns often made it difficult to persuade diverse townspeople to work and cooperate with each other. In each town, the Fun Bus's association with the sponsoring institution alienated a number of townspeople. In most situations, the number thus alienated was insignificant; in others, the divisions among townspeople made the staff's work most complicated and difficult. Overall, the staff's experience supported the hypothesis that the use of art forms as communication vehicles helps to defuse and by-pass feelings of division and distrust that naturally occur among rival groups of townspeople.

People often expressed their amazement at the staff's ability to organize people, prompt discussion of meaningful issues and still produce credible and effective skits by performance time. The staff attributed this to their use of already existing lines of communication when informing the community about the Fun Bus.

At the same time, some people felt that the two-week period was not long enough to allow for effective treatment of social and political problems which were considered extremely sensitive. Each skit, at

some point in its development, was subjected to a censoring process initiated by the town participants. The censoring was a gentle process of neighbors trying to be sensitive to each other. "We have to live with what we say here--you staff move on" was a comment evoked religiously in the process of editing skit material. Material that was highly inflammatory, divisive, insensitive to some person's feelings, or of questionable morality or value would be edited out. This censorship was never invoked by the staff; it seemed to be a natural part of the discussion process in the workshops and was used by the participants in each town visited.

FINDINGS FOR THE FUTURE

When considering recommendations for the future, it is necessary to distinguish between recommendations that would be meaningful to all mobile arts projects like the Fun Bus and recommendations which simply would be relevant to the specific working conditions found in Western Massachusetts. Readers are cautioned to use careful judgment in extrapolating these findings and recommendations to other situations and conditions.

In retrospect, it is believed that the Fun Bus should have spent more time than two weeks in each village. There seemed to develop a natural pace at which townspeople became able and willing to participate with the project, but this pace could not be accelerated. Although the well-developed telephone system facilitated rapid communication of information about the Fun Bus among townspeople, this type of communication was never adequate to inspire their trust and confidence. Before villagers would share information about issues that were meaningful and important to them, time and human energy had to be invested in the individual friendships the staff developed with townspeople. The degree of disclosure gained about sensitive subjects was related to the degree to which good trusting relationships were developed. The degree of disclosure attained should have determined the amount of time spent in a town, rather than an arbitrary decision to limit the time period to two weeks.

In one town where staff were able to spend almost three weeks organizing and rehearsing, they were better able to communicate with the

sponsoring organization about the project. As a result, the Fun Bus had a more informed and motivated group of townspeople to work with than in other towns. This longer period in town led to a production that dealt with the kinds of issues that other towns considered too sensitive or controversial. The extra one week of time definitely allowed relationships to mature to a point where the workshop participants were able and willing to disclose much more significant information about their life experience and subsequently share that information with others as part of the town performance.

A recommendation that may be applicable to other traveling arts projects deals with the advance team. There seemed to be a natural cycle of events that needed to take place before the staff could work effectively or efficiently with the townspeople. Having a greater number of local people prepare the way would have cut down the time consuming settling-in process that had to come before any workshops or meetings could be held. A full-time advance team also would have provided the Bus with a number of alternative towns from which to choose when deciding where to schedule. The Fun Bus advance team in practice included only one or two people who could be spared for only a few hours during the few days before the Bus entered a new town. A full-time advance team would have meant a more informed host institution and therefore a larger body of people "primed" and ready to assist in community organization and workshop recruitment.

Training is another design area that requires inspection. Subsequent projects in Western Massachusetts would define more carefully the

specific role of each staff member. During the project, staff adopted an "action" philosophy that seemed to assume that every task was everyone's task. This led to quite a bit of confusion and anxiety until roles were sorted out as the project matured in the field. While advance specification of staff roles presumably would have alleviated this situation somewhat, the fluidity of the design and the ever-changing complexion of the project were such that "iron clad" roles could not be defined. This points up a higher order of design need in the Fun Bus model: the need for an internal staff facilitator.

The author feels that, categorically, in any project like the Fun Bus, there would have to be a mechanism through which the needs and anxieties of each staff member could be filtered back into the design of the project. In retrospect, it appears that this could have been accomplished by having a process facilitator visit the staff periodically. The facilitator would assist individual staff members to understand and adjust to the changing and ambiguous working situations encountered. While assisting individual staff members to develop the skills and awareness necessary for dealing with their professional frustrations, the facilitator would recommend adjustments in the project design to eliminate as many of the sources of frustration as possible. The project would then be more responsive to the needs and suggestions of individual staff members, and would thereby enable staff to "buy into" the project to a greater degree.

One unexpected spinoff of the Fun Bus was the creation of a cadre of townspeople who, during the two-week period, had come into closer con-

tact with each other, had worked as a team around a central goal, had received substantial training in the techniques of puppetry and drama, and who were left with a high degree of enthusiasm and commitment to work together again. If there had been the time or funds, it would have been natural to organize these people into groups that would continue to probe and analyze the town's political problems and social issues at regular meetings. The Fun Bus had developed in each town a cadre of trained development workers who then had no leadership to direct them in further application of their training.

Additional follow-up activity with members of the performance audience would also be appropriate. In any future Western Massachusetts activities of the Fun Bus, there would be a much more highly structured follow-up section after each performance.

At the end of each performance, the townspeople left the hall talking about the skits and evaluating what they had seen and heard. Some people agreed with the points of view presented and some naturally disagreed. By failing to provide for organized discussion following the performance, the project lost a tremendous opportunity to further involve a much wider range of townspeople in effective discussion of the issues. In retrospect, the Fun Bus staff, through advertising and repeated announcement during the performance, might have been able to set the audience's expectations towards this end.

On the few occasions where the staff suggested the option of further discussion to the audience at the end of the show, the idea seemed to conflict with the expectations that people brought to the performance.

Many people arrived expecting that this was to be an evening of entertainment, not a discussion of social issues.

The evening of theater and music also could be supported with other activities before and after the performance.

In one town, staff invited the people at the performance to join in playing a simulation game called "Our Town." This simulation planning game gave players insight into how development takes place, and gave them experience in setting priorities and organizing resources to meet a wide variety of needs. The game was developed for that specific town, and used local institutions, landmarks and administrative posts as the context of the game's play. Although not many people participated, all who did felt that it had tremendous potential as a learning tool for both adults and youth.

In this particular instance the staff found it very hard to communicate to the townspeople just what a simulation game was, and why it would be useful for townspeople to play it. One leader of a women's group who did play the game said that it would be an excellent means to introduce their new members to town life and politics.

In conclusion, it is recommended that the traveling, theater-type community development project, to be most effective, should be made a part of a larger, regional approach to community development.

The Fun Bus helped a select group of townspeople verbalize and subsequently share with a larger audience a tremendous amount of information about the political and social problems of the entire region. However, there was no provision in the original proposal to utilize this

information in any on-going way. The information compiled about the region was information that would be critically necessary to develop strategies in any kind of regional development approach. Attitudes towards state government, general economic trends, needs for specific governmental services, regional demographic history, problems of local government autonomy, erosion of personal liberties, legislative road-blocks to economic growth, social prejudices and customs were all issues that the staff dealt with time and time again in the different towns that were visited. The staff were thus able to piece together a very striking and dynamic "map" of the needs, attitudes, traditions and problems of the region. This "map" should have been an integral part of a regional strategy for social and economic development.

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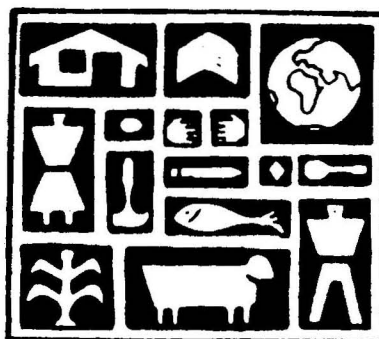
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