



Zooming In and Out when Facilitating Learning



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by Roger Greenaway, Reviewing Skills Training

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Zooming In and Out when Facilitating Learning

by Roger Greenaway, Reviewing Skills Training

Are you a zoomer in or a zoomer out when you facilitate learning? If you feel that you zoom both ways, do you know which is your preference or your dominant style?

Don't worry - I am not about to offer you a questionnaire to help you discover your dominant 'zoom style'. That would be a little tricky because 'zooming in and out' is really just a flexible metaphor that can apply to many different dimensions and situations.

Here are some examples showing how you can zoom in and out with *questions*:

ZOOMING IN AND OUT WITH QUESTIONS

Some examples:

From real to what if ...

Zooming in > "What exactly did you say?"

Zooming out < "If you could replay the situation what would you say?"

From restricted to unlimited ...

Zooming in > "Can you sum up what you want to say in 3 words."

Zooming out < "What would you like to add that has not already been said?"

From essential to also ...

Zooming in > "What was the turning point?"

Zooming out < "What else helped to produce a successful outcome?"

From initial explanation to alternative explanations ...

Zooming in > "Why did this happen?"

Zooming out < "Let's take care not to jump to conclusions. Are other explanations possible?" [The actual search for other explanations might involve both zooming in and zooming out.]

From your perspective to someone else's perspective ...

Zooming in > "Why did you behave in that way?"

Zooming out < "What would x say if she had witnessed what you did?"

From this context to very different contexts

Zooming in > "What was the best example of good teamwork?"

Zooming out < "Would this be seen as 'good teamwork' in all situations and cultures?"

From this system to the wider system ...

Zooming in > "How has greater efficiency been achieved?"

Zooming out < "What will be the consequences for other parts of the system?"

From small picture to big picture ...

Zooming in > "Did you use your resources optimally?"

Zooming out < "What other resources / people / stakeholders could you have brought in?"

From short term to long term ...

Zooming in > "What has been the impact of your efforts so far?"

Zooming out < "How sustainable is this process?"

Zooming in and out is not just about the nature of your questions. Tasks are another option:

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ZOOMING IN AND OUT WITH TASKS

Some examples:

My world – our world – their world ...

Zooming in > Make a headline for this event that sums up what was most important for you

Zooming out < Make a headline for this event that you would like to see in your organisation's newsletter.

Zooming further out << Make a headline for this event for a big circulation news publication of your choice.

From snapshot to storyboard to video clip (of future expectations) ...

Zooming in > Choose one picture (or photograph) to accompany the story of this event.

Zooming out < Choose a series of pictures (or photographs) that tell the story of this event (with no words or few words).

Zooming 'in' on behaviour and zooming 'out' to the future: Create some short video clips that demonstrate how you expect to apply your learning.

From capturing significant learning to building into a future scenario

Zooming in > Produce a group poem (or collection of phrases) that captures the essence of some of your most significant learning.

Zooming out < Draw an imaginary future team project working like a dream, adding in captions, speech bubbles or thought bubbles that re-cycle (or adapt) most of the words and phrases from the group poem.

From reflecting indoors to reflecting outdoors

Zooming in > Spend time completing your reflective journal or talking with your learning buddy.

Zooming out < Make a leisurely journey (walking or canoeing) with a learning buddy in a relaxing and inspirational natural environment. For out and back journeys, switch roles at the turning point, so that each person takes it in turns to be the centre of attention.

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WHY ZOOM?

The value of zooming for facilitators, learners and transfer of learning

As you zoom in, new details appear that were previously invisible, and as you zoom out, the broader view

reduces the visible detail but creates an ever-widening context and panorama. Zooming out reveals the macro system, zooming in reveals the microsystem.

Sometimes the patterns discovered at the micro level are similar to patterns found at the macro level. (Search for 'fractal images' for some beautiful illustrations.) When we are shown photographs without any clues about scale it can be difficult to work out whether we are looking at a span of kilometres or a span of millimetres.

Whatever your current focus, it is always worth considering whether to go large, go small or stay much the same. You are *not* looking for the perfect focus that you make permanent. This is because there is a value in changing focus and making connections from one scale (or zoom setting) to another. It is valuable for facilitators to be adept at changing focus in a timely fashion. It is even more valuable for participants to develop such skills.

Perhaps our hope as facilitators of learning is that zooming in (such as detailed personal feedback sessions) will reveal insights that allow participants to zoom out and discover their broader relevance. Transfer of learning often equates with 'zooming out'.

But sometimes the initial experience is a mind-opening, horizon-broadening, confidence-building, eye-widening, life-affirming, whole-world-of-possibilities kind of experience. And transfer arises from settling on a small achievable project through which to channel these mind-expanding discoveries. So transfer of learning can also equate with zooming in on the next step to take.

Have you noticed how film directors create suspense by zooming in on the detail such as close-ups of the character who is vulnerable to attack, or on the fresh footprint they have just spotted? Zooming out to wide angle provides a sense of safety – scanning the horizon so that we can see more of the surroundings from where threats may come. In darkness, floodlights are more reassuring than the beam of a pencil torch - which gives so little information to the vulnerable torch-bearer while giving mission-critical information to the assailant. The actual danger (or learning opportunity) can be near or far. The habit of zooming in and out maximises opportunities for learning from experience.

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Zooming In and Zooming Out: part two

ZOOM IN OR ZOOM OUT?

by Roger Greenaway, Reviewing Skills Training

In part one of this article I asked, "*Are you a 'zoomer in' or a 'zoomer out' when you facilitate learning?*" I then gave examples of how you can 'zoom in' or 'zoom out' with questions and also with review tasks. And in answer to the question 'Why Zoom?' I wrote:

"Whatever your current focus, it is always worth considering whether to go large, go small or stay much the same. You are not looking for the perfect focus that you make permanent. This is because there is a value in changing focus and making connections from one scale (or zoom setting) to another."

Part two shows how 'zooming' has featured in some learning models that you may know::

- [One way zooming](#) (the funnelling model)
- [Zooming both ways](#) (some more balanced models)

followed by some practical examples:

- [Which zoom setting when?](#)
- [Examples of zooming in for close-up reviewing](#)

- [Examples of zooming out for wide-angle reviewing](#)
- [Examples of reviewing methods that zoom both ways](#)

some thoughts on zooming and the transfer of learning:

- [Zooming and the transfer of learning](#)

and some follow-up links and references for those who want to explore zooming further:

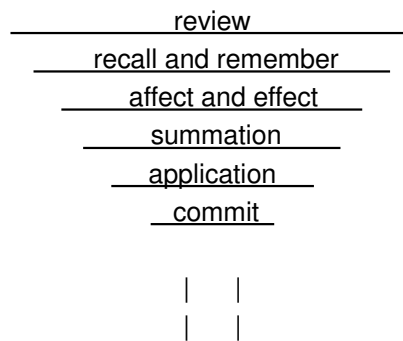
- [References and useful links](#)

You will now discover more about why and how we can all benefit from the frequent use of a 'zoom lens' when our purpose is to learn from experience – or to help others to do so.

I'd first like to take you on a whistle-stop tour of the different kinds of zooming I have found in experiential learning models before getting to more examples of practice.

ONE WAY ZOOMING

The 'Debriefing Funnel' follows a classic 'zooming in' process. Experience is progressively processed on its journey down through the filters in the narrowing funnel (Priest and Gass, 1997). The six filters are:



Priest and Gass state that we should not to be bound by a single view of debriefing as the only way to guide reflection. They do not themselves offer a 'zooming out' alternative to restore the balance, but many others have done so ...

ZOOMING BOTH WAYS

There are many different ways in which other models combine zooming in and out. Here are some examples of learning models that zoom both ways:

analytic contemplative

Borton's three questions: 'What? So What? Now What?' (Borton, 1970) should first be asked in an *analytical* mode that is "hard-driving, pointed, sharp, logical, tough and rigorous" and then in a *contemplative* mode "a more relaxed approach which avoids picking at one's self and allows alternatives to suggest themselves through free association and metaphor." Borton would clearly appreciate the value of a zoom lens that moves both ways – in then out.

divergent convergent

Likewise, Kolb (1984) also recognised the value of balancing zooming in and zooming out. Kolb associates the experience and the initial reflection with *divergent* thinking, and he associates the next two stages of his cycle (conceptualisation and experimentation) with *convergent* thinking. Unlike Borton's model, Kolb's cycle starts with zooming out and ends with zooming in. But the starting point may matter less than the rhythm (much the same as breathing - so long as we maintain a pattern of breathing in and out it doesn't really matter where we started).

o p e n p r o b i n g

Thiagi favours more frequent switching from 'in' and 'out' - moving from *open* to *probing* questions within each stage of his debriefing sequence (Thiagarajan & Thiagarajan, 1999). Perhaps it is no accident that in the laid back 1970s Borton encouraged people to spend a whole cycle in one mode and then wander around it again in a more open mode; in the faster-paced 1980s Kolb squeezed both modes into a single cycle; then in the 1990s Thiagi is zooming out and in several times within a single cycle.

t i g h t l o o s e

In contrast, back in the 1950s people seemed to spend long periods in one mode or the other. Kelly, known for his Personal Construct Theory (Kelly, 1955) presents learning (and creativity) as an alternation between *tight* and *loose* construing. Extremely *loose* construing is associated with dreaming and poetry. Extremely *tight* construing is associated with a fixed and unchanging view of the world. Learning happens as a result of moving to and fro between *tight* and *loose* construing.

u n f r e e z e r e f r e e z e

A similar pattern was described by Lewin (1947). Writing about change at the individual, group and organisational level, Lewin saw unfreezing as a necessary precursor for change. This is followed by moving and refreezing until another thaw becomes necessary. Lewin's theory generally applies to longer time spans than those described above - so it fits neatly into my little thesis about how, in learning theories, the frequency of zooming increases from one decade to the next. [Carl Rogers' Freedom to Learn (1969) exudes the kind of patience that would fit with the pace needed for the 1960s, but I need your help to find a 'zoom' theory of learning from this missing decade!]

From this brief tour of theories that have something to say (in their own terms) about zooming in and out, we have seen an interesting variety:

- the need to zoom in and out if we are to learn (Lewin; Kelly)
- a zooming in cycle followed by a zooming out cycle (Borton)
- zooming out at the 'start' of the cycle and zooming in to complete the cycle (Kolb)
- zooming out then in at each stage of a debriefing cycle (Thiagi)

[[References](#) are at the end of this article.]

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WHICH ZOOM SETTING WHEN?

Rather than wondering which lens to reach for at the start of a review or trying to follow a tidy fixed pattern, I'd recommend that (much like a professional photographer) you are fully equipped with a range of lenses – ready to respond to opportunities as they arise. This whistle-stop tour strongly suggests to me that any and every stage of learning can potentially benefit from any zoom setting. To switch metaphors for a moment, that means that we can benefit from tapping into both 'left' and 'right' brains throughout the learning process – because learning involves both analytical and creative thinking.

The examples that follow demonstrate the value of using a variable zoom lens *at any point* in a reflection/reviewing/debriefing process - whether for close-up reviewing, wide angle reviewing or for reviewing both ways.

EXAMPLES OF ZOOMING IN FOR CLOSE-UP REVIEWING

Being put on the spot

(zooming in at the start)

Hans Bolten <http://www.boltraining.nl/> was demonstrating a 'Socratic' approach to reviewing. He asked us each to write down one sentence about the team problem-solving exercise which we had just been doing. We wrote in thick pen and displayed our statements on the wall. My statement was "*I think I was trying harder than others*". I was asked to explain how I came to this conclusion. My assumptions, values and reasoning were all put under the microscope. I soon wanted to rip down my statement and start all over again. Was it tough being put on the spot? Yes! Had I learned about myself? Yes! Would I use the method? Yes! Thank you Hans. Zooming in can be powerful.

Choosing a focus

(zooming in at the start)

Zooming in can be valuable for other reasons. Sometimes it is a timesaver. A Danish IT company uses the Horseshoe method (showing the full spectrum of views on an issue) in order to save time at meetings. Quickly discovering exactly where each person stands on an issue can save a lot of time. A quick snapshot instantly reveals the spread of views and helps the facilitator choose how best to approach each issue – which generally involves some in-depth sampling at different points of the spectrum.

Repeated specific positive feedback

(zooming in, in and in)

An apprentice did not believe the positive feedback he was receiving from others. Unused to hearing such complimentary words, he thought his mates were pulling his leg. Eventually, in the *third* feedback session, the apprentice accepted the feedback as genuine. In the end, the detailed evidence was incontrovertible and inescapable. It was a personal breakthrough.

Action replay of a turning point

(starting wide and zooming in)

A grumpy participant sat down in the only dry part of the shelter that his group were building in the pouring rain late at night. He demanded that everyone else hurry up and finish so that he could get to sleep. Nobody challenged him and it became the (unmentionable) elephant in the room. The opportunity for the individual to explain and apologise came in an action replay review the next day. When he was sat down in his 'dry patch' (during the replay) he soon asked the group to stop the replay and he did his best to level with them. It was the start of a healing process and was a valued source of learning for everyone involved.

Analysing (and appreciating) the causes of success

(zooming from big picture to the details)

A staff team put on their first ever conference. It was a big achievement and part of the review focused on the factors (big and small) that had contributed to the success and how these factors interconnected. The method used was creating a 'success chart' on the floor which grew outwards from a central statement describing the success. The main purpose of this process was to highlight key features that they should keep and build on next time they would run a conference or do a big project together. An additional benefit was that everyone could clearly see, acknowledge and appreciate each other person's part in creating the success.

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EXAMPLES OF ZOOMING OUT FOR WIDE-ANGLE REVIEWING

"Although reviewing sometimes needs to be about narrowing down, separating out, and examining the detail, reviewing can also be used for 'big picture' learning in which boundaries are blurred, bridges are built, strands are woven together and the whole is more real than the parts - because reviewing is about the wood as well as the trees."

This was the start of my article on Big Picture Reviewing (Active Reviewing Tips 7.2). These are the six 'big picture' methods I described in that article (and so are not repeated here):

- [TIME LINE](#): seeing time by walking through it
- [THE OUTSIDER](#): seeing the group through the eyes of an outsider
- [TURNTABLE](#): seeing issues from unfamiliar perspectives
- [AS IF](#): experiencing different perspectives
- [METAPHOR MAP](#): a fresh perspective on past and future

Edward de Bono's Blue Hat

In Six Thinking Hats, each of the six coloured hats represents a different thinking style. The Blue Hat represents meta thinking – taking an overview. It is the odd one out because it is on a different level. It is of special value to facilitators and leaders. It is useful to all learners. Without blue hat thinking, it is difficult to take responsibility for learning, because you see the learning process most clearly when you wear the blue hat.

Powerful Learning Experiences

Some powerful learning experiences have already been described in ['Examples of Zooming In'](#) (above). There are also many kinds of powerful learning experience that deserve the 'zooming out' label. I asked 100 senior managers about their experiences during an experience-based management development programme as part of my PhD research. I asked them "*What experiences have had most impact on your learning and development?*" I heard a lot of stories that were about 'zooming out' and I was able to sort these into these six categories::

1. Broadening Horizons

Meeting new people, doing new activities, experiencing a new learning culture.

2. Making Connections

Lots of things interrelated, recognising patterns, seeing connections.

3. 'Re-'

Experiencing something again, and feeling much better for it - refreshed, rekindled, reaffirmed etc.

4. Synergy and Support

The delight of being part of a successful team, and experiencing the sum being greater than the parts.

5. Freedom to Learn

Experiencing a free-flowing learning climate in which there are few blocks or barriers and in which creativity and risk-taking is supported.

6. Powerful Experience

Feeling empowered. Having an intense experience which is sufficiently vivid or stirring to have a direct and lasting effect. The effect may change over time, especially through further reviewing.

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EXAMPLES OF ZOOMING BOTH WAYS

Most active and creative reviewing methods are designed to include both zooming in and zooming out within the same technique. These examples are illustrative - they are not full descriptions of the technique. [More complete descriptions can be found at <http://reviewing.co.uk>]

Zooming in >>>

LEFT HAND COLUMN

Appreciative Competition - for exploring a range of perspectives on one topic

Choose a picture (individually) that captures something good about your team performance that you would like to be continued in future projects.

>>>

<<< zooming out

RIGHT HAND COLUMN

After hearing your partner's explanation, try to add value to their picture by seeking other ways in which the picture answers the original question.

<<<

Horseshoe - for exploring the range of views on a spectrum

Where do you stand?
Why are you not further this way or that way?

>>>

What might cause you to move from your position – in either direction?
Are you curious about anyone else's position?

<<<

Storyline - using a rope graph to trace a specific theme

The line itself provides a focus. The story zooms in on whatever the line represents. Each peak and trough provides a focus, especially if the narrator is asked to say what caused their peak or explain how they recovered from their trough.

>>>

Sometimes the storyline is itself a zooming out process because it places single events in the context of the whole story. If others in the group are asked to show their storylines of the same event, then each participant is zooming out to see things from another perspective.

<<<

Wanted - creating a new person who would be welcome to join the team

Thinking about what's missing involves some analysis (zooming in) ...

The details of the person, their skills, their manner, their clothes and accessories come from zooming in ...

>>>

... but this is in relation to a larger sense of what is possible - using holistic or intuitive thinking (zooming out)

... but when a detail connects to the vision, people celebrate the inspiration that connects the detail with the big picture.

<<<

Back to the Future - an audit of favourable factors that will help to achieve a goal

List-making is a combination of both zooming in and out, especially when the form of the question that generates the list asks people for details that connect with the overall purpose: "What x do you already have that will help you achieve your goal?"

Some of the questions zoom in - looking inwards at skills, strengths, experience, confidence.

The journey represents the cumulative combination of all the skills and qualities and connections and resources.

Anticipation of achieving the goal may feel like zooming in if the goal is specific ...

Some of the questions zoom out - looking outwards at resources, connections, networks, systems.

The resulting growth in confidence and capacity that is typical of this exercise is a kind of zooming out.

... or zooming out if the goal is broad and open-ended.

> > >

< < <

Finding the Bones

This summarising method helps to identify the essence of a story a person tells about their experience of an activity. In pairs, one person gives a one or two minute account that emphasises their feelings and experiences. The listener helps the speaker to reduce the story to a few sentences, then to one sentence, then to a phrase (or three words), then to a single word. The sentence, phrase and word are recorded by the listener and presented to the speaker. In new pairs, and in a new role (speakers are now listeners and vice versa) the exercise is repeated. The process ends with three 'rounds' in the whole group: single words, then phrases, then sentences.

Is this zooming in or out? - see next ...

ZOOMING AND THE TRANSFER OF LEARNING

I have chosen to spread 'Finding the Bones' across both columns because this process zooms in and out *simultaneously*. At first sight it looks like a 'zooming in' process because it gradually strips down a story to a single word. But if the process is working well, it is the short phrase or the single word at the end of the process that has the greatest significance and the widest potential application to other settings.

Intriguing as it is that zooming in and out can happen simultaneously, it would be misleading for me to suggest that the transfer of learning depends on stripping stories down to bare bones (or funnelling experience into its essences). There are many other ways in which the transfer of learning happens. Sometimes, for example, the real power is in the whole story. So there is a risk that reliance on a reductionist approach to transfer (exemplified by 'Finding the Bones') can leave the learner with a limp and empty cliché of little lasting value.

This only serves to reinforce the value of the habit of both zooming in and zooming out. By providing an ever-changing focus, you are exposing participants to a range of different zoom settings. This gives participants a wider choice of transfer strategies: for each story, each individual, each situation and each goal it is important to help the learner find the zoom level that will be of greatest value.

Solzenhytsin's acclaimed novel 'A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich' achieved its impact by zooming in on the details of one character's day in just one grisly place. In 'War and Peace' Tolstoy gave himself a much bigger canvas in space and time to write his masterpiece. Both strategies can lead to profound insights and understanding.

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REFERENCES AND USEFUL LINKS

ZOOMING IN

Clean Language

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clean_Language

<http://www.cleanlanguage.co.uk>

Precision Questioning

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Precision_questioning

<http://www.vervago.com>

Philosophy for Children

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophy_for_Children

<http://www.sapere.org.uk>

Critical Thinking

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critical_thinking

<http://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/defining-critical-thinking/766>

ZOOMING OUT

Creativity

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Creativity>

Creative Thinking Skills

<http://www.palgrave.com/skills4study/studyskills/thinking/creative.asp>

<http://brainzooming.com/7-creative-thinking-skills-important-for-you-to-have/>

<http://www.21lobsterstreet.com>

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Zooming in and out when facilitating learning was first published in two parts in Roger Greenaway's *Active Reviewing Tips* in 2013 Vol 14 (issues 2 and 3).

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