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Short, relevant announcements are welcome from all UK providers of CPD for outdoor educators and experiential trainers.

... includes readers' thoughts about experiential learning ...

Thought for the Month

is now a regular feature of Experiential-CPD. This collection of thoughts from 2012 is a celebration of another year of monthly thinking and is also an invitation (and possibly an inspiration) to share your own thoughts.

Roger Greenaway and Bill Krouwel, Editors

Feedback, Questions or Thoughts: please write to roger@reviewing.co.uk

Thoughts for the Month 2012

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2013 *Whatever you are thinking ...*

It could be you!

The Benefits of Play

Have you been enjoying playing with new toys and games over the Christmas holidays?

As a parent the gifts I enjoy giving the most are those toys that encourage play with others (including me on occasions).

Whilst recently watching a nature documentary about bear cubs in

Canada I was noticing some of the benefits of play, the cubs were learning about

Boundaries - how far they could go before their mother intervened, or how far they could go along a branch before it broke

Strengths and weaknesses - what they were good at and what they needed to get better at in order to catch fish

Social interaction - how far they could 'push' the other cubs before they were cuffed or how to work together to catch salmon Physical development - through exercise

Individual skill development - continual improvement through practice and I'm sure many more areas

So.. let us remember how privileged we are as developers (both indoors and outside) to occasionally have the opportunity to initiate Play with those we work with (and sometimes join in the fun) what a great 'tool' it is

Max Norris

<http://www.lindleyeducationaltrust.org/news/festival.htm>

January 2012

Festival of Outdoor Learning

In the absence of any readers offering thoughts for this month, I would like to break with tradition and fill this space with a taster of what you will be missing if you don't make it to the heart of England (Castleton) for this year's Festival of Outdoor Learning over the first weekend in March. At just £70 for everything including food and accommodation, meeting fellow enthusiasts and having a wide range of 3 hour workshops from which to choose, it is probably the best value CPD event you will find this year in

the UK. (If you know of a better value Experiential-CPD event coming up, please tell us!)

<http://www.lindleyeducationaltrust.org/news/festival.htm>

I have really enjoyed these festivals. The in-house real ale bar is an added attraction, but it doesn't get busy until late on Saturday evening because there are usually a few enticing outdoor activities on offer despite (or because of) the lack of daylight.

The very first FoOL (Festival of Outdoor Learning) coincided with an amazing eclipse. Who knows what 2012 will bring!

Roger Greenaway

February 2012

[Eds: Same link and same price applies to FoOL 2013!!]

In Praise of Improvisation

Improvisation is at its best when it is original, authentic, responsive, creative, edgy, lively and truly 'in the moment'. I think this applies to music, comedy and drama - and also to learning.

Improvisation is less rewarding when the improviser is not on form and falls back on old routines, repeating familiar patterns, guided by past learning rather than by really reading the current situation.

Improvisation at its best = experiential learning at its best: going to the edge, doing new things, trying new ways of doing familiar things - as Kolb might say: "actively experimenting".

As facilitators of experiential learning do we not aim to create situations that are so new and different that participants must improvise in order to succeed? Does our enthusiasm for experiential learning not make us all fans of improvisation? - for other people.

I added 'for other people' because I do know that providers of experiential learning do have some fairly standard, routine, tried and tested ways of placing participants in situations that require improvisation. But this can create an unnecessary distance between participant and facilitator - if the participant is operating in a world of edgy improvisation while the facilitator is in a parallel universe of routine familiarity.

When were you last on the edge and needing to improvise - as a facilitator? (And if this makes a good story, how about making it a 'thought' for next month?!)

I'd like to heap a little more praise on 'improvisation' – which is to do with how it challenges conventional wisdom about experiential learning: the more we praise improvisation that is alive to the present situation, the more we disregard learning from (past) experience.

I owe some thanks for this insight to Remy Bertrand's's post about improvisation to the LinkedIn Experiential Learning Exchange in response to a poll about which aspect of the learning cycle we pay most attention to in advance of an experiential learning event. You can find the discussion search for 'The Experiential Learning Exchange' at <http://www.linkedin.com/groups>

Roger Greenaway
March 2012

Thank You

"It is one of the most beautiful compensations of life, that no man can sincerely help another without helping himself" Ralph Waldo Emerson

When we say "thank you" and mean it most sincerely, it feels good. One of the quickest ways to generate happy feelings in ourselves is to focus on what we have to be grateful for, and then make it concrete with a few

specific "thank you"s to others. What they get out of it - that is just a bonus.

When you work in a team, you have many opportunities to appreciate others. Take some of those opportunities today!

John McCarthy
April 2012

Sustainability, Curriculum for Excellence and the John Muir Award

The John Muir Award's new education resource is now available online at <http://www.jmt.org/jmaward-resources-links.asp>

It aims to help teachers and educators make effective use of experiential and outdoor learning approaches, and meet a range of educational needs.

The resource highlights how the outdoor environment can be embedded in teaching and learning, providing enriched experiences for learners across areas such as modern languages, technology, numeracy and science.

The resource includes examples of activities and topics used by John Muir Award groups that have: helped take learning outdoors, made connections across subject areas, and promoted themes across learning such as Sustainability, Global Citizenship, and Enterprise.

You can also download a visual mind map showing links across curriculum subject areas - ideal for displaying in staff rooms or on notice boards!

http://www.jmt.org/assets/john%20muir%20award/jmt_cfe_chart.pdf

John Muir Award
May 2012

On Being Resourceful

I wonder if your work involves helping people to be resourceful?

People used to live in the Kruger National Park before it became a reserve for animals. I was fortunate to be shown around by one of the people who grew up in what is now national park land. Everything we saw growing or living there seemed to be useful for something. Our guide had grown up in an extremely resourceful community.

Judging by some of the Experiential-CPD courses on offer there seems to be a growing interest in survival skills - in being resourceful. How to navigate without map, compass or GPS. How to find shelter or build one. How to find, make and cook food when a long way from the shops.

I have often found the need for resourcefulness when climbing. When there is a smooth blank wall to cross, a small bump becomes a 'good enough' foothold. When I am leading and I run out of belays, I need to think resourcefully about other ways in which I can attach myself to the rock.

The answer is not always finding new uses of a belt. But this is often a good (or 'good enough') solution for at least a couple of team problem-solving exercises commonly used experiential training.

In three short paragraphs I hope I have shown how environmental education, adventure and problem-solving exercises can all bring out the need for resourcefulness. Some of the best reviewing techniques also make use of items in the immediate environment.

I suspect that your work is about helping others to be more resourceful. So how resourceful are you when you are miles away from a flipchart and projector, or when your favourite bit of kit goes missing? And how resourceful are you when it comes to your own professional development?

If you have any stories 'on being resourceful' that you would like to share, we could have a mini-series of thoughts for the month about resourcefulness. A timely theme as austerity bites?

Roger Greenaway
June 2012

Too Experiential?

What does 'experiential' mean to you? Stimulating? Sensory immersion? Opening up more senses, more intelligences, more abilities? Holistic learning? Whole persons becoming fully tuned in to their selves and their social and natural environment? Being fully engaged and participating? Being more alert and alive?

Is this what we mean by 'experiential'? Maybe some of the above even if not all of the above?

I recall turning up at the high point of the Pennine Way with my radio playing and annoying the people already there. They did not want this extra stimulation. The 'stimulation' of the radio was interfering with their preferred sources of stimulation - presumably mother nature and each other's company.

I now happen to enjoy running (and racing) on long distance footpaths. And people often say to me: "Don't you get bored? Do you not listen to music while you run?" No thank you. I am now like those Pennine Way walkers who did not want any extra stimulation. Anything extra would reduce the value of the experience.

I increasingly encounter super stimulating training rooms that are bright colourful and welcoming, with all kinds of bits and pieces on the table tops. A little bit like that play room at Google HQ - their nursery for bright ideas. And a little bit like nursery, kindergarten, playschool ...

Us experiential people are definitely onto something important, but do we sometimes lay it on too thick and fast? Do we ever cause overstimulation? And if so, what are the consequences of providing an environment that is 'too stimulating'?

Our selling point might be that we are 'more experiential' than other providers. But can we ever be 'too experiential'?

Roger Greenaway
July 2012

Too Experiential? A Response from Nick Smith

Yes we can definitely be 'too experiential'. Having read your thoughts, particularly about music, I noticed exactly that on an abseiling session this week. Having run a climb, I moved across the crag to assist another instructor with abseiling the whole group of young people. He had his phone beside him playing music. Now, I have been conscious before that the two of us have different styles and so I put my annoyance down to that. However on reflection I decided I would have been justified in at least starting a debate. Now you could maybe argue that by playing styles of music that the young people recognised and related to you were building rapport and putting them at ease before they did the scary bit. However I just found it to be distracting and was mentally singing along instead of being fully focused on my work.

When we are out with groups we want them to notice what is around them, the beauty of nature, the feelings they have inside, what is happening to them and others etc so that they can reflect on it later and gain the full learning from the event. If they have been distracted at some crucial part of the day by a song that they suddenly recognise then you may lose important details for reviewing later.

However, I am also a believer in fully stimulating an individual and

particularly for an auditory person, it may be helpful to have music associated with an event or feeling. Think how often people recognise a song and it conjures up memories and feelings for them. Generally if I want to do that though, I will use it in a review where we are sucking out the learning to an appropriate soundtrack; appropriate either in that the lyrics mirror the lessons or the songs are current and will be repeated in their hearing in the future to remind them of the experiences.

I suppose it comes down to being deliberate in our actions and in designing the experiences we use. When we think about what will work and we review that plan in the midst of the action, changing it where necessary then we will probably get it right, whether that is with music or not. If we simply switch on the radio without thought to get some 'tunes' for (our own?) entertainment then we probably ought to think again.

We live in a world where there are countless distractions and people, particularly young people, have multiple stimuli at every turn. Maybe with time we will get better at filtering out the useless and focusing on that which works for us. I fear not though - we will simply become more like goldfish, distracted by the little plastic castles every time. I also wonder whether visitors to the great outdoors will have the necessary filters in place to work out what is useful. How much do we need to guide them in that?

Nick Smith
Dunoon, Scotland
Outdoor Life Coach
<http://www.squarepegscoaching.com>
Author of "Making Games Work - More Effective Learning in Teams"
<http://www.makinggameswork.com>
August 2012

More Thoughts on 'Too Experiential?'

MUSIC & WRITING

When in thinking/writing mode, I find that music helps - sometimes. Instrumental music with a steady pulse (e.g. Bach) seems to help me achieve the levels of concentration I now find (post-60, post-lifetime tobacco addiction) isn't as easy to come by as it once was. Oddly, 60s Bossa Nova Jazz and old instro rock records also help, as does choral music, so long as it's in a foreign language ...

... but once it starts to intrude, it washes away the concentration, and I'm thinking of anything but what I should be doing.

ONE PERSON'S CREATIVE INSPIRATION IS NOT ANOTHER'S

When I am experiencing the interaction with machines, civil engineering and landscape which narrowboating can achieve, my anxious front-brain relaxes and creative thoughts begin to emerge... but I have a colleague who, new to the canals, found that her creativity etc. was washed away by the fearful anxiety of being responsible for several tons of steel with an engine but no brakes, with other similarly unstoppable contraptions heading towards her down a canal which had, in her mind, shrunk to the dimensions of a muddy ditch ... too experiential!

Bill Krouwel
September 2012

From 'Too Experiential' to 'Making the Experience Big'

I can relate to the comments made so far. I have an autistic son, and a simplistic view of someone with autism is that they cannot cope with the stimuli around them in the way most of us can. We are generally able to block out background sounds etc, and know how to focus just on the important ones at any time, whereas someone with autism doesn't have this ability to differentiate between stimuli, so finds all the sounds, smells etc

etc around them just too much to handle and blocks the whole lot out - making them typically unresponsive. A programme we ran with my son for many years (Son-Rise) included using a room that contained very little - this helped avoid over stimulation and at the same time made the other person in the room the most significant and interesting thing around. A great way to encourage communication.

But all of this is surely confusing the idea of experiential with that of stimulation. The next time you do something special you really want to repeat, stop for a moment. Breathe the air, notice the smells around you; listen to the birds; use all your senses to take in the moment, and focus on the excitement or good feelings so that they can become really big. In other words make the whole experience as BIG as you can. The bigger the emotion attached to something then the more entrenched it is likely to become in your mind; and the greater the likelihood of remembering it in the future. This could be used by a tennis player, for example, to help them to repeat a particularly good shot.

Maybe we could use the same idea with participants in a workshop?

John john.morgan.mccarthy@gmail.com
<http://www.activeteamsolutions.com/>
<http://www.autismtreatmentcenter.org/>
October 2012

Whose Experience is it Anyway?

Sometimes things over-run, as they did for me this week in a discussion-based 'lecture' in an undergraduate module. Having to make way for an incoming group, we were homeless, and scanned around for a room. Within minutes, one (belonging to the primary education department) was found, and in a process known in our school as 'cuckooing', we moved in...

... Big mistake.

The room was full of glove puppets. Big ones almost a metre high; small Sootie-sized ones; parrots that perched on your shoulder; simple ones; complicated ones. Above all, colourful ones.

No prizes for guessing what happened next. What had been an earnest group discussion on the problems of adopting a developmental (as opposed to training) working approach rapidly degenerated into an improvised puppet theatre. My obvious enjoyment (expressed in hysterical laughter) of this development probably didn't help, and for a while we succumbed to the experience. Slowly, the puppeteering palled and within around ten minutes, we were back on track - but in a better way. Some who had held back in the earlier discussion were now contributing more. and we had a thoughtful and wide-ranging group conversation.

For me, the point in this is that sometimes an immersion, even swamping in technicolour 3d experience takes precedence over more serious matters, and even oils the wheels of adult discussion (at this point I'm struggling not to make the obvious connection with the 'free child' and 'adult' modes in transactional analysis, as I am uncomfortable with such glib fare). The point I'd much rather take from it is around seizing the moment. How would I have looked if I'd heavy-handedly attempted to restore order to the group? How would that have been helpful to them?

Sometimes it's good to be swamped by the experience ...

Bill Krouwel
November 2012

Getting Beyond the Caption

I never expected to learn much about experiential learning in a museum. But I did - thanks to Charlotte who works for the Natural History Museum in Stockholm. Charlotte feels that school children who turn up with their questionnaires and rush around looking for answers are missing out on

significant learning experiences - because their attention is on the caption and not on the exhibit.

So Charlotte covered the captions, sat us around an exhibit and asked us to work out what was going on. There was a bird of prey eating part of a dead animal. There was a crow tugging at the feathers of the much larger bird. There were stains in the snow - and footprints. I felt like Sherlock Holmes ... until I heard others talking about clues that I had missed. So I went back and looked more closely. And then we tried to piece it all together.

I greatly enjoyed the experience of working and learning with a group of fellow nature detectives. I am absolutely convinced that this was a far better learning experience than searching for facts in the captions.

I am sure that you can think of even better nature detective experiences out in real nature. You can always find a more experiential way if you truly value experiential learning. If you are doing talks, try quizzes. If you are doing quizzes, try detective work without the captions. If you are doing detective work inside, go outside. If you are doing detective work outside, try ... and so it goes on.

Let's keep things moving in this experiential direction and generate even better learning experiences.

Moving from a lecture to a quiz is just the start of a long journey...

Roger Greenaway
December 2012

Eds: A special thanks to those who contributed your thoughts or your listings during 2012. All readers: please let us know of events you think should be included in Experiential-CPD. Thoughts of the Month (and 'resources of the month') are always welcome.

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8th February 2013

METALOG® training tools Workshop

Newcastle

METALOG® training tools are multifaceted interaction activities and learning projects for indoor and outdoor use.

http://www.metalogtools.co.uk/en_gb/workshops/

12-13th February 2013

Facilitation Fundamentals

Knaresborough, North Yorkshire

This 2-day course is dynamic, packed with tools, methods and techniques and provides insight into the key facilitation competencies.

<http://www.facilitatethis.co.uk/index.php/events/>

23-24th February 2013

The 7th Lindley Annual Festival of Outdoor Learning

for Outdoor Professionals, Teachers, Youth Workers and Anyone With A General Interest In The Outdoors. Only £70 for the whole weekend - includes 4 workshops, 2 nights accommodation and meals during the event.

<http://www.lindleyeducationaltrust.org/news/festival.htm>

26th February 2013

UFA Young Researchers and Evaluators

Birmingham

Train to lead a 3 day programme for young people to develop their skills in research and evaluation. We use our Young Evaluator's Toolkit to show how evaluation can be interactive and even fun! ...

<http://www.youngresearchers12-eorg.eventbrite.co.uk>

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