



Roger Greenaway

## Thoughts for the Month for the year 2014

**Thought for the Month** is a regular feature of the Experiential-CPD newsletter. This collection of thoughts from 2014 is a celebration of another year of monthly thinking. It is also an invitation (and hopefully an inspiration) for you to share your own thoughts in 2014.



Bill Krouwel

Roger Greenaway and Bill Krouwel, Editors

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### When winning is losing

"You just remember the wins and forget the losses".

This appears to come from a positive thinking manual. It reminds me of the story of the the Olympic diver Greg Luganis who hit his head on the springboard on the way back down. (Ouch!)

His coach was offered a collection of video clips showing the incident from all angles. But the coach rejected the offer saying that Greg only views replays of his best dives.

This way of thinking ties in with the belief (from Appreciative Inquiry) that "What we focus on becomes our reality" - so focus on the wins and you win more.

Not necessarily ...

In the world of gambling things work differently. The opening quotation ("You just remember the wins and forget the losses") is from someone who was seriously addicted to fixed odds betting terminals. Remembering the wins kept the addict playing, and the more he played, the more he lost.

Remembering the wins - in this case - was a recipe for becoming a loser.

So remembering wins is not always a good idea: we need to be careful about what our selective memory selects. Let me try to be a little more precise about how positive thinking can apply to facilitating experiential learning.

1. Be sure it is a worthwhile game that gives opportunities for participants to practice skills and strategies that will be useful outside the game - in their community or workplace.
2. Discourage people from taking credit for success (or blame for failure) that was not the result of their own actions but was due to external or random factors. There is a limit to what people can learn from being lucky or unlucky, or from compliant or addictive behaviour.
3. Focus on the process rather than the result: help winning teams or individuals work out what they did well. Also help other teams or individuals work out what they did well.
4. Encourage people to remember why and how they achieved what they achieved.
5. Help individuals find the optimum balance between paying attention to 'success' and 'failure'. The most valuable balance will vary from one individual to another, and from one situation to the next.

Facilitated experiential learning should be a game in which everyone is a winner. Your commitment to continuing CPD will help you to spread the winnings and make experiential learning less of a gamble.

Roger Greenaway

January 2014

Reference: [Rise of the machines puts punters at bigger risk, says gambling addict](#)

## Silence in experiential learning

Silence is not just a strategy for learning in libraries. It is also a strategy for experiential learning - and not just for solo reflection.

One of the most thought-provoking offerings listed below is a three day residential in which you can explore silence - in silence. How else?

\* \* \*

Yes - it's a very short thought this month. I hope it shows that thoughts of any length are welcome. You are invited to think aloud on any topic that has some connection with Experiential-CPD.

There are good times for silence and there are good times for speaking up - and sharing your thoughts via Experiential-CPD.

Roger Greenaway

February 2014

## Teambuilding with Sheep

["Raising the Baa"](#) persuasively claim that "the unpredictability of the sheep is the KEY differentiator from other team building activities."

Their explanation continues ... "The totally different environment can present unexpected leaders, highlight gaps in the communication skills of even the most polished orators and boost confidence levels of quieter team members. Emotions will range from anticipation, excitement, frustration, disillusionment and ultimately elation and celebration."

The usual challenge is for the team to get the sheep into a pen. You may happen to know of the human version of this method where blindfolded people become the "sheep" and are only allowed to respond to non-verbal sounds from the shepherds. I am convinced that using real sheep really does "raise the baa" and actually provides a much better simulation of unpredictable factors that teams and leaders need to cope with in the workplace.

As the adventure in 'adventure-based learning' becomes increasingly designed and predictable, maybe sheep (and other animals?) can re-introduce a level of uncertainty that keeps everyone on their toes.

The addition of 3 video cameras to the the head of the leader, to one of the sheep and a wide view camera to take in the whole scene provides a level of sophistication to the reviewing process that few other activities can compete with.

Roger Greenaway

March 2014

## When does experiential learning happen?

When does learning happen in experience-based programmes?

Does it mostly happen before, during or after the activities?

Or does it mostly happen during or after the post-activity review - or later still?

I'd suggest that learning can happen at any time such as ...

### **Before the activity: learning before doing**

Learning can happen before the activity especially when the activity is being used as a means to check, verify, rehearse or practise what has already been learned but not yet put into practice. Doing the activity might lead to some small refinements but the main purpose of doing the activity would be for application and consolidation.

### **During the activity: learning through doing**

Any reflection that happens during the activity is a natural (or even essential) part of the activity such as when working on a new challenge. During most activities people will be thinking and talking, reflecting and communicating even when their main focus is the activity itself.

### **After the activity: learning through unfacilitated reflection**

If there is a gap between the activity and the review, participants may be reflecting about the activity on their own or they may be informally sharing their stories, feelings or opinions with others. Or they may be anticipating the review and even preparing for it in some way (such as the leader who feels they have let the team down)..

### **During the review: learning through facilitated reflection**

Some of this reflection may be on what has already been learned, but reviewing is far more than a recap of learning. The main function of a review is to bring out new learning by facilitating reflection on activities and experiences during the reviewing process.

### **After the review: learning through informal reflection**

A review may not be a tidy wrapping up process in which the learning is neatly packaged and labelled with no loose ends to tie up and no unfinished business. In fact a review can stir things

up and leave people full of curiosity, perhaps puzzled about the feedback they received, or still inspired by an 'aha' moment of insight. This might lead to further conversations outside the review session or some thinking time alone.

### **After the programme: learning back in the real world**

This is often the stage when classroom (or off-the-job) learning is tried out for real. If there is little need for new learning when applying what was learned, the situation is similar to 1 above. But if the application is more of an exploration or experiment then it can be a significant continuation of the learning process.

But if you are under the spell of almost any theory of experiential learning you could be forgiven for being under the misapprehension that learning happens at just one stage of a multi-stage cycle.

Let's wake up to the many different opportunities for learning that experience offers - before, during, after and even long after the most intense part of the experience.

Roger Greenaway

April 2014

## **What learning happens when?**

This question follows last month's question about when experiential learning happens. One of my answers was that learning happens through facilitated reflection during the review.

It may come as a surprise to those skilled in the art of questioning that a lot of reflective learning happens before you begin to enquire about feelings or reasons.

Eye-opening can be eye-opening. For example, the whole area of mindfulness (including the wild mindfulness programmes that often appear in this calendar) is based on noticing and increased awareness. The question "What did you notice?" is all I ask on an observation walk. I recently discovered that this works well for blind people too because you can notice with many different senses. Ski instructors regularly encourage their students to notice how their weight is distributed on their skis. Timothy Gallwey's "Inner Game of Tennis", Herrigel's "Zen and the Art of Archery" and many other "Inner Game" and "Zen and the Art" books show how much can be gained from simply noticing - as does McDougall's "Born to Run".

Of course, "What did you notice?" can readily lead to more sophisticated questions. But sometimes simply noticing leads to performance improvement. In a group setting new learning can readily arise from each person sharing what caught their attention. Watching a video of

yourself as a leader or presenter or facilitator helps you to see what the camera sees. Performance improvement is not guaranteed, but I am continually surprised by how the pathway from awareness to change can be a short one that needs little extra reflection or assistance.

If you prompt participants to express their feelings they may well develop greater empathy or learn more about the impact of their behaviour on others - for good or ill. This is the territory of sensitivity group training, emotional intelligence, relationship counselling and sales training. It is also the territory of experiential learning because we have such an interest in what participants experience. We go on long journeys or build elaborate outdoor gyms or visit awe-inspiring places to generate certain kinds of experiences. If we know what participants have really experienced we may be better able to take them further on their learning journey. But simply sharing experiences develops sensitivity, empathy, trust, relationships, respect, friendship and a whole range of communication skills including story-telling.

All these learning benefits and we have only asked two questions:

"What did you notice?"

"What did you experience?"

And we have yet to ask any analytical questions. Before this thought gets too big, I will take a break and resume the topic in a later issue.

Roger Greenaway

May 2014

## Agile Experiential Learning

This month's issue is a few days later than usual because I have been at the Agile Games conference in Boston, New England. It was my second time there sharing ideas with this "awesome" community dedicated to collaboration and experiential learning in the workplace.

The conference attracted many experts in the design of learning games: one group devised 5 new games in less than 5 hours. In another part of the conference 5 people facilitated the playing of the games that they had designed and that had won them each a free place at the conference.

All of these games will probably continue on their journey of development as they get tried out, tweaked, shared and adapted in this community that is dedicated to continuous improvement. And they apply the same principles to team development: "*At regular intervals*, the team reflects on how to become more effective, then tunes and adjusts its behavior accordingly."

Their belief in teams is so strong that they assert that: "The best [work] emerges from self-organizing teams." Like Bill Krouwel, they are fans of emergent learning: they value "Responding to change over following a plan".

They are also very keen on face-to-face communication in the workplace: "The most efficient and effective method of conveying information to and within a ... team is face-to-face conversation". Any lingering stereotypes I may have had about IT software developers have now completely vanished.

Agile Games brings together some of the most creative people in the world of software development. And what is most astonishing to me is that these innovative practices do not come from research institutions or training events but from and in the workplace. The amount of learning and development and productivity that comes from a well functioning Agile team would, I suspect, make off-site team development redundant.

If you have ever been surprised by experiential learning happening in a different world to your everyday work, then perhaps that would be an "awesome" opportunity for you to write a thought (or thoughtlet) for the month?

Just a thought.

Roger Greenaway

June 2014

\* Quotes above are from <http://agilemanifesto.org>

\* "awesome" (U.S.) = "not bad" (U.K.) ;-)

## Not Learning from Experience

Not learning from experience can be very convenient - in the short term. We can just carry on as before - as if nothing had happened. We can continue to operate on automatic uninterrupted by thinking non-routine thoughts. We can carefully avoid any thinking that is new, critical, deep or difficult.

Alternatively we can seek and provoke experiences that make people think: thinking original thoughts rather than consuming the ready-made line-of-thought served up by an instructor who knows the ready-made purpose of the ready-made exercise.

Try asking people to list the ways they avoid new or unpredictable experiences . Then ask them to write another list of ways in which they avoid thinking about experience. And then ask them to write another list of reasons why they do not learn as much as they could from their

experiences.

Or just try this for yourself. You may discover just how accomplished you are at not learning from experience. You may then be better prepared next time an opportunity for experience-based learning presents itself.

Thoughts (or lists of how not to learn from experience) welcome!

Roger Greenaway

July 2014

## The Attractions of Uncertainty

When you don't know if your train will arrive on time for an important meeting, when you don't know if you will be able to pay all your bills at the end of the month, when you don't know where your next meal or next drink of clean water will be coming from ... these are uncertainties that no-one wants.

But many of us are in the business of creating uncertainty - *more attractive* kinds of uncertainty. These often take the form of adventures or of problems to solve - so that participants overcome a challenge or find a solution. They pass through a period of uncertainty. They survive. They achieve, They celebrate. They tell stories of uncertainty with happy endings!

This is also the typical Hollywood or Bollywood script - a journey through a world of uncertainty with a happy ending (at least until the sequel appears).

But is everyone really striving for greater certainty? That is a pathway that eventually leads to a robotic and programmed world. We can do better thanks to the unlimited capacity that we all have for lifelong learning. And if we enjoy the process of learning itself then we will come alive when faced with uncertainty (and then doze off a bit if we find ourselves in a world of dreary predictability).

If we are educating or training people to thrive in situations of uncertainty and change, then regular exposure to uncertainty (in a supportive learning culture) might be exactly\* what is needed. Uncertainty can bring out the best in people. Uncharted territory can produce some wonderful surprises. At the very least it demands new thinking. And learning to thrive in uncertain situations prepares people for a world of increasing uncertainty and change.

Even so we may lack confidence about the attractiveness of "uncertainty" in the marketplace, so we call it "adventure". Maybe.

And maybe uncertain outcomes are more attractive than we think?

Roger Greenaway, August 2014

\* According to Anthony Robbins we need both certainty and uncertainty. Maslow's pyramid was just one view of human needs and Robbin's list is just another.

## Bill Looks Back

Looking Back ...

About a year ago, I retired from regular paid employment. Nothing special about that - it comes to us all, and the end of a forty-nine year working life seemed like time for a change of pace.

I reflect on the changes that have happened in this time. When I started work it was as a loader of lorries. We used sack-trucks and sweat to do the job. In the office, clerks pondered over reams of paper, wrestled with Roneo machines and comptometers (ask a grandparent...) and, like us, smoked like chimneys.

Overseas, East and West confronted each other, our Empire had pretty much evaporated and computers were rare and vast things tended by white-coated acolytes. At home it was still illegal to be gay and uncomfortable to be anything but white.

The past is indeed a foreign country. And the pace of change is relentless - but not continuous; it's not a smooth sequence of night-following-day variation but a process of astonishing, unpredictable dislocation.

I believe that outdoor learning can be a tool to help people prepare for a future which is going to be even more dislocated and randomly-changing; the outdoors is one of the few fields where we can actually offer programmes full of the unpredictable. The sad thing is that most buyers want unsurprising, measurable outcomes,

We need to educate them to change that expectation to the more realistic one of building the meta-skills necessary to cope with the unknown world that's coming...

That's a task to which the more experienced - the elderly - may well be able to contribute ... after all, we've already coped with massive change, and may have skills to pass on ...

Bill Krouwel, September 2014

## Competition or Collaboration?

This old question has been given new life by Margaret Heffernan's latest book "A Bigger Prize: why competition isn't everything and how WE do better". In the style of Malcolm Gladwell, but with more heart and passion, Margaret Heffernan brings together a collection of real and very recent stories to make her case - that collaboration makes sense in all walks of life.

She is a successful business woman who can show how collaboration works well in business and how competition often doesn't. It might be possible to pick and choose examples to make an opposite case, but I was all too ready to sit back and enjoy the stories of successful collaboration in so many different fields.

In my case, Margaret Heffernan was preaching to the converted. Ever since I read Terry Orlick's 'Co-operative Sports and Games Handbook' I have been forever exploring and developing ways of making outdoor/experiential learning more collaborative and less competitive.

But if the real world is a competitive one should we not be using lots of competition in our work? Heffernan has so many examples of collaboration working well in the real world that I do not think we would be letting anyone down by focusing on developing their capacity for collaboration.

In the world of outdoor education and training I suspect that the vast majority of programmes and courses are already doing an excellent job of preparing people for a world of collaboration: trust, support, listening, empathy, working together, interpersonal skills, teamwork, mutual support, cross-cultural teams, conflict resolution ...

I think our work is already fully infused with experiences of collaboration and the language to go with it. Some aspects of our work (and I am especially thinking of Forest Schools) might even qualify as a 'competition-free' zone.

We know that collaboration is good for learning. And thanks to Margaret Heffernan we know that it works pretty well in the 'real world' too. Maybe we should be even more explicit about this in our work? Dip into 'A Bigger Prize' to find plenty of evidence to strengthen your case - but don't expect to find any examples from the outdoor education field. We already have enough good examples of our own.

Roger Greenaway

October 2014

November's thought is a film review ...

## Ivory Tower

This eye-opening documentary film about USA higher education is at least as shocking as Michael Moore's 'Sicko' (2007) about health care in the USA.

For several years, the cost of college fees has been increasing at a rate that is considerably faster than the rate even at which US health care costs are rising. Potential students and their parents are increasingly doubting whether a four year degree course is worth the investment. After their degree course many students are faced with spiralling debt that nationally exceeds \$3,000,000,000,000 dollars - an amount that has overtaken the total US credit card debt!

Even worse, 68% of students fail to get a degree in 4 years and will need to pay for extra years if they are determined to get a degree - eventually.

But there is not much sign of student determination, with only one hour's study per day being the norm in some universities. The way in which students evaluate their teachers means that the teachers who make least demands on students tend to get the best ratings - and the fastest promotion.

The various ways in which competition in US higher education lowers quality while increasing costs - would have fitted well in Margaret Heffernan's 'A Bigger Prize' - the book I reviewed here last month.

Not only does competition result in the promotion of the teachers who require least from students, it is also the driving factor behind the sharply rising costs of a university education in the USA. Higher education institutions compete with each other by offering the best facilities they can - they spend on such an extravagant scale that students live in luxury with an abundance of swimming pools, gyms and other sports facilities. Plus they are pampered by service staff who wash and clean up after them.

**4 years of pampering and partying = very little learning (only 32% get a degree) + a considerable amount of debt.**

The film does show some experiments in different kinds of higher education, but the experiments with elearning have failed because the results are even worse than those achieved by real teachers.

US higher education has reached a crisis point. The lessons learned from sub-prime mortgages do not seem to have been noticed by the higher education sector where institutions and students alike are taking on increasingly unsustainable levels of debt.

And everyone in the system - students, parents, teachers and administrators seem to have lost

sight of what education is supposed to achieve. The market economy seems to be driving education out of the education system - a system that puts many young people into a lifetime of debt and well out of reach of a mortgage.

Andrew Rossi's film is not as entertaining as those of Michael Moore. But it is just as worrying. There seem to be no winners other than, perhaps, the highly paid administrators and the academic gown manufacturers - but even their prospects are poor if you believe even 50% of the claims made by Andrew Rossi.

And the connections with Experiential-CPD? A sharp reminder of the importance of keeping 'education' central to our work? And can experiential education offer a better route into the world of work? How good is our track record?

Roger Greenaway, November 2014

## Camaraderie

Do you find that many experiential learning activities are valued because they generate a spirit of "camaraderie"?

When I encounter that word I picture a group of people relaxing together after facing some kind of challenge or competition. Having shared a common (or similar) experience, they are now enjoying a growing sense of togetherness. And while chatting about their recent ordeal they start talking French! I am intrigued that we turn so much to French (or French-derived) words when experiencing "camaraderie", "rapport", "bonhomie", "esprit de corps" or "joie de vivre".

English-speaking teams seem fairly happy talking about "mutual support" and "team spirit" and even "close-knit", but if we want to express stronger feelings we turn to French words - perhaps because they are suitably vague and distant and do not invite further exploration.

I do not know of facilitators who analyse camaraderie. I have never seen groups making lists of what makes good camaraderie. I have not seen plans for better camaraderie. Camaraderie just happens when it wants to. We can work at teamwork as much as we want, but camaraderie floats around in the ether and is not so amenable to being worked at.

Getting curious, I explored further and found that a close-knit group can be exactly that:

"An example of camaraderie is a group of women getting together to knit and talk on a

weekly basis." <http://www.yourdictionary.com/camaraderie>

The same source offers these examples:

"Do you enjoy the camaraderie of the smokers' group outside the building?"

"To my surprise I missed the camaraderie of the ward round."

"The others returned in a group, the climbers boisterously chatting, but any sign of camaraderie among the others was absent."

The [Cambridge Dictionary](#) also associates camaraderie with climbing:

"When you've been climbing alone for hours, there's a tremendous sense of camaraderie when you meet another climber."

So there we have it: "camaraderie" is so universal that it spans the worlds of knitting, smoking, hospital wards and climbing. English speakers often use the word when referring to a sense of kinship and shared experience.

I wonder which word French speakers use? And I wonder why English-speaking groups seek the comfort of French fog when feelings make their fragile entry into group discussion?

Roger Greenaway, December 2014

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