



Roger Greenaway

Thoughts for the Month 2015

Thought for the Month is a regular feature of the Experiential-CPD newsletter. This collection of thoughts from 2015 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 2016.



Bill Krouwel

Roger Greenaway and Bill Krouwel, Editors

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Freedom to Roam and Read

"Freedom to Roam" is an attractive idea, especially if you happen to be in a stimulating environment in good weather and in good company - and preferably with someone who can help you find the the spots you will most appreciate.

Much the same applies when roaming the internet for interesting CPD articles to read - except that you can enjoy doing this indoors whatever the weather.

Random wanderings can result in pleasant surprises but a searchable collection of articles or a listing of the "most read" articles can save you a lot of time. Here are some collections of **searchable** articles of interest to Experiential-CPD readers:

[Search Horizons articles by author, topic, content](#) (UK+)

[Search articles by topic at OutdoorEd.com](#) (USA+)

[Search 17 years of 'outres' discussions](#) among outdoor and adventure education researchers (UK+)

[Search the keyword index](#) of the Wilderdom Outdoor Education Research & Development Center (Australia+)

[Search the Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning](#) using any term or by "most read" (UK+) After reading the abstract you meet a pay wall, but free access is sometimes available eg [see this current promotion](#).

Do you know of any other places that offer easy-to-roam or easy-to-search collections of articles that are of interest to Experiential-CPD readers?

Your thoughts on this or other topics are always welcome.

Roger Greenaway

January 2015

Rebranding Boredom

Involving young people in activity is a common response when they say they are bored or "there is nothing to do around here". As a parent, as a teacher and as a trainer I have felt that providing adventure activities has been (in part) a welcome antidote to boredom.

But I do remember one occasion where I offered a group of teenage boys an open choice of activities (that included climbing, abseiling, zip wire, canoeing, rubber-tying) and they surprised me by asking to go fishing. So we did. My surprise was followed by (my) boredom, but the boys were quite enjoying themselves not catching fish.

From their perspective it seemed that hanging-around-with-their-pals-not-doing-very-much *in their normal urban surroundings* was boring, but that hanging-around-with-their-pals-not-doing-very-much *beside a remote windswept lake* was NOT boring - despite the absence of fish.

You can probably tell that I am not keen on fishing. But take me to the very same place and call it "meditation",

"reflection", "mindfulness" or (better still) "wild mindfulness" and there is a fair chance that I will approach and reframe much the same experience in a more favourable way.

Ask me to stay a whole day or overnight and call it "solo" and I might enjoy the experience even more. You could even ask me to stay for a whole month and call it "Vision Quest". Now that is a bit of a stretch (rebranding has its limits for me, I think) but such lengthy sojourns do appeal to many people.

Much depends on what fills the nothingness, the absence of activity, the absence of people, and the absence of structure. One advocate of Quiet Time, Val Nicholls, describes its therapeutic benefits in her PhD. Others see boredom as a spur to creativity and imagination. Others see boredom as leading to self-initiated action or self-designed play or simply as valuable "me time". Others see it as a dangerous vacuum that leads to trouble and chaos.

I was always told that "bored people are boring people" - so I have long been in the habit of rebranding emptiness. As a child I would watch raindrops racing down the window - it was an engrossing spectator activity! These days I choose to enter trail races that can last 24 hours or more. Despite the fact that I am fully engaged in a challenging activity, friends think I must get bored on these long runs. Nothing could be further from the truth!

Perhaps this is the makings of a case for including "boredom" in activity programmes - we just have to be careful about how we brand it. Any ideas?

Roger Greenaway

February 2015

Lasting Impact - or something better?

I was at Sheffield station looking for the Hope Valley train. "Whereabouts in Hope Valley?" asked the station master. "Castleton", I said.

I wish I could remember exactly what he said next. It was something like "Hope Valley was the best experience of my life". He had been to an outdoor centre there about 40 years ago. And he loved it. He clearly treasured those memories. Hope Valley had made a lasting impact.

Or that is what I assumed because he was still enthusing about his experience about 40 years later. Which is one kind of lasting impact - its unforgettability.

Did it make a difference to his confidence? I don't know.

Did it make a difference to his social skills? I don't know.

Did it improve his attitude to school? Pass.

Did it improve his behaviour in the classroom? Pass.

Did he develop valuable and lasting friendships? Pass.

Did it provide him with knowledge that he has since used?

Did it arouse curiosity that he has since followed up?

Did he choose to spend more time outdoors?

Did his parents notice any positive changes?

Did it influence his subject choices or life choices?

I didn't chat long enough with the stationmaster to find out - I had a train to catch and he had a job to do. But my impression was that he treasured his Hope Valley experience so much precisely because it was so unrelated to anything else in his life.

I do not want to devalue the simple pleasure of remembering good times across a gap of several decades. But I am sure that providers of outdoor education can offer something much better than good memories. Perhaps something that is the equivalent of Continuing Professional Development for students. Continuing Student Development?

It is difficult to make anything "continuing" if providers see students only once for a one-off experience. I wonder what good practice is out there supporting students' continuing development *after* the impact of their outdoor experience?

After we raise hopes in Hope Valley, what do we do next?

Roger Greenaway

March 2015

Other versions of history are also available

Interpretation boards are growing fast in and around the city where I live. I am discovering all kinds of interesting historical facts and tales. These boards give me an excuse to take an "educational" rest during my local runs. And I am becoming a bit of an expert on local history and the local environment. A tiny bit that is.

We also have an interactive sign board which adds one to the day's total if you ride past on your bike and it shows the current temperature and the date.

This electronic board happens to be situated by the start of the history walk - a pleasant riverside walk where history begins in 1297 and every few decades you come across another date with another story engraved beside it - all the way up to 2009 when this version of history was created.

I used to enjoy history because there were always at least two interpretations - and many more possibilities would arise as you discover evidence that contradicts existing stories.

This is what outdoor/experiential education does at a personal level. People turn up with a dominant story about who they are. And they leave with an ever growing number of possibilities as their world grows and they grow with it...

... unless they arrive with a ready-made interpretation board hanging round their neck. Social workers used to offer us detailed histories of the young people they were bringing to our residential centre. My preference was only to see information I needed to know for safety reasons. I was afraid that our own interpretations would be coloured too much by past interpretations - while we were trying to open new horizons and co-create new possibilities.

Our local history seems to have been written by abbots, because they were the amongst the tiny educational elite who had the skills and the time and the power to create history. The stories of the illiterate majority are much harder to find.

Roger Greenaway

April 2015

Too busy to read?

In the summer do you have less time to read or more time to read? Summer gives us longer days and more time for enjoying and/or providing outdoor activities. Does reading wait for the quieter winter months?

I used to read most in the summer. This would be during climbing trips to the Alps. I loved the climbing. I also loved the "fester" days – of eating, sleeping and reading. After all, recovering well on lazy days meant more energy for climbing on the other days.

I was reading books but I wasn't reading nature. I would learn what I could about avalanche risks because such knowledge would help to keep me alive – so I would try to read snow slopes. I would also try to read the weather. But when my climbing friends stopped to show me rare plants, I would only stop out of politeness and would not loiter for long.

In our work we need to read groups. Now that does interest me. Understanding how groups behave is essential for group facilitators and is important for everyone else. But how do we actually read groups?

Do we step back and watch? This gives a remote view which may be helpful, but the key to understanding some groups may not be visible from a distance.

So do we join in and get close enough to understand the group from the inside? We may pick up useful clues, but

the tightrope of being both in and out of the group can be a difficult one to walk.

Perhaps we could get the group talking about what is going in the group while we listen in? They should probably be doing this anyway because such communication is usually a major factor in achieving challenges and learning objectives.

In 'Group Action', Martin Ringer has another way of reading groups - as a facilitator you look inside yourself: you read "yourself" first as it might help you to read the group. You recognise that although you have a special role with the group you are still a part of the group. Your own feelings let you know something about what it is like to be part of this group at this time: another source of useful clues.

I find it difficult to read a group when they are sitting still. I find it much easier to read a group when they are facing a variety of different tasks and challenges. A disengaged or inactive group is like a blank page to me – there is nothing much to read. But when a group is engaged and active it is as if the page quickly fills with words and clues and "reading the group" becomes much easier.

It also becomes much easier for the group to read itself if we help participants to see the clues and the words – so that instead of getting lost in the whirl of group activity they can do plenty of "reading" at the same time: noticing self, noticing others, noticing the process and noticing the environment.

We should not be too busy to read and neither should the groups we are working with be too busy to read. Given time and encouragement to share what they are reading, everyone becomes a better reader, and those fuzzy learning outcomes start to come into a clearer focus.

Roger Greenaway

May 2015

How do you define process?

by Bill Krouwel

I was taking part in a facilitating-focused session at an annual outdoor-learning festival. The facilitators, both experienced and respected outdoor/development training veterans, were having a ball. So were the participants, as we moved from one interesting and absorbing task to the next. Reviews were well-handled, too, with lots of open questions and a focus on interaction rather than just task success/failure.

After a while, and wishing to move things on by provoking a discussion outside of the task-review cycle, one of the facilitators asked '*how do you define process?*' The response, such as it was, was unexpected. Mostly, a puzzled silence prevailed, and people looked from one to another in bafflement. What did he mean? Process? What's that got to do with outdoor learning?

Finally, one guardedly ventured a tentative view that *'process is about engineering, isn't it?'* ... at which point I abandoned a self-imposed vow of silence (I'm trying to avoid talking too much ...) and shared my own views on human process and its place in the outdoors.

But I was worried. I'm pretty sure that the idea of group process and in particular the task-process opposition is one that used to inform a great deal of outdoor learning, the idea being that unfamiliar outdoor tasks tended to illustrate and highlight the workings of personal, interpersonal and group process in an almost graphic way, thus producing meaningful material for review (often then known as process review to distinguish it from a simple review of the task).

As psychologist Barry Peel once put it, the outdoors uses tasks which are *real but not realistic* (in terms of day-to-day life) to provoke process *which is real, and may also be life-realistic*. Indeed some, such as Williams and Creswick (1977), went so far as to aver that this highlighting of process made the outdoors a far more developmental medium than 'unreal' indoor-based courses.

Although it was only a small sample (around a dozen people), I am worried by the conference group's apparently total ignorance of the idea of process ... Perhaps we need to do something about this before it's too late and the outdoor learning is reduced to a way of just learning about the outdoors rather than the potentially much more powerful learning through the outdoors ...

Maybe (and I'm being just a tad cynical here ...) we ought to set up a group-process NGB... At the very least (now I'm not being cynical), we might write and speak-out about the value of the outdoors as a window into human process ...

Bill Krouwel

June 2015

Reading Groups

I really welcome these thoughts on "reading groups" from Harve Downey who is responding to my earlier Thought for the Month on the same subject (Too busy to read? Exp-CPD May 2015). Harve (and I) wonder if other readers have experiences they are willing to share about reading (or not reading) groups. Roger Greenaway

Harve writes ...

Claude Taroni once commented on how groups appear to develop their own personalities back in the 70s and this observation has stayed with me ever since.

I once spectacularly misread a group after personally feeling brilliant because I had had the best night's sleep in two weeks during a beach Bivi on Skye. Everyone else said in the expedition review that the morning trek up the

hill from the beach was the "lowest" moment of the course! (I appreciate Martin Ringer's ability to read the group by first reading yourself, but it doesn't always work for me!)

On another occasion I "Knew" at breakfast we were in for a challenging day but not why! After profound reflection I realised their baseball hats were angled low in a closed/defensive way. Good days baseball hats were angled high or not worn.

The Kalahari Bushmen appear to have sixth sense while navigating the desert but actually were "reading" signs subconsciously that "Western" observers were oblivious to.

A skilled facilitator once shared with me a skill in reading an inactive group was to take a visual snapshot mental photo of the group then examine it kinaesthetically - a bit like Malcolm Gladwell's "thin slicing" in Blink. I began to recognise that what is happening on the periphery of the group is sometimes as important as what is happening in the centre of the group.

It would be good if facilitators shared their secrets about reading groups. Or has it already been done?

Harve Downey

July 2015

Hide and Seek

Nick Eve writes ...

We can all remember playing Hide-and-Seek as children, an exciting world where the adult was a stranger and we were immersed in the moment.

When we are running a group there are significant and useful parallel processes to recognise and think about, both at the intellectual and the emotional level.

Considering how these link back through time can open up our sensitivity to what is going on in the present. It can help us to be aware of the tension between hiding, feeling safe and keeping quiet as against the desire to be seen and included in the active group, to become one again with our friends.

There was an electric level of excitement and fear that held us enthralled in the all encompassing importance of the game, which was characterised by the movement from hidden to seen, silent to heard, alone to together, introverted to extroverted.

Remember how conflicted we felt between wanting to stay hidden, quiet and unfound, how safe it felt to be tucked away, silent and unseen, but the longer it went on, the more we wanted our friends to find us. Sometimes making small noises to hint at our whereabouts, sometimes even fearing that everyone had gone home, the game had finished and we had been forgotten, turning to terror as that reality became concrete in our

imaginations.

And to be found, to be reincluded and active again within the circle of friends was so important, it almost justified the amount of investment in what might appear to the outsider as a non-event.

As facilitators we witness this dynamic being experienced by the adult, moving between the safety of silence and the “risk” with reward of inclusion in participation. Being sensitive to the subverbal reality and hearing the echoes of the past in people’s contributions allows us to pick up on the importance that underlies even the most innocuous contribution and to recognise the dance that is being acted out in front of us.

This is not about better or best but about the power of the experience, how deeply it is felt and how it drives our behaviour, how those early experiences set patterns that configure our present participation.

Watch a pre-verbal infant playing peekaboo, hidden behind hands and out of sight and the look of ecstasy and wonder when the hands are removed and the world is complete again. Both positions hold immense attraction to the infant, the movement from one to the other is where the boundary of wonderment is found, the doorway to learning.

This process is being echoed, however subtly, in the most prosaic events, such as asking people to go round and say their names at the start of a group or as we watch people enter and leave the group discussion.

As facilitators our empathic understanding of participants’ experience is enhanced if we are sensitive to and mindful of the process conversations that happen at this subconscious level, at the same time as attending to the content.

Nick Eve

[Elements](#), the business of human relationships

August 2015

UK Blogs about experiential learning

Who reads blogs? Maybe you if you find one that is up your street / river / trail? It is a fair bet that as a subscriber to Experiential-CPD you will be tempted to read the blogs of people whose events appear in these listings.

So here is a selection of blog posts from providers of Experiential-CPD events in the UK ...

[10 ways to better engage learners in your training workshops](#) blog post by Shirley Gaston, Azesta.

See Shirley's next event [below](#).

[Storytelling and story acting in the early years](#) by David Farmer, Drama Resource.

See David Farmer's next event [below](#)

[Eco-education or eco-therapy?](#) blog post by David Key, who facilitates change through experiences of nature
See David Key's next event [below](#).

[How to encourage learning and development, lessons from parenthood](#) by Martin Thompson, MTa
Learning.
See MTa's next event [below](#).

[Hide and Seek](#) by Nick Eve, Elements
See Nick's next Facilitator Development Programme [below](#)

[Grid Review For After Lunch](#) latest fortnightly blog post from David Gibson, Eureka / Tips for Trainers.
See David Gibson's next event [below](#).

[Rethinking Experiential Learning](#) by Roger Greenaway
See Roger's next UK Reviewing Workshop [in the full Exp-CPD calendar online](#)

[Where are the Antifragile Learners?](#) by Geoff Cook, RSVP Experiential Learning Design. RSVP's trainer-training options are presented [on this page at RSVP](#)

Roger Greenaway

September 2015

Supported by research

"Where is the research?"

When those who resist change ask this question, they might be assuming that the 'status quo' is well supported by research and the 'new way' has a poor research base.

Often the reverse is true.

I have previously reported on research about the value of walking to school. But how about running a mile when you get to school? Over 30 schools in Stirling are involved in this Daily Mile pilot. And Dr. Colin Moran from Stirling University will be studying its impact. Early signs are promising for health, happiness and learning. Yet another link is forming between activity and learning.

You could even try this for yourself. Run a mile every day and see what happens! (Let us know!)

Even if the Daily Mile pilot shows good results this does not necessarily make lessons themselves any more active. There is a pile of research supporting active learning in the classroom such as that summarised by John Hattie in [Visible Learning and the Science of How We Learn](#). Some practical ways of applying some of these active learning principles are described in Shirley Gaston's "[Get them moving!](#)"

There is a lingering prejudice in education that was given an undeserved extension by the now largely discredited learning styles theories. The prejudice is that active learning is best suited to students who struggle with academic learning. So I am always reassured to find research studies that dismantle such prejudices. Recently [an article on learning myths in the McKinsey Quarterly](#) lamented the "misconception that each one of us has a strictly preferred learning style and channel". The authors state:

"Recent studies have flatly disproved this idea, suggesting instead that engaging all the senses in a variety of ways (for instance, audiovisual and tactile) can help employees retain new content."

Moving, touching, watching, listening is for everyone. Let's get learners of all ages and abilities doing all of these things.

Engaging all senses works better. The research says so.

And there is even research supporting the value of students doing the research. See "[Want Great Research? Why you should ask young people](#)"

Roger Greenaway

October 2015

Frightening People

Hallowe'en is the time of year for frightening people. Outdoor educators are specialists in this area. We seem to know the difference between 'good fear' (which can be educational) and 'bad fear' which is just plain frightening.

We seem to go to extraordinary lengths to place people in situations where they experience fear - whether in a churning rapid or half-way up (or down) a cliff face. Funfairs and amusement parks specialise in getting people from fun and amusement to fear within seconds of the ride beginning.

But we (outdoor educators) seem to know what kind of fear is educational, what kind of fear is entertainment and what kind of fear is traumatic and potentially damaging.

I am not so confident at spotting these boundaries. Thanks to human diversity, the same activity can be entertaining for some and educational for others while being damaging for some participants in the very same group.

And even a frightening experience that has an "educational" impact can be a bit tricky to steer in a worthwhile direction. How confident are we that surviving a turbulent rapid will increase confidence that can be applied to potentially frightening challenges in daily life - such as singing, or making a speech or standing up for yourself (against negative peer pressure) or standing up for a friend who is being bullied.

So if the descent of the rapids was all about building confidence, why not follow this up with overcoming a few

daily fears. Ask the paddlers to write and perform a song, or stand on a stage and talk about their experience in the rapids. Or as a facilitator you can be eagle-eyed for moments where people seem to back off when facing peer pressure, or when they are trying to stand up for the rights of themselves or others.

If we are helping people overcome their fears of getting through cold swirling choppy water, then can we claim this to be "educational" unless we are also helping them navigate their way through more everyday challenges?

Unless we can really help people translate their overcoming of fear from one situation to another, then perhaps all we are doing is frightening people?

Roger Greenaway

November 2015

5 Experiential Learning Trends for 2016

On reading Rob Caul's '[The big five learning technology trends for 2016](#)' I wondered what the big five *experiential learning* trends for 2016 might be. And then I noticed that these 5 trends might each have their equivalents in the field of experiential learning ...

1. Gamification

Purposeful games were invented in the non-digital world and we can continue re-inventing such games to meet educational and training needs in 2016 - experientially.

2. Going Mobile

Yes this was about mobile phone technology. But there are many other ways in which learning can go mobile. Let's keep moving - it's in the DNA of experiential learning.

3. Personalised learning

Experiential learning, indoors or outdoors, uses a small group face-to-face interface with intuitive-reciprocal micro-adjustments that respond to emerging needs and personalities... we call it personal and social development and without a digital interface it's truly personalised.

4. Greater integration

Integration is what we do. Clients often turn to experiential training to build teams, to revitalise organisation culture, to help people become more engaged and inclusive in their behaviour - working and learning with non-pixelated others at the same time and place.

5. Cloud computing

We can lie on our backs and count the clouds as they go by without any prompting from a mindfulness app!

I'll be generous and give myself a score of 3/5 for this game. New learning technologies are improving all the

time but they are still a long way short when it comes to developing interpersonal skills - interpersonally.

Perhaps providers of experiential learning will in 2016 become more assertive and eloquent about the value of learning experiences in low-tech, non-digital, social environments? It is a hope and a prediction.

Roger Greenaway

December 2015

Experiential-CPD - opportunities for your continuing professional development

Free monthly news of opportunities to develop your:

- facilitation skills
- groupwork skills
- activity and design skills
- skills for working with specific groups

Keep up to date with:

- conferences
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Announce or discover training events for UK outdoor educators and experiential trainers with Experiential-CPD. Enjoy and/or share 'thoughts of the month' in 2016.

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