



Roger Greenaway

Thoughts for the Month 2016

Thought for the Month is a regular feature of the Experiential-CPD newsletter. This collection of thoughts from 2016 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 2017.



Bill Krouwel

Roger Greenaway and Bill Krouwel, Editors

Thoughts for the Month 2016

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Magic Stickology



Magic Stick (or Helium Stick) is team development exercise. The task is to lower the stick to the ground without any team member's finger losing touch with the stick. And – guess what -

when the team try to lower the stick it floats up as if it is filled with helium. Then everyone denies moving the stick upwards because each person believes they are keeping in touch with the stick without exerting any upward force.

I first encountered this kind of phenomenon when sitting in a group around an upturned glass tumbler on a smooth table top. Everyone was asked to keep one finger lightly on the glass without moving the glass. Sooner or later someone's involuntary imperceptible twitch starts the glass starts moving and everyone else follows to stay in touch with the glass. And the glass typically accelerates with such force that some people might believe it is a supernatural force at work.

In both cases, the cumulative efforts of everyone trying to stay in touch with the object can readily initiate, exaggerate and accelerate movement - even if no individual is aware of applying any force to the object.

In Magic Stick there are two illusions. The first illusion is that the stick rises without any individual knowingly making the stick rise. The second illusion is that successfully lowering the stick to the ground demonstrates effective teamwork



The idea is that if everyone concentrates and works together the whole team can lower the stick to the ground without any individual losing touch with the stick. This is certainly possible with a team of 2, but the bigger the team the more impossible this challenge becomes - and the more likely it is that success (if "achieved") has been achieved by cheating. The most usual form of cheating is that an individual briefly loses contact with the stick and does not wish to confess. This "little cheat" arises either because they don't think that such a tiny infringement matters and/or because they think that owning up (or grassing on a fellow team member) would be letting the team down.

Magic Stick is an exercise in which a claimed success almost certainly depends on foul play or on low awareness or on poor observation. And these are precisely the kinds of behaviours that lead to such things as

bankers fixing the Libor rate or nuclear power plants accidentally blowing up.

Maybe this is the wrong time of year for raising such concerns. But there are better ways of using Magic Stick. You could intervene after 5 minutes of Magic Stick attempts and congratulate participants individually and collectively for what they have done well so far. Then tell them that the solution they are working on is unlikely to succeed without some kind of cheating. Now take the stick away for 5 minutes and tell them that their new challenge is to come up with as many alternative solutions as they can in the next 5 minutes (in brainstorming groups of 3 or 4 people).

Return the stick and let them try our their favourite alternative idea. Most groups will come up with a much more elegant and effective solution. Which I think is far better than running the risk of inadvertently endorsing cheating as the magic behind effective teamwork.

In general, I think that team developers could pay more careful attention to the the kind of images that their favourite team challenges represent. The usual "solution" for Magic Stick depends on everyone doing precisely the same thing at precisely the same time. Not an effective strategy for a football team but possibly useful for synchronised swimmers ...

Perhaps you have better ways of using Magic Stick?

Roger Greenaway

Whose story?

The **Hunger Games** provides the inspiration and story line for what might otherwise be described as an outdoor education course. The skills learned include fire-making, stalking, shelter-building, camouflage, edible plants, and nature awareness skills such as bird language. I think that some kind of paintball is in there too. [[Wildwise Hunger Games Camp](#)] As a teen I am sure I would have loved the experience.

A strong and popular storyline clearly clearly helps to attract and engage participants. In the case of the Hunger Games it is a storyline that shapes the whole programme. It is perhaps more common to find that storylines apply to activities within a programme rather than to the whole programme. This is the case with "Dramaturgy" in which single activities can be based on a film (e.g. The Poseidon Adventure, The Day of the Triffids). [You can find more on this in [my review of 'Outdoor and Experiential Learning'](#)]

Strong story lines can be inspirational for programme designers as well as for participants. They can lead to programmes that have shape and flow and that have strong connections from one activity to the next. But designers do need to have clear strategies to counteract storylines that include risky "baggage" such as violence, victims, mass killing (or any killing) or even competitions that create losers - especially if everyone involved is expected to develop confidence and well-being... The trouble is I cannot think of a popular film (or any film) in which everyone is a winner. [Maybe the **Marigold Hotel** but I don't think it has a teen following.]

So there needs to be another level of story-making going on if everyone is to be a winner. It involves putting time aside when the "actors" are off-stage and out of role and who use their real names when talking to each other. In the world of acting there is a clear and well practised dividing line between the real person and the role they perform. In story-themed outdoor education these differences between role and real are often blurred - sometimes in highly beneficial ways if the

roles are positive ones. But if people are playing villains or victims or powerless bystanders they may need special encouragement to reflect on that experience. By doing so they can retrieve something positive and personally relevant that will contribute to their own developing story.

Roger Greenaway

What's under the bushel?

You are probably an expert at finding lights under bushels and encouraging people not to hide them quite so much: "**Don't hide your light under a bushel!**" you say because you want people to use and develop these strengths to benefit themselves and others.

While we selflessly search for other people's lights hiding under bushels, are we setting a good example ourselves?

Without more ado I would like to draw your attention to the latest works of your editors.

Bill has recently researched and written a book on the history of **Lindley Educational Trust** - which you may well know as the organisation behind the **Festival of Outdoor Learning** which has just celebrated its 10th year. The book is called **Squaring the Circle** and if you are not yet ready to get your copy from <http://lindleyeducationaltrust.org> you may like to read [my one page review of Squaring the Circle](#).

One of the workshops I offered at the **Festival of Outdoor Learning** was entitled '[Reviewing with Teenagers](#)' - and if this is something you do, you may like to [view my 12 page article](#) about some of the strategies that I have found work well with this unpredictable age group.

My first book for several years has now been published. It goes by the fairly predictable title '[Active Reviewing](#)'. Click on the title for a description, reviews and buying options.

Roger Greenaway

All work and no play makes children suffer east and west

Three years ago I wrote here: "*Did you know that children who walk or cycle to school learn more than those who arrive by car?*" This was demonstrated in a Danish study that showed how walking to school **supports academic achievement**.

More recently I wrote here about the Daily Mile study in Stirling primary schools which has since been extended to schools in London, Gateshead and Wales. The Daily Mile has been shown to improve their health, fitness and **concentration in class**. ([Daily Mail 20/4/2016](#))

Now the **Millennium Cohort Study** of more than 6,400 English children born in 2000-01, funded by

the Nuffield Foundation, is thought to be **the first to reveal the association between primary school children's out of school activities and educational achievement.**

Readers of Exp-CPD will not be surprised to learn that the association is positive and significant:

"Children taking part in organised sports and physical activities at the ages of 5, 7 and 11 were almost one and a half times more likely to reach a higher than expected level in their Key Stage 2 (KS2) maths test at age 11."

Even less surprising (at least for Exp-CPD readers) is the finding that: "children who participated in organised sports and physical activities at any time during primary school had better social, emotional and behavioural skills than those who did not take part".

Compare these findings to the recent headline news in the South China Morning Post (4/4/16) that **SLEEPLESS CHILDREN 'WILL LACK CREATIVITY'**. This front page news described a survey in Hong Kong showing that one-third of primary school children (in P5 and P6) were getting only 6 or 7 hours sleep a night. The survey also found that 37.5 % of the children surveyed had to do an average of 7 to 8 pieces of homework a day!

More alarmingly 3% of P5s and P6s in this survey finish their homework after 4am, with 14% finishing between midnight and 3am and 83% finishing their homework before midnight. One cause of these late nights is parents who send their youngsters to extra tuition sessions until around 10pm.

Everyone wants their children to do well and in many USA states this has led to the end of recess (playtime) so that young students can spend more time studying. But such moves are **the exact opposite** of what the research recommends. A host of research reports from the USA support the importance of recess, playtime and physical activity as part of the school day. And it is thought that children aged between 5-12 need 10-11 hours sleep a day.

Research demonstrates time and again that "**All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy**" or, to be more specific, makes Jack less happy, more sleepy, less creative, with reduced memory consolidation, damaged growth hormones, reduced social, emotional and behavioural skills as well as (shown for the first time in this Millennium Cohort Study) ... **reduced educational achievement.**

So if you are a Chinese, American or British parent (or educational administrator) who causes children to be deprived of free play, organised play or sleep then ... chill out, take a power nap and then take a fresh look at the research evidence about the damage you are doing. Then look at and listen to your children a little more carefully.

Before training as a teacher I had a pre-course assignment to visit some primary schools in North Norfolk. At Stalham primary, the staffroom was empty during playtimes: it was playtime for teachers (including the head teacher) as well as pupils. All were outside playing games together.

The information and sign-up page for Experiential-CPD is at: http://reviewing.co.uk/_ezines.htm

And there is now plenty of research to underline the value of such play-promoting practices, including these UK studies:

[Out of school activities improve children's educational attainment, study reveals](#) (20 April 2016)
[Full report](#)

[The value of after school clubs for disadvantaged children](#) (also funded by the Nuffield Foundation)

[After school clubs – can they help raise attainment?](#) (2015)

and these studies from the USA about playtime/recess:

[School recess offers benefits to student well-being](#) (2015).

[The Crucial Role of Recess in School](#) (2013)

[A Research-Based Case for Recess](#) (2013)

And make it safe for children to walk or bike to school and they could benefit even more!

Any thoughts about why such research gets brushed aside and whether we need more research or something else to re-educate parents and decision-makers about what helps and hinders educational attainment?

Even the news that a 12 year old Chinese girl committed suicide because she could not finish her homework on time seems unlikely to dent the resolve of those who blindly believe in the mantra of "work hard, work hard" no matter how young the "worker" who is meant to benefit.

Roger Greenaway

Where to Invade Next

Just after sending off last month's thought ("All work and no play makes children suffer east and west") I came across the perfect film clip to add to the references supporting the educational benefits of playtime / recess.

[This film clip](#) is from Michael Moore's documentary "Where to Invade Next". The clip shows his visit to Finland to find out the secrets of the success of their educational system. And, yes, there is lots of playtime, not much homework and no shortage of high achieving students.

[This link](#) takes you to the London Play Facebook page, where London Play writes:

"Here's a puzzle. Finnish children spend comparatively little time at school, don't get homework and yet receive one of the best educations in the world. Curious? Watch how the Finns did it in this clip from Michael Moore's compelling documentary film 'Where To Invade Next?'"

Roger Greenaway

Why Walking Works

Walking for health

Walking is good for you. There are zillions of scientific studies to prove this. And unless you share the ex-Minister of Education's distrust of experts, you might like to see these summaries of the science - especially if you are trying to encourage others to take more exercise.

- [11 ways walking changes our bodies \(for the better\)](#)
- [Walking: Your steps to health](#)
- [The exercise effect](#)

Walking for learning

One approach to experience-based training is to go outside for "activities" and then back inside for "learning". I have never understood this simple distinction between "activity" and "learning". It seems to be associated with a lingering feeling that learning happens in classrooms and that it is not real learning unless it gets written down somewhere. Of course, writing is a useful learning aid - but so is walking, so is fresh air, so is nature, so is novelty, so is challenge, so is sharing thoughts with others - and all of these things can come together quite naturally while walking.

But learning while walking can be at a snail's pace, so I have been experimenting (over the years) with ways of accelerating the pace of learning on the move. Admittedly this does generally involve reducing the physical element a bit, but rarely to the extent that you have to stop and sit down in order to learn.

I hope one day to be writing a well-researched scientific paper on the subject. Meanwhile I am offering 'walking workshops' (and active indoor ones too) to allow people to discover the various ways in which movement can support and enhance learning.

Just look at the teaching or training objectives you are trying to achieve. If there is an active element in any of these, then you might like to take a look at my growing list of articles which are now indexed at: <http://reviewing.co.uk/articles/>

These articles can be delivered to your inbox if you are also signed up for [Active Reviewing Tips](#). The next issue will be appearing soon.

Roger Greenaway

How much mindfulness?

My holiday reading was a quick read with plenty of pictures. It was the **Ladybird Book of Mindfulness** where mindfulness is defined as: "the skill of thinking you are doing something when you are doing nothing".

You soon learn that people who practise mindfulness first find somewhere quiet to sit down. "Alan is sitting down in the Falkland Islands" reads the caption beside the Ladybird style illustration of Alan sitting down.

Yes - it is one of the more recent tongue-in-cheek Ladybird books "for grown-ups". I enjoyed this send-up of mindfulness even though I wrote a thought last year about the [value of mindfulness](#).

Some people really do benefit from taking a break and emptying or re-focusing their minds, becoming more observant and more self-aware. While other people may be so introspective and withdrawn, they would benefit more by being tempted out of their shell, socialising more and taking a few risks.

Adventure education tends to focus on the value of getting out more, being more active, working together and overcoming personal or team challenge. This seems to be a world away from mindfulness.

I have long been a fan of both adventure and reflection. And I believe a key aspect of teaching / leading / facilitating (in almost any context) is finding the right balance between the two.

Pure adventure or pure reflection have limited value unless they are combined together in some way - in a way that is suited to the group or individual you are working with.

I have written about these issues in more depth and detail in my article about "[Reviewing for Wellbeing](#)".

For the sake of balance (and humour) I hope one day to see a new addition to the Ladybird series for grown-ups: "The Ladybird Book of Adventure". I wonder what Alan will be doing?

Roger Greenaway

Richer for the Experience – part 1

In a world that increasingly seeks evidence-based practice, we are naturally keen to show the world that there is plenty of evidence supporting our practices. And to ensure that the evidence is sound let's bring in a researcher who has proper academic supervision. Then we will have lots of sound evidence about the value of what we do, and there will be lots of people queueing at the door to come on our courses!

(Ideally a queue to go out the door.)

The logic so far seems quite sound ... and then the problems begin. Evaluation research in our field is far from straightforward and methodological problems abound.

What if we are asking the wrong kind of question?

If adventure is your business (and your passion) then maybe what really counts is the quality of the adventure?

If you offer new experiences of any kind, maybe it is the quality of those experiences that count?

If we are asked about "evidence-based practice" why assume we need evidence of outcomes. Maybe evidence of processes and experiences is more important?

For example: "Do you have evidence that the needs, expectations and dreams of these people were met or exceeded during your programme?"

I believe that if we pay attention to quality experiences 90% of our work is done. Really high quality experiences do not switch themselves off. They can linger for months, years and lifetimes. (Yes, there is evidence.)

Everyone deserves high quality developmental experiences. And we (experiential types) are well placed to make these happen.

My own [PhD research](#) was about the nature and quality of experiences that had most affected participants' learning and development.

I found evidence about the kinds of experiences that had most impact. I believe that the more we know about the quality of experiences that make a difference, the more the difference we can make.

It is interesting to ask what it is that people *take away* with them. Those who value their experiences the most will readily talk about the experiences they take with them. They are richer for the experience.

Richer for the Experience - part 2

Last month I was thinking aloud about the value of paying attention to what participants experience. I am sure we all have our favourite lists and you are very welcome to write in with your list. Below is one from Harold Drasdo.

Harold Drasdo (climber and outdoor educator) was concerned that efforts to ensure wider margins of safety with improved safety equipment can "*rob the experience of its value*".

Drasdo wrote: "*In mountain walking, novices are told:*

1. '*Always carry waterproof clothing*' - no more getting wet on the mountain;
2. '*Carry spare sweater, gloves and so on*' - no more cold on the mountain;
3. '*Take a good torch*' - no more night;
4. '*Take watch, match and compass*' - no more doubt;

5. *'Plenty of spare food' - no more appetite;*
6. *'Never go in groups of less than three' - no more solitude;*
7. *'Leave details of your pre-planned route' - no more spontaneity;*
8. *'Study the weather forecast carefully' - no more scope for judgement*
9. *Why, it has even been suggested that groups on expedition should carry alarm flares and short-wave radios: no more separation. [Ed. no mobile phones in 1972]*

Of course, we do not want people, much less young people, to be cold, hungry, uncertain, alone and so on, all at once. But to get one's feet wet is not instantaneously fatal. If this dogma is taken too seriously, the whole experience diminishes ..."

The words in italics are those of: Drasdo, H. (1972, 1973 2nd enlarged edition, page 54) *Education and the Mountain Centres*, Tyddyn Gabriel.

Harold Drasdo died a year ago at 85. This obituary appeared at the time in [The Guardian](#) and this highly appreciative review of Drasdo's "The Ordinary Route" appears on the [Footless Crow](#) blog.

Drasdo did not present this as a complete list - I see it as more of a window on the kinds of experiences that he valued in outdoor education. What should we add to make it more complete and/or to bring it up to date? Maybe the whole nature of valued experiences in outdoor education has changed or should be changing?

Roger Greenaway

Richer for the Experience - part 3

Last month I quoted Harold Drasdo's list of ways in which ever wider margins of safety can "*rob the experience of its value*". I then asked about how we could add to Drado's list to make it more complete or more up to date.

Drasdo's valuing of discomfort (feeling wet, cold, hungry, alone etc.) fits with ideas about how leaving your "comfort zone" can be an important step towards personal development. Even [Childline](#) advocates "stepping out of your comfort zone" (such as by styling your hair differently, reading aloud in class or joining a team).

Choice matters here. Few people actually choose to get cold, wet and hungry. Getting cold, wet and hungry are more usually the unintended consequences of other choices - such as choosing to travel light, or choosing to see the sunrise from the top of a mountain. And learning from the consequences of making choices is a significant feature of much outdoor education.

When people choose to step outside their "comfort zone" we must hope (or even ensure) that they are generally rewarded with good consequences, or at least that the good consequences

outweigh the bad ones. And this is especially important if self-esteem or confidence are worryingly low in the first place.

So I think that my list of valuable experiences must include some rewarding consequences and experiences, as well as some mini-stories of trial-and-success. (Experiences *without* stories have less value now and in the future.)

Also in my list would be a number of satisfying group and interpersonal experiences. These seem to be the bread-and-butter experiences of much outdoor education anyway. Even the most apparently individual activities are greatly enhanced by the presence, support and appreciation of others - whether it is appreciation for trying or for succeeding.

The most significant experience of many group adventures is the experience of mutual support, working together, or simply belonging. If the kinds of adventure likely to happen are varied so that everyone gives or receives support at some time, then all can experience this 'lift' from others in the group.

Adventurous outdoor activities tend to get linked with more adventurous aims such as: becoming more confident and positive, becoming more assertive, overcoming difficulties, and breaking new ground, but the 'other side' of adventure, though often less visible, can have just as much impact, and just as much relevance.

This 'other side' of adventure provides scope for aims such as: developing greater awareness of self and others, making relationships, learning to cooperate, learning to express feelings, and the development of many attitudes and skills other than 'adventurous-looking' ones.

I'd like to finish this 'thought' by referring to a list of experiences I made earlier in [Reviewing for Wellbeing](#). The list is far from complete, but I believe it is a sound starting point. Adventures (and any associated discomfort) will be more worthwhile if built on such strategies for enhancing wellbeing.

What is in your list?

Roger Greenaway

Take a break (and make it a habit)

I don't imagine that many readers of *Experiential-CPD* sit around for too long at a time. But I do admit to going over the recommended limit myself from time to time. Both time management gurus and health experts advise that we **get up and move around after 30 minutes of sitting**.

So just imagine that you are young again and sitting quietly at your primary school desk for hours on end without a break. The chances of this happening are much higher if you live in the USA and even more so if you are black and/or live below the poverty line. "[Why Kids need recess. And why it's endangered](#)" is a short article that includes old and new research about the value of taking a break.

What kind of break? Just 15 minutes makes a significant change especially if it "*allows children to design their own games, to test their abilities, to role-play, and to mediate their own conflicts—activities that are key to developing social skills and navigating complicated situations.*"

Much of this research is related to improved attention and learning in the lesson that follows. A break you took a week ago won't do much to help you through a long period of sitting today. The research reported is mostly about short-term effects (even if it does add up over time).

These beneficial break-time activities (*in italics above*) also happen to be at the core of good youth work. So it was reassuring to learn recently of research from Glasgow and Edinburgh Universities that demonstrates **the long-term benefits of Scouts and Guides for mental health**:

"Joining the Scouts or Guides in childhood appears to help lower the risk of mental illness in later life, a study suggests... Children who participate in the organisations – which aim to develop qualities such as self-reliance, resolve and a desire for self-learning – are likely to go on to have better mental health in middle age, the findings show."

[National Child Development Study](#)

And the benefits of one-off residentials (and advice on how to achieve those benefits) are well demonstrated in the [Learning Away](#) research project.

So whether "taking a break" means standing up and walking around, or playing with peers, or getting outdoors - **make it a daily habit AND a weekly habit AND an annual habit - for all ages**. The research is there. We just need the personal will - and the political will - to make it happen.

Excuse me while I stand up and take a walk ...

Roger Greenaway

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