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A View into the Future: The Value of Other Ways of Learning and Development

Futurologist Alvin Toffler wrote in his foreword to *Rethinking the Future* that “the illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn” (TOFFLER, 1997). So how can we best prepare young people for a future that will require more learning and change than ever before? It is clear that to prepare for life as a lifelong learner students need more than study skills: they also need to be able to learn from their experiences (pleasant and unpleasant) while growing and developing along the way. Mainstream education has been slow to adapt to this growing need to prepare students for a life of learning and change. This question about how to prepare young people for an uncertain future is not a new question. It was being asked over a century ago:

“With the advent of democracy and modern industrial conditions, it is impossible to foretell definitely just what civilization will be twenty years from now. Hence it is impossible to prepare the child for any precise set of conditions.” (DEWEY, 1897)

From outside the mainstream looking in, change seems slow. But from the mainstream looking out, the alternatives lack credibility. For example, if the mainstream looks towards “experiential learning” for solutions, just one simple question (“What is experiential learning?”) reveals its Achilles’ heel. The embarrassing answer for its advocates is that experiential learning is a contested idea that gets pulled and stretched in so many directions that it has no clear basis for claiming any distinctiveness from other forms of learning. Ironically, one of the most quoted authorities on experiential learning came to the conclusion that *all* learning is experiential: “Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (KOLB 1984, 38). And a leading association of experiential educators cautiously offers its provisional definition of “experiential education” as part of an “ongoing conversation” (AEE, 2007). How can experiential learning be taken seriously if its exponents have difficulty defining it, describing it or demonstrating its distinctive value?

Outdoor adventure education does not escape from issues relating to the broader field of experiential education to which it clearly belongs. This chapter traces some of the key issues for the future development of experiential learning, particularly in the field of outdoor adventure education. Although it is international in scope, it is limited to English language sources. It

does not set out to be a representative survey: it simply follows the scents and trails picked up along the way. After exploring the theme of “other ways of learning and development”, this chapter investigates the various passions that inspire outdoor adventure educators and how these influence the experiences of participants. This is followed by an account of the confusion about what experiential learning is and how it works, and how this confusion can drain energy and purpose away from the passion that drives it. This leads to the creation of a rough spectrum of different traditions in our field and a hopeful view of the future for outdoor adventure education. This future view places high quality growth enhancing experiences at the heart of our work and encourages educators to keep the doorway to other ways always open.

Other ways of learning and development

When “other” involves leaving the classroom and going outdoors it *disrupts* routines, it *breaks* patterns, it *distorts* time, it *changes* roles, and it *creates* expectations: going outdoors can *disrupt, break, distort, change* and *create*.

I was recently at an experiential learning conference where all the workshops had been indoors. My workshop was on the last day of the conference. It was a beautiful summer’s day. We went outside and played in the children’s playground. This playing was part of a workshop about experiential learning theory: it involved working out how playground equipment could be used to represent core ideas about experiential learning. The swing, the slide, the bridge, the net and the monkey rings all became dynamic learning models. Going outdoors helped to *disrupt, break, distort, change* and *create* ideas about learning theory.

Going outdoors is first and foremost a change of environment and a change from the normal ways of doing, thinking, feeling and behaving when learning. Simply crossing the threshold and leaving the normal educational environment behind is a significant step into *other ways of learning and development*.

Having crossed the threshold, do we celebrate this ‘otherness’ and develop new (and better) ways of learning and teaching, or do we try to recreate (in the outdoors) familiar, traditional, mainstream, conventional ways of learning and teaching? The outdoors is certainly conducive to thinking new thoughts and exploring new possibilities. The outdoors is not just a breath of fresh air: it is a change of perspective. It can feel like the flick of the switch when moving from seminar room to playground. Longer journeys can create unimaginable changes of perspective, as this unemployed 18 year old discovered “a million light years away” in the Saharan desert:

“As the sun rose, we found ourselves standing motionless, as the breathtakingly beautiful landscape became a luminous pink under the early rays of the sun. As the sun rose higher, exposing the full extent of the bare uninviting terrain, everyone looked on in wonder, finding it hard to take in the vastness of the dry, hostile countryside that stretched to the horizon in every direction. We were a million light years away from the industrial North of England which is our home, and one and all experienced a solitude that never again would be experienced. The silence and eeriness of that bleak and foreboding land would remain in our memories for ever.” (Eric, Sahara, 1985 in: KENNEDY 1992, 48)

What lesson plan could contain such an experience? What reflection could capture its true meaning and significance? What action plan would dare convert that cherished memory into actionable steps? What research measures could judge the value of that sunrise in the Sahara?

Some outdoor experiences do not fit with conventional teaching models, and *nor do they fit very well with conventional models of experiential learning*. Perhaps some experiences (such as Eric’s above) are best left intact and untouched. Any attempt to add value by ‘processing’ the experience could spoil that treasured moment. There were plenty of other events on this expedition that did involve learning from experience (such as truck maintenance and teamwork) *but this desert sunrise was the kind of experience that didn’t need learning from*. Eric believed that the desert sunrise would remain in their memories forever: it was a powerful experience even though it had no clear significance and no clear consequences. A zealous accountant might wonder why these young expeditioners were not doing something of more measurable value at the time, but I think the rest of the world would appreciate that such experiences have value. Somehow we ‘know’ that the most valuable experiences can be the most difficult to express or explain.

However, outdoor education is a source of a huge variety of valuable experiences and is not simply a search for a special category of awe-inspiring experiences that are difficult to express or explain. Some experiences produce more identifiable learning than others, but the fact that some experiences are best left untouched is not an argument for leaving *all* experiences alone; likewise, the fact that the reviewing of experiences can bring out valuable learning is not an argument for reviewing *all* experiences. There is no rule that states “*You shall have only one model to guide your practice!*”. We should be alive to the diversity of valuable experiences that can happen outdoors, and we should be smart enough to respond in appropriate ways to each different kind of experience.

I believe that the passion that outdoor educators have for their work is undervalued. Recognising such passion also recognises what is missing from the dry models and theories through which outdoor educators explain what they do. A notable exception is Colin Mortlock’s model of adventure education in which he uses the word “love” three times: love of self, love of others, and love of the environment (MORTLOCK 1984, 19). The passion of outdoor educators takes many forms. Understanding what inspires outdoor educators

might reveal more about outdoor education than any model can do. Let us look more closely at these passions.

A passion for the outdoors

Our classroom and our dreams are huge. The outdoors is a big place and we have big ideas about how being, living, doing, growing and learning in the outdoors can be good for us and good for the planet. Our wish list is enormous. We want to open hearts, minds and bodies to unlimited horizons. We want outdoor learning to be available and accessible to all, so that everyone can fulfil their potential. We believe in healthy bodies, healthy minds and happy spirits (while reducing truancy, obesity and suicide rates if we can). And this is just a start: our list is much, much longer. In the outdoors we can raise self-esteem (if it is too low), develop a positive outlook on life (for all ages), develop trust, deepen relationships, improve social skills, develop altruism and co-operation (and competition too). We can also foster an entrepreneurial spirit, teach problem-solving skills, reduce bullying and offending behaviour, develop groups and teams, and develop leaders (and followers), organisations and communities. All outdoors. And it is increasingly urgent for us to go beyond raising awareness of nature: we want people to *connect* with nature, follow sustainable life styles and adopt sustainable policies wherever they live, learn or work. In short, we want to save the planet. And the medium we use for learning (the outdoors) is so powerful and flexible that we'll find a way of achieving whatever you want.

Passion inspires and energises, especially when purpose, values, activities and methods are all in alignment with a coherent philosophy of outdoor education. But clients and participants may not want the full menu - they may want less walking and more indoor activities, they may want less time for sustainability and more time for fun (or vice versa), less emphasis on personal development and more on curriculum links (or vice versa). They will almost certainly expect more in less time ("and extra goes on the zip wire, please"). To keep our passion alive, we should each have a coherent philosophy of outdoor education that clarifies (to ourselves and to others) what it is we are passionate about, and we should feel free to adopt a facilitation style that allows us to show our passion through our work. Passion is one of our strongest assets: it should not be restrained in a straitjacket of structured learning models. It is difficult to nourish whole person development if the teacher follows a model that restricts their own style - making them a professionalised half person. When young people take part in outdoor education they should meet an educator who is clearly 'in their element' and passionate about what they do while paying close attention to the quality of each young person's experi-

ences. Being passionate while remaining objective and attentive and leaving space for each young person is a demanding combination and a fine balance.

A passion for adventure

Every adventure educator surely has a passion for adventure. But what happens to that passion when adventure is transformed into adventure *education*? Sometimes adventure becomes a process of setting challenging goals and achieving them. (Is that adventure or is it the *work ethic* injected into an adventurous setting?). Sometimes adventure is about leaving a “personal comfort zone” and spending time in the “stretch zone” while seeking “flow” or “mastery” (Is that having an adventure or is it becoming an *expert* in an adventurous activity?) Achieving goals and achieving mastery are very useful kinds of adventures to have, but where is the passion for adventure in these *useful adventures*? Where is adventure itself? Where is the fun of adventure? Where is the spontaneity of adventure? Where is the delight of a *shared* adventure? Where is the uncertainty and surprise of adventures that just happen, without design or contrivance? All of the above kinds of adventure (and more) have a part to play in adventure education. But if adventure education becomes exclusively focused on stories of individual success, our cultural heritage of outdoor adventure (in our organisation, region or country) would be reduced to the mainstream game of jumping over hurdles. The alternative is a fuller sense of adventure that opens new windows on the world and broadens horizons.

With some adventure activities the idea is to have each person exceeding their own expectations. Some succeed and say “Never again!” (an unfortunate message to take away) while others leave with a more empowering message such as “If I can do this I can do anything!” This is a very controlled (and valuable) use of adventure activities aimed at changing “I can’t” into “I can”. It is just one of many kinds of adventure that a young person might experience. If taking part in a residential programme, being away from home may be a bigger adventure than jumping off a pole, but the main learning from the experience of being away from home may not be the “I can do it” message. It might be about valuing the friendship and support of others. Such seemingly unadventurous benefits are an integral part of many adventures. I have referred to these as “the other side of adventure”:

Adventurous activity may at first appear to be valuable mainly for the “adventurous spirit” which the experience can arouse. Adventurous 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 less visible,

can have just as much impact, and just as much relevance - especially when the experience is suitably reviewed. This "other side" of adventure provides scope for aims such as: developing greater awareness of self and others, making relationships, learning to co-operate, learning to express feelings, and the development of many attitudes and skills other than "adventurous-looking" ones. (GREENAWAY 1990, 60)

A passion for adventure narrowly interpreted would not include this "other side" of adventure. But the word "adventure" can also be an all-encompassing term that refers to the whole experience and therefore pays attention to the whole person. A shared adventure is far more than the achieving of a goal. And sometimes goals are little more than a good excuse for having a real adventure.

Adventure can create an appetite for more adventure. And the bigger the adventure the bigger the appetite it can create. An awakened appetite for adventure could reveal itself in many different ways (some more worthwhile than others) perhaps as an appetite for fairground rides, independent travel, computer games, adventure sports, gambling, entrepreneurship, or finding the courage to stand up for oneself or for others. Interestingly, there is a counter argument that having an adventure "outlet" helps people suppress their desire for adventure at other times. This apparent ability of adventure to pacify is frequently expressed as one of the rationales for using outdoor adventure with young offenders. Adventure, it seems, can stimulate or satiate the desire for further adventure. Who decides? And how?

These difficult questions about how much the appetite of one kind of adventure increases or decreases the appetite for other kinds of adventures can perhaps be resolved if we see adventure as part of a particularly dynamic learning process. Adventure educators may well have a passion for *adventure*, but when at work perhaps their passion is for a particularly dynamic form of *learning*...

A passion for learning

A breakthrough in learning can be achieved by "unlocking" the learning process. The *Learning Combination Lock* (BEARD/WILSON 2006, 4) is a model of experiential learning that illustrates countless potential combinations of ways to unlock learning. We usually think of a combination lock as having just one secret sequence that will work, but in the "Learning Combination Lock" *any* sequence will work (even though some sequences may work better than others). Beard and Wilson encourage us to experiment with many different combinations: it is about unlocking our practice and unlocking learning.

But is it possible to get passionate about *learning* without qualifying it in

some way? Does it not matter *what* is being learned and *how* it is being learned? What values underlie statements that glorify learning such as Alvin Toffler's prediction about the importance of learning, unlearning, and relearning? Unlearning means letting go of old ways (and even old values) and not hanging onto the past. Learning is about growing and developing, keeping up with the times and riding the wave of change. A passion for learning could be a passion for a brighter and better future. Let's put this to the test: picture an outdoor educator working in a forest school or training people in wilderness survival skills. Someone who has chosen to live and work close to nature can play a valuable part in a young person's education, but is this same person likely to have much to offer young people preparing for a fast-paced future? What does spending slow quality time in the outdoors have to do with preparing young people for a future of rapid change? Is this a mismatch or a perfect match?

Beard and Wilson's *Learning Combination Lock* can be used to help answer these questions. The ways we can use the outdoors for learning provide many more learning combinations than are found in the typical classroom. A creative indoor teacher could always provide more learning combinations than an unimaginative outdoor educator, but a well designed and well facilitated outdoor education programme can be full of opportunities for unlocking learning. An outdoor educator with a passion for learning will find ways of unlocking learning for each student - whether it is bringing a subject alive, arousing curiosity, or awakening the learning process in students who do not thrive in school. At the other end of the educational spectrum, there are outdoor programmes (in the UK) which are specially designed to develop the interpersonal skills of PhD students and improve their employment prospects. These other ways of learning in the outdoors can benefit students throughout the whole spectrum of ability and privilege.

A passion for education

The idealism that infuses outdoor education is both a strength and a weakness. Our great expectations of what outdoor education can achieve, and of how much individuals can learn, grow and develop in the outdoors are the kinds of positive beliefs that help to make outdoor education work. On the other hand, we can claim so much that we are vulnerable to criticism that the benefits of outdoor education are overstated. The incredibly broad agenda of outdoor educators is shared by many others. This gives outdoor education a high score for relevance, but a low score for uniqueness. For example: learning by doing, active learning, interactive learning, participatory learning, project-based learning and group problem-solving are found throughout many

forms of education. A whole range of teaching styles can be found both indoors and outdoors. Some outdoor education literature implies that classroom teachers are stuck in a time warp in the 1950s, while outdoor educators are 21st century facilitators of experiential learning. How many counter examples would I need to find of excellent 21st century classroom teaching and 1950s style outdoor instructing to balance the argument? It would be more fruitful to explore commonalities in 21st century practices and not discredit others by exaggerating differences - especially if we have a shared passion for education.

A passion for experiences that enhance growth

Dewey believed that “Everything depends on the quality of experience which is had ... every experience lives on in further experiences.” (DEWEY, 1938) He recognised that not all experiences are “equally educative”, and that some experiences enhance future growth while others can have the opposite effect. So how do we recognise a growth-enhancing experience? This question can be the start of a whole new journey into theories about what makes a whole person - such as multiple intelligence theory, learning styles theories and development theories. Each development theorist seems to have their own idealised vision of what it is to be whole. Their theories highlight needs that (when met) are said to foster development. These include the needs for belonging, acceptance, care, love, praise, responsibility, creativity, achievement, new experiences, connection, significance, certainty, uncertainty, growth, contribution, power, fun and freedom (MASLOW 1954; KELLMER-PRINGLE 1965; ROGERS 1969; KOLB 1984; GLASSER 1990; ROBBINS 2001). No such list is ever complete. An alternative way of presenting growth and development is in the form of a multidirectional model, such as this:

“Personal growth can be viewed as making new connections in any of several directions: upward, to achieve one's full potential; outward, to make contact and encounter others; inward, to increase our awareness of who we are, and what we want, need, sense, feel, think, and do; and downward, to touch earth, to be grounded, and to connect with the universe. It involves: increasing the range of perceptions, thoughts and feelings we experience, developing new ways to express them, and making choices and decisions about the direction in which we wish to move. “(GIGES/ROSENFELD 1976, 87)

Giges and Rosenfeld's description of growth as connection-making in four directions (upward, outward, inward and downward) can be usefully applied to the fostering of growth through adventure. From an adventure education perspective we tend to emphasise how “big” adventurous experiences can enhance growth. But the following story illustrates how a heightened sense of awareness of simple everyday experiences can help a person escape from their conditioning - and grow.

“Tonight, I had no idea what to expect. Then, my friend Aaron taught me a lesson [...] he gave me a German malt drink, with a most unusual taste. It was my first time ever to have such a drink. I spent the first couple of sips trying to describe it in terms of known tastes, such as a mixture of Coca-Cola and beer. Then, I saw my stupidity. I was trying to fit this experience into what I knew, and I was locked in the prison of my conditioning. Straight away, I knew exactly what this tasted like. It tasted like a German malt drink, in all its uniqueness. Every experience, every moment, is unique. What if we could keep the freshness of the intelligent, untouched mind, and see it that way? There is no learning when we stuff new experiences into old memories. There is no flow when our past determines what we can see in the present. Open. It's about opening and letting go, moment to moment, being born and dying, moment to moment, endlessly.” (OOM 2007)

Being able to see new experiences with fresh eyes must surely be an essential feature of any experiential learning process. These insights suggest that always being open to new experiences could do more for continuing growth than relying too much on recalling lessons arising from past experiences. Perhaps growth involves sensing the uniqueness of an experience while also seeing connections with other experiences? Another fine balance.

A confusion of language

There is a confusion of language, theory and practice in experiential learning and outdoor adventure education. The confusion begins with language and terminology. In an article entitled “Diversity in Language”, Ivana Turcová, the compiler of an English-Czech outdoor dictionary, explains some of the background:

“With regard to the outdoors, many publications are written in English and much of the basic terminology has been primarily developed in English. To understand the range of apparently similar terms is becoming more difficult, not only for non-English speakers who face the problems with translation of terms, but also for native speakers.” (TURCOVÁ et al. 2005, 110)

The variety of opinions of the British academics who were consulted in Turcová's study demonstrates a range of different views about how key terms relate to each other. Turcová's work is helping to clarify meanings but her purpose is to *bring out* differences rather than to smooth them over:

“National characteristics and norms influence subtle differences among terms and individual perception and interpretation of terms. These differences highlight regional differences in practice, as well as different theoretical standpoints, which is helpful for communication with colleagues from other countries and for international co-operation in the European Union.” (ibid. 115)

Some terms, such as the Czech “turistika”, the Norwegian “friluftsliv” and the German “Erlebnispädagogik”, are not readily translated into English because

their meanings are so bound up with the history and culture from where they originate. Exploring the differences within and between British and North American terminology is both more straightforward and more complex: despite sharing the same language some terms (such as “programming”) have different meanings on each side of the Atlantic and need translating. Interestingly, many of these transatlantic differences follow *a clear and consistent pattern* that is having a profound influence over how people think, write and talk about outdoor and experiential education when communicating in the English language. The pattern involves a shift from learner-centred language to teacher-centred language.

A typical example of this pattern can be seen in how the word “experience” changes its meaning. In American usage, “experience” often refers to the activity, whereas the British tend to reserve “experience” for the subjective and individually different experience of the activity (which is the usage generally followed in this chapter). The American usage dates back at least to the 1970s when Pfeiffer and Jones used the term “Structured Learning Experiences” to refer to the training exercises which they published in their annual handbooks for facilitators. It appears that when designers of exercises are confident that a particular activity will generate a particular experience and a particular outcome, then activity, experience and outcome are readily conflated into one composite term such as “Structured Learning Experience”. This 3 word term is a bit of a mouthful, so the first two words get dropped and these training exercises become known as “experiences”. In this way “experience” could refer to any or all of the following: the published briefing notes, the activity, the experiences or the outcomes. In this broad usage, “experience” becomes part of an almost didactic delivery system that has little room for the individual variations that stray outside the prescribed pathways of the designed experience.

This stretching of the meaning of “experience” is paralleled by a shift of language that takes experiential learning theory back into the didactic paradigm - an ironic shift back into the very ideology that most experiential learning theorists were challenging in the first place. In experiential learning theory, rather than the teacher being the primary source of knowledge, the student’s own experiences become the primary source of knowledge. The student is no longer a passive student receiving wisdom, but is now an active learner constructing meaning from their experiences, while the teacher becomes a facilitator of learning. These ideas were grown, raised and developed in North America through the work of Ralph Waldo Emerson, William James, John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, George Kelly, Carl Rogers, David Kolb, Donald Schön, Howard Gardner, Elliot Eisner and many others. Theorists from other countries have made important contributions to experiential learning theory (such as Paulo Freire, David Boud and John Heron) but the main point here is that the development of experiential learning theory has been

primarily a USA phenomenon - and male dominated. So it is ironic to find that outdoor adventure education textbooks published in North America appear to be taking experiential learning theory back into the didactic paradigm. Recent terminology in North American adventure education literature presents *learning from experience* as if it is a highly organised industrial process. Instead of the didactic pouring of knowledge into the passive student, the educator is now busy *programming* the experience, *delivering* the experience, *frontloading* the experience, *framing* the experience, *funnelling* the experience and *processing* the experience. Even allowing for some mistranslation from American English to British English, the pattern is clear: this new industrialised lexicon of experiential education (delivering, loading, funnelling etc.) is reversing the direction of change. This reversal from experiential back to didactic is not quite complete because it is still *experience* rather than *knowledge* that is being acted upon. In an attempt to bring some clarity to this confusion, a range of experiential approaches are presented below in a rough spectrum from *designed experience to open-ended adventures*.

A rough spectrum from design to adventure

- ⇓ **Treatment through experience:** characterised by the terms “Isomorphic Framing” and “Paradoxical Symptom Prescriptions” (PRIEST/GASS 1997, 190-221) - approaches which are carefully designed and controlled.
- ⇓ **Teaching through experience:** characterised by the advice from designers to facilitators that the activity should "not generate excess data" (PFEIFFER/JONES 1983) - not the kind of advice that would apply to a day in the hills (nor to any other outdoor adventure).
- ⇓ **Delivering the experience** characterised by an adventure education seminar which involves “delivering the outdoor adventure experience”. (NORTHLAND COLLEGE 2007) - the combination of the term “delivery” and the use of “experience” in the singular pulls this experiential approach back into the didactic paradigm.
- ⇓ **Optimal experience** characterised by the concept of “flow” in which the participant experiences a state of focused concentration and complete absorption in an activity. (CSIKSZENTMIHALYI 1990) - experiential and highly focused.
- ⇓ **Learning from experience** characterised by the definition: “Experiential Education is a process through which a learner constructs knowledge, skill, and value from direct experience.” (AEE 2003) - a definition in which the educator is not mentioned.
- ⇓ **Uncontrived experience:** “We must always try to prevent our pro-

grammes from turning what should be natural, direct and immediate into a contrived experience” (DRASDO 2000) - “programmes” implies there is some design, but Drasdo’s dislike of contrivance puts a clear limitation on just how far design should go.

- ⇓ “**It is their adventure**” characterised by David Charlton’s ideas about adventure education: “It is their adventure and if they tell you about it, it is because they hope that you will understand.” (CHARLTON c.1980) - shows full confidence in the value of adventurous experiences.

The above spectrum is “rough” because it combines several scales in one. The designed end is the medical model (using language such as *diagnosis* and *prescription*) in which the provider views participants principally as patients. The patients may be actively doing things - but the activities are structured and supervised in ways that ensure they do not have too much experience (excessive data complicate the treatment process). Somewhere in the middle of the spectrum is “flow” experience. *Flow* is probably rare in outdoor education (except where there is scope for sustained skill development) because to experience *flow* the person would usually be quite accomplished in a particular activity and in a state in which they are in control, in the zone, and totally absorbed. Beyond *flow*, at the less contrived end of the spectrum, neither the educator nor the learners have a strong influence over the particular nature of the experience: it is adventure!

The *designed* end of the above spectrum happens to be illustrated with examples from North America and the *open* end of the spectrum with European (British) examples. Perhaps there are significant American-British or American-European differences here? But any such generalisation would ignore all the American theorists (listed above) who have done so much to develop experiential learning theory *throughout* this rough spectrum.

Another way of seeing this spectrum is to notice the influence of the world of training at the *designed* end of the spectrum. This also reflects a global trend in which education is becoming more vocationalised and more dominated by the language of objectives and outcomes. Ideals about a broad and balanced curriculum and the more aesthetic subjects are becoming squeezed out of the mainstream and into the margins of “other ways of learning and development”. Thus the training end is clear and focused (what you see is what you get) and the other end is fuzzy and open.

This could also be seen as a spectrum with learning at one end and with development at the other. The learning end could be represented by Kolb’s theory of experiential learning, and the development end could be represent by Kolb’s (less well known) theory of experiential development. Both theories are brought together in a three dimensional integrated model in his seminal work *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* (KOLB 1984). If the most prominent experiential learning the-

orist has successfully integrated the whole spectrum of learning and development, should we not try to emulate such integration in practice? Kolb's use of Escher's art as illustrations in his 1984 work shows his fascination with integrating opposites, with balance and with transformation.

The following words of Johan Hovelynck bring together some key themes from this section. He summarises two of his papers as follows:

"Many practices that are currently referred to as 'experiential education' – especially in outdoor programs – are more accurately understood as active forms of teaching. In such programs, activities have enlivened the curriculum, but the concept of education as a matter of teachers conveying a message has largely remained unchanged. The papers argue that such a 'didactic' mindset interferes with a focus on the experiences of program participants, and hence with experience-based learning." (HOVELYNCK 2001, 2003)

In this chapter I take a similar view, but I also encourage a search for other ways that draw on all parts of the spectrum and that also involve looking beyond the comfort of our own favourite models. That proposal comes next.

What's missing from models?

The rough spectrum outlined above could form part of a more elaborate, more inclusive, more diverse and more complete picture of outdoor adventure education. This would create a map on which we could differentiate between one approach and another. We could each then identify our own preferred territory and our own preferred way of working. Or are there better ways of using such a map? Each approach has its own strengths and weaknesses. Each approach is also stronger if it blends in suitable ideas or practices from other parts of the map. What such a composite map would call into question is whether we have *any* single theory or model that is so universal that it is equally relevant throughout *all* forms of outdoor adventure education. This is a question worth asking because so many models are used as *if* they are universal.

Models are useful because they simplify. They reduce complex and variable processes into a regular and standard pattern. But experiences do not come in regular and standard packages and we learn and grow (through experience) in many different ways. Some experiences might be worth subjecting to deep analysis, whereas other experiences are more for celebrating than for analysing; some potentially valuable experiences will pass us by unless our senses are sufficiently alert to pick them up and tune in, whereas other experiences can be so overwhelming that we need to distance ourselves from the experience to recover and make sense of it; some experiences recur so much that we can learn from looking at patterns over time, whereas other experi-

ences seem so special that we may want to treasure their uniqueness in every way we can; most experiences are kept alive by sharing them, whereas some experiences may seem so fragile that we prefer to keep them to ourselves. If the experiences are adventurous experiences outdoors, the potential variety of experiences is immense. And the more variable the experience, the less likely it is that "one model fits all". In my book *Reviewing Adventures* I asked:

"Is experiential learning theory (such as that of KOLB 1984) really so versatile that it can be usefully applied to any experience - from boiling an egg to climbing a mountain?" (GREENAWAY 1996)

Deeply enriching experiences, immensely rewarding experiences or highly adventurous experiences are not necessarily about performance nor are they necessarily about learning. There are times when *the experience itself* matters far more than any learning or performance improvement that might arise from it. It is likely that such fulsome experiences are simultaneously satisfying several developmental needs - including the need for growth. Attempting to follow such experiences with a rational process of reflection and abstract conceptualisation could be a serious mismatch. Adventure educators need more options than are suggested in Kolb's model. Surely it is not always necessary to feed the experience into a reflective process in order to make it "educational" or worthwhile?

In their book on adventure programming, Simon Priest and Michael Gass have adapted Kolb's model to include emotions ("affect") as part of their "debriefing funnel" (PRIEST/GASS 1997). A series of filters in the funnel, sequentially transform experience into "change" - which is represented by a drip emerging from the bottom of the funnel. Whenever it is important to bring out specific learning points or to produce a commitment to change, such a process provides a useful means of focusing on what really matters. Despite paying more attention to emotion than other models, the visual impact of the funnel and its filters, seems opposite to the philosophy of adventure: the funnel zooms in whereas adventure zooms out. The funnel presents an image of convergent thinking rather than an image of divergent thinking. While both kinds of thinking can be useful throughout the spectrum outlined above, convergent thinking is more characteristic of treatment, and divergent thinking is more associated with adventure. Interestingly, Kolb's cycle does provide a balance between divergent and convergent thinking. Also, the *What? So What? Now What?* cycle (BORTON 1970) is balanced in a similar way - but only if Borton's advice is heeded to apply the cycle twice - first analytically and then in a more relaxed and contemplative mode. If facilitators do not know that the models they follow are not balanced in these ways, the chances are that they will adopt the convergent style that is implied (in British English) by the term "processing" and that is so unequivocally represented in the metaphor of funnelling. The funnel provides a useful guide for filtering experiences, but without a complementary process to stimulate divergent thinking

(as found in other models of experiential learning) there is a risk that the power and spirit of adventure also get filtered out.

Adventure involves broadening horizons and opening out and letting go and exploring new frontiers and opportunities. At the adventure end of the spectrum there is a different kind of experiential learning process at work. The bigger the adventure, the harder it can be to appreciate its future significance close to the event, and the harder it can be to predict what impact it will have. The individual may feel that their adventure is a personal breakthrough, or a group may feel that they have crossed a significant threshold in their development. A celebratory telling of their story or a physical re-enactment may do more to help this special experience live on in future experiences than would a convergent cognitive filtering process designed to produce a commitment to change. Reliving a special experience is a kind of *emotional* processing - which may turn out to be of greater lasting value than the purely *cognitive* processing of the experience that is typical of most learning cycles. Dewey writes of experiences *carrying* people into the future. He describes an educative experience as one that:

“... arouses curiosity, strengthens initiative, and sets up desires and purposes that are sufficiently intense to carry a person over dead places in the future.” (DEWEY 1938, 31)

Dewey provides a broader vision of “educative experience” than many of his followers do. Dewey’s interest was in the kinds of experiences that arouse, that are intense, that strengthen, that stimulate, and that live on in future experiences that have similar properties. Such experiences help people over dead patches and help to prevent them shrinking from the world. This is a philosophy of adventure - and one that maintains a holistic view of the individual throughout the process. It is the opposite of “paralysis by analysis”. Borton was aware of the dangers of lifeless processing when he warned “do not dissect to disintegration”, but many users of his “*What? So What? Now What?*” model do not know of author’s warnings. Models simplify reality. Practitioners simplify a model further if they work only with the model’s labels and have little understanding of the substance beneath the labels.

Ultimately, however much we aspire to “follow” a particular model, our decisions are subjective, intuitive and provisional. There may be something “professional” about following a model, but there may be something even more “professional” about not following a model. We should continually be seeking *other* ways in learning and development.

A view into the future

In the world of outdoor adventure education it is especially important to ap-

precipitate the core belief that outdoor adventure can arouse, stimulate, enliven, draw out potential and provide a broader view of self, others and the environment. It is an enlivening process that develops potential and opens up new possibilities and opportunities. Within this process there are times when it pays to zoom in and inspect the detail, especially if it is a detail that is holding things back. But in a holistic approach, movement in one direction will soon need balancing by movement in another direction: such as by following zooming in with zooming out, structure with freedom, intensity with relaxation, yin with yang. By asking "What else?", "What's missing?", "What other?", "What's new?" we find opposites, new directions and create a more rounded and life-enhancing process of learning and development.

Outdoor adventure education is itself "other" to mainstream education. For many participants it provides what is missing. Much of the appeal and power of outdoor adventure education lies in its 'otherness'. Let's continue to celebrate and develop our rich diversity of theory practice and (like Dewey) value experiences that live on in future experiences. We should always be seeking *other* ways. In the following lines I draw together the reasons why.

Other is not normal
Other is not mainstream
Other is not the status quo
Other is not how we do things round here

Other is alternative
Other is different
Other is alien
Other is beyond the familiar

Other is yin ... or yang
Other is balance
Other is what's missing
Other is promise and potential

Other is unknown
Other is risk
Other is adventure
Other is opening, changing and becoming

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The European Institute for Outdoor Adventure Education and Experiential Learning (EOE) was founded in October 1996 in Spital/Pyhrn in Austria. It is the first Europe-wide cooperation between experts working together on further developing a pedagogical practice that uses the educational sensory potential inherent in adventure in challenging natural situations.

The title, *Other Ways of Learning*, corresponds with the conceptional basis of the European Institute, which celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2006. The contributions in this book illustrate the various stages of the development of the Institute and discuss the central conditions of the other way of learning in outdoor adventure education and experiential learning practice.

The articles show the range of those topics and questions that the Institute was concerned with between 1996 and 2006 and which are among the key issues of our times: such as the question of the consequences of globalisation and technological development, ecological responsibility and sustainability and of the cultural differences of outdoor adventure education, among many others.

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Peter Becker
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Other Ways Of Learning

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and Experiential Learning 1996–2006

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Other Ways of Learning

Edited by Peter Becker & Jochem Schirp (2008)

From the Back Cover

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