



Roger Greenaway

Thoughts for the Month 2017

This collection of thoughts from 2017 is our last one. We are still thinking (!) and we are still sharing our thoughts online (and offline) in various ways but no longer through Experiential-CPD now that it has ceased publication. Thanks for your interest and support over recent months or years.



Bill Krouwel

Roger Greenaway and Bill Krouwel, Editors

Thoughts for the Month 2017

page

Jan	Unexpected Diversity	Roger Greenaway	1
Feb	Reasons to be Cheerful	Roger Greenaway	2
March	Perfect Professionalism	Bill Krouwel	3
April	Called to Serve	Bill Krouwel	4
May	Glorious Mud	Roger Greenaway	5
Jun	One hour every day	Roger Greenaway	6
Jul	The Art of Doing Nothing	Roger Greenaway	7

[An unintentionally prophetic ending]

Unexpected Diversity

When I walked the top half of the Pennine Way with my brother-in-law (who had begun at the beginning) what surprised me most was the variety of different people and different motivations amongst all the walkers we met on the way. It was an "unexpected diversity".

It was my first experience of long distance walking. I had assumed that long distance walkers were a special breed of people all similarly motivated, sharing a common passion and enjoying the company of like-minded people. How could I have been so naive?

My first mistake was to assume that there was just one Pennine Way. At the time there were two different guidebooks. Each author presented different versions of the route. The allegiance that each walker had for their own author's route felt at times as if walkers were following different sects or religions with unwavering loyalty.

And as for the walkers who caught buses to miss out "less appealing" parts of the route (or who "started" at the half-way point) these were regarded (by the guidebook worshippers) as people who threatened the purity of the true way. Or they were lesser beings, at least. Unfathomable at best.

Some Pennine Way walkers were taking their time, especially the walker who had started (that same year I think) in Lands End and was carrying his tent and camping gear all the way to John O'Groats. Mostly fuelled by edible plants, he would have us believe.

Hurrying in the other direction was a military man sweating under a load so heavy that we wondered how he would fare in the bogs ahead (until we reached the Northumbrian bogs that he must have already survived).

For some it was just pleasant being out in the fresh air every day. For others it was a huge challenge throughout. Some were fundraising. Some were escaping from something and just wanted peace and quiet. And some, like me, were just enjoying meeting such a wide variety of people, and talking so much that the views or the effort might occasionally go unnoticed.

I am sure that this "unexpected diversity" is found in all activities if we look and listen closely enough.

So I wonder if, in the world of professionalised activities, we are losing some of this human diversity? If we choose activity "X" to achieve outcome "Y" what room do we leave for deviation, difference and diversity? (And serendipity, says Bill.)

And, I wonder if, in the world of research into the value of so-called "experiential activities" we are losing even more of this human diversity? Seeking tight causative correlations between activity "X" and outcome "Y" seems to come from a wish for precision and clinical certainty in a field of education that so often celebrates other values that are more complex, dynamic and uncertain.

Many of us have probably "got" biodiversity by now, and even include something about this in our programmes. But what about those other kinds of diversity that we should be protecting, developing and celebrating?

Among these diversities we might want specifically to include open-ended curiosity, exploration, uncertainty of outcome and the diversity of human nature.

Vive La Différence in 2017 and beyond!

Roger Greenaway

Reasons to be Cheerful

This month's 'thought' is a recommended link to a surprisingly cheerful article from Rob Bushby, John Muir Award Manager: **Are children and young people really disconnected from nature?**

The surprise is not that Rob is cheerful, it is that his cheerfulness comes through in an article about young people's connection with nature.

Thoughts for the Month (2011-2017) are indexed at <http://reviewing.co.uk/thoughts/index.htm>

And my own reasons to be cheerful include the fact that I will be connecting with nature ...



...near Stafford and Leicester (early February), nr Sheffield (early March) and Grisedale Forest (October). These are all outdoor workshops for outdoor educators in which reviewing methods are part of the journey we make.

For a description (and photos) of my most recent walking workshop for outdoor educators, take a look at [Reviewing Outdoors](#) which includes a detailed guide to what you can expect.

Another Reason to be Cheerful (part 3) is that I have got through the ballot: on 1st September I'll be on the starting line for the Ultra-Trail du Mont-Blanc. I am told there is plenty of opportunity for deep reflection (and French conversations) while walking up steep snowy hills in the moonlight ...

Roger Greenaway

This month's thought is from Bill Krouwel ...

Perfect Professionalism?

Professionalism, like motherhood and apple pie, might be considered a universal good. Certainly, there are a decent number of organisations in the outdoors promoting the general idea of greater professionalism. From the host of national governing bodies, through statutory bodies to the IOL itself, standards of skill and performance are set and monitored.

All good stuff.

But, by professionalising, do we lose something? It depends on our attitude to education and learning. It depends on why we do what we do. According to two Finnish educationalists (Jauhiainen and Kivirauma, writing in 1997), there are two ways of looking at things:

Thoughts for the Month (2011-2017) are indexed at <http://reviewing.co.uk/thoughts/index.htm>

On the one hand, schooling is seen ...as having the task of reducing social differences. On the other hand ... as an investment, the task of which is to select and prepare future citizens for a hierarchically structured labour market.

It isn't too great a stretch to see the professionalist end of education (including outdoor education) as being focussed on the more measurable side of learning; on what's come to be known as managerialism, which views education as a means of developing '*skills, competencies and capabilities*' (Hall and Rowland, 1998 and '*stresses competitiveness, accountability and audit*' (Fitzsimmons, 2005). This just about perfectly describe most of the practitioner-assessment processes used in the outdoors.

And there are consequences to this dry professionalism. A recent example from my own life; Last week I had to urgently take a relative into hospital. In a (for once) mercifully quiet emergency department, she was subjected to professionalism. Which is to say she was dealt with impersonally but efficiently, rather like a malfunctioning piece of machinery that needed mending. The fact that she was a vulnerable and frail human being was pretty much ignored. And she was miserable...

Later, she was transferred to a non-emergency (but very busy) ward, where they chatted with her, made her feel at home and offered, along with the treatment, tea and personal warmth. In their way, they too were professional, but crucially saw that a caring attitude was as much a key to recovery as timely medication. When I collected my relative she was full of praise for the people on this ward.

By focussing solely on professionalism, we may lose a warmth and empathy which, although difficult to measure, self-evidently makes for experiences which allow people to *develop attitudes* as well as to be trained. It's not just a case of having learned soft skills, it's a deeper attitude of care altogether. It's the difference between the obvious distress that one nurse in the second ward displayed when we were forced to sit waiting for late medication and the cool, professional, indifference of the staff in the emergency ward.

It used to be called, er, 'calling' – and I'll share some thoughts about it in next month's edition...

Bill Krouwel

Bill Krouwel follows on from last month's thought on 'Perfect Professionalism?'

Called to Serve

The vehicle through which I discovered outdoor learning (in 1979) was the team of instructors at O.B. Aberdovey. These, although poorly paid and accommodated, worked miracles with my groups. It was as if they'd experienced a real impulse to serve. They seemed called to their profession.

What do I mean by that? Well, Raatikainen (1997) says that a calling is characterised by a deep internal desire to choose a task or profession which one experiences as valuable and considers her own, a devotion to the task, a

striving to act according to its highest principles. Further, the aim is to serve people. Personal attributes include altruism, devotion, dedication, caring, “being there”, trust and loyalty (Lane, 1987). It’s not all fluffy; Raatikainen lists some quite steely characteristics as well: Courage, boldness, strong will, taking the initiative. Perhaps more rigorous than traditional professionalism...

Such a list suggests that “called” practitioners are positive and energetic; likely to be an example to others.

Jauhiainen and Kivirauma (1997) –Finns, like Raatikainen - writing of education, neatly illustrate the difference between the focus of calling and that of professionalism; the person called to teaching, they say, probably sees education as way to reduce social difference, whereas the professional sees it merely as a means to prepare future citizens for a hierarchically structured labour market.

As for outdoor learning, my thoughts echo Jauhiainen and Kivirauma, seeing our field as ground contested by competing managerialist (professionalising) and humanist (calling-based) paradigms.

Managerialism can lead to prescriptive initiatives, positioning teachers as recipe-following operatives whose role it is to “deliver” (Mahoney et al, 2005).

The humanist paradigm, on the other hand, draws on ‘...humanist concepts and research from the Hawthorne experiments (Mayo, 1933) to ideas of organisational learning (Senge,1990; Pedlar and others’) (Hall and Rowland, 1999), and is engaged with developing human potential rather than just developing specific skills.

Managerialism in the outdoors

Where there is state involvement, there is managerialism. Thus, I fear for such things as the National Citizenship Service when I see that evaluation has focussed on such tangibles as teambuilding and leadership, and that it is sold on the basis that ‘UCAS recommends students include NCS in their personal statement’ and that ‘you learn the skills employers value’ . Very much, then, the managerialist agenda of education as a ‘means of developing skills, competencies and capabilities’ (Hall and Rowland, 1999). Very prescriptive.

Enough. You get the drift ... down with narrow professionalism, up with service and dedication!

Bill Krouwel

May's thought on Glorious Mud is from Roger Greenaway:

Glorious Mud

[The Rise of the Sufferfests](#) is a documentary about the growing popularity of muddy obstacle course races which, in the USA, *now attract more people than the total of those who take part in marathons and half-marathons!*

This is even more surprising when you discover that the obstacles can include live electric cables, barbed wire, tear gas and wading through icy water at -5C. Yes - people part with money (lots of it) to get dirty, electrocuted, gashed, tearful and hypothermic.

Thoughts for the Month (2011-2017) are indexed at <http://reviewing.co.uk/thoughts/index.htm>

This "sufferfest" documentary explores why people pay to suffer. One theory is that its appeal is its contrast to the comfortable life. Another theory is that participants like to publish action photos of themselves on Facebook. But a Facebook poll revealed that 99% say they would take part anyway.

The original "Sufferfest" was developed by the eccentric Mr. Mouse on a farm in Staffordshire. I can understand how a few exceptional people might be attracted to such challenges, but I would never have believed that such strange activity would become so mainstream.

Outdoor education seems to operate in a completely different paradigm ... or does it?

Rock climbers have been known to show off their damaged hands after a gruelling climb. Photos of blistered feet get "admired" after expeditions. And photos of smiling muddy faces are often used to promote outdoor education.

In OE courses you might find camouflaged children crawling through a muddy ditch to avoid detection. And some activities are dramatised by introducing imaginary poisonous swamps, imaginary crocodiles, imaginary electric shocks, imaginary exploding bombs or radioactive devices. You will also find many variations of obstacle courses in OE (but without electricity or tear-gas, as far as I know).

And in both "sufferfests" and OE there is a strong emphasis on helping others. In sufferfests, people will help each other over obstacles even though they are officially competing against each other. In OE helping others is often part of the official curriculum.

Most forms of OE avoid competition. OE aspires to be open to all abilities and is usually designed so that every participant experiences a sense of achievement. In the sufferfest documentary I glimpsed some athletes with disabilities taking part - so it seems that some sufferfests are also underpinned by an inclusive philosophy.

But even after listening to all the interviews, explanations and theories in the documentary, I am not much closer to understanding why so many people will pay to suffer. Maybe I lack the imagination to understand the appeal of such suffering. Or maybe it is simply that participants lack the imagination or skills to enjoy less painful outdoor challenges that they can organise for themselves?

Other theories are welcome - especially if you have participated in such an event.

Roger Greenaway

June's thought on One Hour Every Day is from Roger Greenaway:

One Hour Every Day - "at least"

"There is strong evidence that regular physical activity is associated with numerous health benefits for children. The UK Chief Medical Officers recommend that all children and young people should engage in moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity for at least 60 minutes every day. Many schools already offer an average of two hours of PE or other physical activities per week. However, we need to do more to encourage children to be

active every day. Every primary school child should get at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity a day. At least 30 minutes should be delivered in school every day through active break times, PE, extra-curricular clubs, active lessons, or other sport and physical activity events, with the remaining 30 minutes supported by parents and carers outside of school time."

Extract from "[Childhood Obesity: A Plan for Action](#)" Aug 2016, HM Government.

In dense urban settings, local communities are fighting to defend and save what little green space they have left. One local council has recently fenced off a much used and popular green space because of conflicts between users. [Montagu Estate residents](#) are trying to fight off plans for more house building on the last piece of open green that the community can enjoy.

Now that so many school playing fields have been sold off to developers, it is now all too clear that in some communities the very last green recreation areas are under threat - or have already disappeared.

If daily green space is not readily available, the annual trip to green space (whether it is a family holiday or an outdoor education residential - however brilliant) is surely far too infrequent to create a significant reversal of the deprivations of those other 50 weeks.

For £40 you can get 24 hour access to a research article entitled "[Body Composition Changes in an Outdoor Behavioral Healthcare Program](#)" Don't bother. The study reveals that "on average, adolescent participants moved toward healthier body compositions from intake to discharge." Obviously.

But what if these young people are "discharged" back into the same environment that was contributing to the problems tackled in their outdoor programme?

Have we got the balance right between brilliant residentials and brilliant opportunities in the home environment? Perhaps OE researchers and practitioners should take a broader view?

Annual outings and daily habits both matter. Do we connect them well enough in OE?

Roger Greenaway

This month's thought on The Art of Doing Nothing is from Roger Greenaway.

The Art of Doing Nothing

"We did it ourselves - our leader stepped back and gave us space to find our own way, to make our own choices, to work out what to do and how to do it. And we did it!"

This is very much in the spirit of John Heider's "The Tao of Leadership". It is an approach that could be described as "The Art of Doing Nothing".

"Doing Nothing" could be seen as an extreme example of "Less is More". Applied to leadership it means that the less the leader is doing, the more opportunities there are for others to fill the vacuum and take the initiative and

the responsibility, to take the credit or the blame, and to learn from the results of their own actions..

But make a habit of "Doing Nothing" and you risk becoming redundant. So if you want the pay or the prestige (or inner satisfaction) of being a leader, you need to mix in some artistry into "The Art of Doing Nothing".

This "Art" includes knowing when to do something, and how to do that something in a way that will then let you return to "Doing Nothing" so that others may flourish. By doing nothing you hope that you are empowering / motivating / enabling others to do whatever needs doing.

o O o

Should participants also be learning "The Art of Doing Nothing"? As courses get shorter they tend to get busier and busier. Providers are tempted to cram in activities into all the time available - leaving very little time for "Doing Nothing".

I have often been doubtful about the value of sitting round a campfire "Doing Nothing". That was until I read [excerpts from] [Val Nicholl's thesis on Quiet Time](#). This 'Quiet Time' typically happens when the pressure is less and individuals get lost in their own thoughts and reach some valuable insights. "Quiet Time" does not appear in the programme (as something like "Solo" might) - they are moments that happen serendipitously when the pace slows down. For example, for one person, sitting alone poking the embers of the campfire was a moment of insightful Quiet Time.

"Doing Nothing" can also be orchestrated a little. I have asked groups of adults to spend a few hours in a room with no task or goal. And I repeated the experiment in the outdoors on a small island. During these experiments I was doing nothing. *But what were the participants doing?*

Well, it usually happened that the participants wanted to fill the vacuum with some kind of purposeful activity - such as organising their own fun activity or getting to know each other better. However they started, by the end of the first hour they would get locked into deep conversation - far deeper than anything that was likely to be happening in a facilitated review.

After some initial frustration, groups would experience this vacuum as a rare opportunity to spend time together in a meaningful way without the distraction of a task to do, a problem to solve or a goal to meet. For some this was seen as a rare luxury, and for many this was the most powerful part of the "programme". It might also make sense to think of this as "Me Time" or "Us Time".

With young people, this kind of conversation (free-wheeling, deep discussion) would typically happen round the wood-burning stove in the centre of our multi-purpose space. Teenagers who back home would complain "there is nothing to do around here" would quite happily be drawn to the warmth of the wood stove and sit around filling the vacuum of "Nothing to Do" with deep, engaging, meaningful conversations.

While fires seem to feature a lot in these stories of "doing nothing", there are many other inspirational outdoor settings in which moments of "Doing Nothing" can be profoundly inspiring. One of my favourite examples comes

from the writing of Eric when was an unemployed 18 year old:

"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 in [Alastair Kennedy's The Expedition Experience as a Vehicle for Change in the Inner City.](#))

Some of the most valuable moments happen when nothing is being "delivered", when there is no task, no facilitation, no expectation.

The "Art of Doing Nothing" begins by creating personal space for yourself and/or by creating personal space for others - preferably in a place that is different, that is inspirational and is without distraction and without much else to do.

Any other thoughts about doing nothing? Does anyone care to suggest a research design for exploring the value of doing nothing?

Roger Greenaway

POSTSCRIPT

These are the thoughts that Bill and Roger (and a few guest authors) have enjoyed writing each month from January 2011 – July 2017. For reprint requests, please write to: roger@reviewing.co.uk Intrigued by a title or wanting to browse? Then please go to the full index at: <http://reviewing.co.uk/thoughts/> from where you can download each year's thoughts as a pdf.

Unexpected Diversity

Reasons to be Cheerful

Perfect Professionalism

Called to Serve

Glorious Mud

One hour every day

The Art of Doing Nothing

Magic Stickology

Thoughts for the Month (2011-2017) are indexed at <http://reviewing.co.uk/thoughts/index.htm>

Whose Story?

Under the Bushel

All work and no play

Where to Invade Next

Why Walking Works

How much mindfulness?

Richer for the Experience (in 3 parts)

Take a Break

Freedom to Roam and Read

Rebranding Boredom

Lasting Impact - or something better?

Other versions of history are also available

Too busy to read?

How do you define process?

Reading Groups

Hide and Seek

UK Blogs about experiential learning

Supported by research

Frightening People

5 Experiential Learning Trends for 2016

When winning is losing

Silence in experiential learning

Teambuilding with Sheep

When does experiential learning happen?

What learning happens when?

Agile Experiential Learning

Not Learning from Experience

The Attractions of Uncertainty

Bill Looks Back

Competition or Collaboration?

Ivory Tower

Camaraderie

Darkness my old friend

When winter works well

Walking and learning

Bubble armour

What do we do?

How do you know what we do?

Designing richer learning experiences

The 'undesignables'

Finding inspiration

Experiences for me

Shared experience or unique experience?

The Benefits of Play

Festival of Outdoor Learning

In Praise of Improvisation

Thank You

Resource: Sustainability, Curriculum for Excellence and the John Muir Award

On Being Resourceful

Too Experiential?

Too Experiential? A Response

Too Experiential? More Thoughts

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

Whose Experience is it Anyway?

Getting Beyond the Caption

Thinking about hybrids...

Guess what I'm thinking?

Paradigms Lost

Mantle of the Expert - or Novice?

Who needs models?

Who needs models? - Reply

Whose Preferences?

CPD & cpd

Working on the Edge?

What an Experience!

Mantle of the Expert: part two

Whatever happened to Brian?

These are the thoughts that Bill and Roger (and a few guest authors) have enjoyed writing each month from January 2011 – July 2017. For reprint requests, please write to:

roger@reviewing.co.uk Intrigued by a title or wanting to browse? Then please go to the full index at: <http://reviewing.co.uk/thoughts/> from wheree you can download each year's thoughts as a pdf.