Facilitating learning: mine, yours and others’ :gaining insight into the facilitation of corporate experiential learning programs through the lenses of personal experience and the learning styles analysis

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Chapter 1. Introduction

In my own opinion, women think and write differently than men because they have different experiences, different myths, different needs and desires and dreams and memories. As feminist scholars have pointed out, we exist as a separate culture within the dominant culture. A culture distinct from men's, no matter how intimately we may live with or love them, Kathleen Betsko, 1987, playwright and editor (Partnow, 1993:470)

1.1. Beginnings

This is the story of a journey. The story was motivated by and begins with my own experience. It proceeds as I immerse myself in the literature related to my experiences and as I explore new areas as I become aware of them. This is not necessarily a linear, clearly logical story. At times I have felt as though I have been lost, 'geographically embarrassed'. At other times I have felt as if I was racing down a stream, 'going with the flow'. There have also been many times when I have wanted to leave the journey to pursue something else. To communicate this journey I frequently delve into the use of metaphor and analogy to help tell my story. The metaphors and analogies reflect who I am and draw upon the language of photography (through the use of 'lenses') and of journeys and travel as well as my background in outdoor and experiential learning.

As I set out on this journey I did not necessarily know where it would lead, nor were the research questions clear. The questions were not fully revealed until the journey ended, and even then, they remain a little obscured. But in commencing this journey what I have chosen to be true to is my own experience. It is my individual experience that is unique. It is the expression of my individual experience that is new. Will the story of my journey be generalisable to a larger population? Maybe, but probably not. That is not what I was trying to achieve. What is important in this process, the heuristic research process, is an increase in self-understanding and self-growth (Moustakas, 1990). For me, understanding alone is not enough, there needs to be an impact upon my practice as well. My desire is similar to the concept of 'praxis' as suggested by Freire (1972) who said that reflection without action is verbalism, and action without reflection is activism, while action with reflection, that seeks to transform the world, is praxis. In my world, I seek first to change myself. What I
have added, what I offer to the field is not more answers or models, but rather observations and questions about the dominant paradigms that emerge from my research and experience, that may assist others as they explore their professional practice and development. What I offer is one person’s critical perspective that has led to an increased awareness of the where of programs, not just the what and how.

The increase in my understanding and growth is bounded by my focus on facilitation of experiential learning programs, particularly with corporate groups. As I reflect upon the beginning of this journey I take note of Moustakas’ (1990) words when he says that “In such an odyssey, I know little of the territory through which I must travel. But one thing is certain, the mystery summons me and lures me ‘to let go of the known and swim in an unknown current’” (Moustakas, 1990:10). As I travelled this journey I have seen different things, each impacted by the ‘lens’ that I applied at that time.

1.2. Lenses

From my experience with photography, lenses are a major factor in ‘making’ or creating photographs. Whether you use a zoom lens, a wide angle or a close up lens will significantly affect the final product. A lens can be used to increase the emphasis of something and to exclude other things. Additionally, the same lens can be used with a range of filters such as polarising filters or UVA which will influence what is seen in the final photograph. Even the choice of film and paper has an impact. As with photography, so with research. The choice of ‘lenses’ or ‘filters’ used to look at a topic, or an experience, will influence what is seen. The lenses of my personal experience and the Learning Style Analysis heighten awareness of particular aspects of learning, while excluding many others. But then they are choices that are made in a research process. If you wanted to see it all then you would have to be there yourself, as any method of recording (whether in photography, writing or audio recording) is always going to limit what is seen or heard by the listener or viewer (Grbich, 1999).
1.3. Where to Now?

The remainder of this chapter seeks to outline the context from within which I write. It sets out the broader boundaries of the research, including consideration of the needs of management and organisations for the future, human resource development and learning styles. The key topics to be considered are:

- What Are the Questions?
- Where is this Research ‘Located’?
- Learning as an Adventure; Facilitation as Risk Management
- Different Perspectives, Different Voices
- Learning Styles: What’s that?
- There’s Nothing New in This!
- A Journey of Exploration

But first a note about this personal journey.

1.4. A Personal Journey

_No learning can avoid the voyage (Serres, 1991:8)_

My journey of exploration and discovery in areas related to experiential learning and learning styles has continued over a number of wandering, intersecting and sometimes parallel paths. These paths have occurred over many years, in formal and informal settings, in groups, in class, by myself, through many cultures and in various countries. In many ways, this journey has reflected my own individual learning needs. My preferred way of learning is self directed, problem-based, involves peers, authorities and individual effort, and requires practical experience as well as theoretical underpinnings. At other times my journey has been erratic and uncontrolled, leading to often-unintended outcomes.

When first exposed to experiential learning techniques (particularly of the adventure-based variety), I had no appreciation of the process; in fact I was resistant and totally...
lacking in understanding of the process. I would say to my supervisor: "Why?, Why do I have to get a group to fill a bucket with water when the bucket has holes?; Why am I playing all these silly games when the session is about leadership or communication?" I did not understand. I was not a good 'player'. I thought I was an individual, rational, analytical learner who had just been 'saved' from the world of investments, foreign currency transactions and computers. As I explored more, played more and observed individuals and groups grow more through these 'silly games' I began to appreciate their impact.

What I thought would be best was to go and study with one of the 'guru's' of experiential learning. This led to my enrolment in a Masters of Education where I was able to study experiential learning at greater depth that enabled me to gain a better theoretical understanding of these methods, but I wanted more. I was not satisfied with the way I saw these activities 'debriefed'. Typically, we would sit in a circle and talk about what happened. Even though I was fairly comfortable and confident speaking in front of a group, I knew that this mode of 'debriefing' did not work that well for me. I preferred smaller groups, preferably with people with whom I connected, and more time and distance from the experience. At times my most significant learning from these experiences occurred well away from that place, in situations such as driving, swimming or even waking in the middle of the night. I wondered what it was like for others who may not have the same level of verbal skills or confidence in front of a group. I was beginning to struggle with the apparent contradiction of asking people to talk openly about their experiences in front of a group of 15 or more, when we also knew that the greatest fear people tend to have is speaking in front of a group (Baskerville, 1994). And what about those people who prefer learning more like I do? Was this learning process the most effective way for them? What also of the challenges faced in a multicultural society where communication in mixed groups may not flow as freely and openly (Yin, 1999)?

I had questions and I wanted answers ... if they existed!

This focus on experiential learning began to raise questions in my mind about the connection with individual learning styles. My efforts to pursue study around the topics of facilitation, experiential learning and learning styles was rejected by a prominent author on experiential learning and reflective practice on the basis that it
was an irrelevant topic to be researched. My personal experience said otherwise. I was not satisfied that this rejection of my ideas was to be the end.

Being true to my experience (not bad for a reforming logical, rational, analytical learner!), I chose to continue in my journey, knocking on doors, asking questions, trying new ideas, asking for feedback from colleagues through conference workshops, staff trainings and articles. Increasingly the response was positive. People could see the connections. Intuitively it made sense to them, as it did to me. If people learned in different ways, then we should be looking for different ways to help them learn from their individual experiences. A question that could arise from my experience thus far would be: “What would experiential learning look like if the theoretical basis and the dominant writings had originated from other voices such as poor women from the Asian sub-continent or rich youth from traditional African cultures?”

From my experience, an added pressure exists when using experiential learning techniques in corporate training. That pressure is to ensure the efficiency of the use of training resources: human, time and money. Organisations do not want to spend more time and money than is necessary to achieve their organisational objectives (Smith, 1998). In the face of rapid and continuous change, the ability for an “organisation’s most expensive and flexible resource” (Rylatt and Lohan, 1995:32), that is people or employees, to adapt and to learn quickly, is possibly one of the greatest assets for individuals, groups and organisations alike. If the learning process could be improved through consideration of learning styles, then this may assist the organisation to achieve its objectives and the individual to be able to learn in their own way.

1.5. What Are the Questions?

The ultimate aim of this study is to contribute to the development of effectively facilitated corporate experiential learning programs. In working towards this end the questions that I have explored have been interrelated and interconnected. The following list of seven questions provides a broad framework of the research, a framework that was constructed after the fact to help communicate what happened rather than at the beginning of the research to explain where I intended to go:
1. What are the themes and foci of the current literature on the facilitation of experiential learning? The central themes and foci considered include:

- What constitutes an experience?
- Reflecting upon the experience;
- The variety of locations of the experience;
- The activities within the experience;
- Outcomes and application of the learning, and
- Evaluation of effectiveness of the programs

2. What insights do I gain from reflecting upon my own experience of learning?

This question has highlighted not just the issue of location as considered within the literature, but more significantly the impact of the location upon the experience and the learning.

3. What connections are there between my experience and my Learning Style Analysis™ (LSA)?

Throughout the autoethnography numerous connections related to aspects of my preferred learning style, such as sensory modalities, time of day, structure and formality of the study environment, are made between reflections upon my own learning and the LSA Questionnaire (Dunn and Prashnig, 1999) I completed and processed in 2000 (Dunn and Prashnig, 2000). This highlights the link between the LSA with my individual experience of learning.

4. What insights are gained from looking at the LSAs of a range of adults?

The LSAs of 73 postgraduate students provide a broader picture of the preferences of adults who may be similar to those people who participate in corporate experiential learning programs. The data from the LSAs, while providing some support for the need to more carefully consider the needs of individuals when facilitating corporate
experiential learning styles, was not a sufficient sample size to make firm recommendations relevant to all programs – but then that is not what I set out to do.

5. What are facilitators of experiential learning doing in their practice?

Through surveying 76 facilitators at two international conferences it is clear that my 'gut' instinct about the use dominant use of whole group discussions was confirmed. What also came to light was the substantial lack of knowledge and understanding by facilitators as to how people learn. This lack of understanding may well provide an answer as to why facilitators of experiential learning continue to prefer verbal 'debriefs', as indicated by the survey, over other non-verbal reflective activities.

6. What other theories or perspectives may provide alternative directions and/or reflections upon the practice of experiential learning?

Evolving from the combination of the literature review in Chapter 3, the autoethnography in Chapter 4 and the LSAs and Workshop Surveys in Chapter 5, the alternative literature considered from organisational aesthetics, human geography and urban planning, heightened the emphasis placed upon the impact of the location upon the experience and the need to create effective 'spaces' within which people could learn.

7. What recommendations could be made about professional practice in the facilitation of corporate experiential learning?

The recommendations that emerge from this study place more emphasis upon what further research may need to be done, rather than providing specific changes to practice. With the emerging themes of this study being about 'place' and 'space', further research needs to be conducted into the role 'place' and 'space' has upon the experience. This would include, not just the physical 'place' and 'space' in which the program occurs, but also the emotional, social and psychological 'place' and 'space' of the individuals, the group and the organisation.

With these questions at the centre, the primary focus of the research became the 'inputs' into the corporate experiential learning program, which includes the participants and the context, with a secondary focus being upon the process (e.g.
activities and approaches) with no consideration of the outcomes (e.g. benefits and results) (Allison, 2000a). This contrasts with Bunting’s (2003) suggestion, quoted at the beginning of Chapter 2, that the only important research focus for experiential education is scientific research outcomes.

Table 1-1 provides an overview of where each of the key research questions was primarily considered in the journey. But as suggested previously, this has not been a linear, logical process of exploration, it has been iterative, random and at times repetitive process that reflects how I learned as opposed to how one might like traditional research to be presented. The heuristic research process that I have used has enabled me to adopt a process that has been a bit like using a zoom lens that goes from the 28mm wide-angle lens to the 400mm zoom lens, with the literature being viewed with the wide-angle lens providing a very broad perspective. I then zoom in for a close-up in the autoethnography and then gradually the lens is zoomed out again as a bigger picture is explored through the LSAs and surveys and then wide again through literature from other traditions. The final phase, the creative synthesis, is like a 50mm lens where what you see through the viewfinder is similar to what you would see with the naked eye.

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<th>Question</th>
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<td>3: Connections between my experience and my LSA</td>
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<td>4: Insights gained from the LSAs</td>
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<td>5: What are Facilitators Doing?</td>
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1.6. Where is this Research 'Located'?

This next section is an outline of where my thoughts and perspectives are 'located' which includes influences from education and management, as well as diversions to other places. My journey through the lands of learning and experience is a journey in a broader context of influences of feminism, a critical perspective, and views on management and human resource development. As a personal journey it has been a process of listening to myself, my experience and the experiences of others and then feeding that back into what I am doing and thinking. The research process has been disjointed, eclectic, diverse and at times, seemingly, unconnected, but is held together by a common thread. The thread of continuity woven throughout has remained my own experience of learning and facilitating the learning of others.

1.6.1. Feminist, Who Me?, Surely Not!

I am a reluctant feminist.

Feminist is not a label that sits comfortably with me; for most of my life I would not have identified myself as a feminist or with feminism. I would be more likely to have said that I believe in equality and that mostly I did not believe I had been discriminated against because I am female. In many ways I have probably fought against being considered a feminist. I perceived this as especially necessary in the ten years I worked for the Anglican Church as well as two years in a theological college training to be an Anglican minister in a Diocese that was vocal in its opposition to women being in charge. I even continued to try and convince myself that I wasn’t a feminist while working in a place where I perceived that discrimination, on the basis of gender, was rampant. But as I have entered into this process of writing a PhD and having to reflect upon my assumptions, beliefs and perspectives on 'truth' and theory, I have begun to understand that what I consider critical thinking is actually what others called feminism (no wonder people have given me that label in the past!). Moreover, to be called a feminist is not a derogatory term, it is in fact a reflection of my ability and desire to question, to explore, to listen and to appreciate other views, and to realise that my perspective, as a feminist, “is a radically different way” (Henderson-King and Stewart, 1997:416).
My experience of avoiding or not acknowledging my ‘feminist identity’ or even rejecting the label feminist, despite identifying with the values and beliefs, is a common tendency of many women, and particularly young women (Henderson-King and Stewart, 1997). As Henderson-King and Stewart suggest, each person has a different experience of feminism that may be expressed through a developmental model of five stages of feminism (Henderson, 1996). Table 1-2 provides a summary of the stages discussed by Henderson-King and Stewart.

Table 1-2 Developmental Model of Positive Feminist Identity


Based upon this model I may have missed a few stages, or at least may not have been aware of them, or I may not fit at all. If I am a feminist, what ‘type’ of feminist am I? Is there a category or a box within which I may begin to more clearly identify?

Feminism, in its various forms, has diverse labels, histories and inferences. Henderson (1996), in addressing questions of feminism and outdoor leadership, notes the following differences between some key feminist perspectives:

... liberal feminists would suggest that women ought to have equal rights in outdoor participation and that their leadership opportunities ought to be similar to those of men. Cultural feminist philosophy focuses on seeing and celebrating the uniqueness of women’s outdoor experiences and leadership styles; radical feminists provide a basis for how women ought to choose their own models of outdoor leadership that may not resemble male models at all (Henderson, 1996:108).

Is linking to a type really important, or am I just succumbing to a masculine view of the world where labels and categories are important? Murfin and Ray (1997) comment that many French feminists see feminine language as being semiotic, by which it is meant that it is “rhythmic and unifying; it does not rigidly oppose and rank
qualities of reality” as seen in the male-dominated ‘canon’ (Murfin and Ray, 1997:122). There is a great temptation to fall into this trap and to subvert what is good about feminism and succumb to the dominant paradigm of types, labels and categorisation. In light of Murfin and Ray’s comment, I did not try to oppose and rank my experience, but rather I risk letting my writing, from a male perspective, seem “fluid to the point of chaotic” (Murfin and Ray, 1997:122). If that is the case, then Murfin and Ray suggest that that is a fault of the male perspective, not the writing.

In this process I take a critical standpoint, one that supports the questioning of the status quo, exploring other options and perspectives and which, at times, may seem lacking in order and structure. And yes, I do not categorise what ‘type’ of feminism I may or may not be.

1.6.2. Taking a Critical Perspective

Any feminist analysis begins with a critique of the existing structures (Henderson, 1996:108)

A dominant theme throughout this dissertation is that of questioning. Questioning me, questioning meanings, questioning assumptions, questioning conclusions and questioning the hegemony. This is not to undermine the status quo, but to carefully consider the validity of the status quo and to investigate what other statuses may exist. As suggested by Brookfield:

... the ideas and practices of hegemony are part and parcel of everyday life – the stock opinions, conventional wisdom, and commonsense ways of seeing and ordering the world that many of us take for granted. If there is a conspiracy here, it is the conspiracy of the normal (Brookfield, 1995:15).

Questioning the position or presupposition of the dominant voice, if not the dominant paradigm, and its universal application to all people may reflect the perspective of Critical Theorists. Giroux suggests that Critical Theorists “rejected all forms of rationality that subordinated human consciousness and action to the imperatives of universal laws” (Giroux, 1983:8) and thus may highlight the mechanisms of “ideological control that permeate(s) the consciousness and practices of advanced capitalist societ(ies)” (Giroux, 1983:13). I do not fully subscribe to the concept that there is a conscious control in action. However the possibility that we are being
controlled by barriers such as pragmatism, limited time and insufficient resources to look elsewhere, or even our lack of knowledge of other ways of being or doing, provides an impetus to help break down those barriers and pursue new and different journeys. It is these unconscious controls in action that I place specific focus upon through a process of critical reflection.

a. A Critical Perspective, Learning from Teaching and Management

Brookfield (1995), who writes from the perspective of adult education, is an advocate of critical reflection who sought to explain the differences between reflection and critical reflection and its significance for teachers. To this end, he said that:

... reflection becomes critical when it has two distinctive purposes. The first is to understand how considerations of power undergird, frame, and distort educational processes and interactions. The second is to question assumptions and practices that seem to make our teaching lives easier but actually work against our own best interests (Brookfield, 1995:8).

This latter point correlates with Fulop and Linstead (1999) as they present an argument for pursuing a critical perspective on management by suggesting that:

... learning about management requires a critical perspective that is guided by three key processes of inquiry:

identifying and challenging assumptions;

developing an awareness of the context in which management ideas have evolved;

always seeking alternative ways of seeing situations, interpreting what is going on, understanding why an organisation is configured the way it is, and speculating about the way the organisation could be managed differently (Fulop and Linstead, 1999:3).

Within the context of this study, these same three processes are applied to the fields to be explored. As such the three processes suggested by Fulop and Linstead may become:

- identifying and challenging assumptions about topics such as experiential learning, facilitation, reflection, learning and learning styles (Chapter 6);

- developing an awareness of the context in which experiential learning ideas have evolved by exploring some of the origins of the dominant writings and to
'peel back' some of the layers to see what may lie beneath the apparent orthodoxy (Chapter 3);

- always seeking alternative ways of seeing situations, interpreting what is going on, understanding why experiential learning situations are configured the way they are, and speculating about how they could be structured differently through questioning and exploring and trying to see things through the eyes of people from other life experiences (Chapters 4, 5 and 6).

This exploration of experiential learning has been triggered by a desire to facilitate more effective corporate experiential learning programs, and thus to benefit the participant (often a manager) and the organisation for the future.

1.6.3. Managers and Organisations for the Future

Organisations aren't the visible, tangible, obvious places which they used to be. No longer ... do you have everyone in the same place at the same time in order to get things done. Place and time are now independent of one another (Handy, 1997:378)

Meeting the goals of the organisation, which is investing in corporate experiential learning programs (CELP), requires some appreciation of the context within which they operate and the demands faced for the future. Increasingly organisations in the twenty-first century are warned of the ever-present challenges faced by rapid rates of change and the need for adaptability (e.g. Hesselbein, Goldsmith and Beckhard, 1997; Sofo, 1999). This demand needs to be reflected in the learning and development opportunities provided for employees to ensure that training is delivered efficiently, effectively and relevantly. With change reputed to be faster now than at any other time in history it may no longer be possible to take extended periods out of the workforce to pursue fulltime study or extended blocks of training (Rylatt and Lohan, 1995). Courses developed in the past may not be relevant for the future. An increasing emphasis on short courses, on and off the job, that have demonstrated outcomes that align with the organisation's objectives may be far more cost effective and relevant than an MBA achieved at a prestigious graduate school. As Sofo (1999) notes:
The demands on organisations now require learning to be delivered faster, more cheaply and more effectively to a fluid workplace and mobile workforce dramatically affected by daily changes in the marketplace (Sofo, 1999:322).

One way that may enhance the speed, cost and effectiveness of learning is to place more focus on the individual and their own preferences and abilities to learn. By providing the learner with knowledge and skills that enable them to be more effective self-directed learners, the speed, cost and effectiveness of the learning program may be enhanced.

b. Australian Managers and Organisations in 2010

In Australia, an Industry Task Force on Leadership and Management Skills was set up to investigate ways to strengthen management development and business leadership. The resulting 'Karpin Report' identified their vision for Australian enterprises and managers in the year 2010 as presented in Figure 1-1.

Figure 1-1 Karpin Report: Task Force’s Vision


The Karpin Report highlights five challenges and recommendations that are central to the vision, with two of the challenges focusing on the need for high quality human resource development (HRD) mechanisms, and thus are of significance to this study. In summary the five challenges are:

1. Developing a positive enterprise through education and training;
2. Upgrading the capability of the vocational education and training system;

3. Capitalising on the talents of diversity;

4. Achieving best practice management development;

5. Reforming management education (Karpin, 1995).

The fourth and fifth challenges are of particular interest in the context of corporate experiential learning where the emphasis is on ensuring learning opportunities of the highest quality, with outcomes that reflect the future organisational needs. Karpin’s (1995) representation of the management development system is presented in Figure 1-2.

Figure 1-2 Karpin Report: Management Development System


Figure 1-1, and challenges four and five of the Karpin Report noted previously, acknowledge the interconnection of a variety of HRD programs such as the on-the-job, short courses and industry visits, working alongside the formal vocational and award-based management education programs in achieving the task force’s vision for organisations and their managers. However, little note is taken of the individuals within the model nor the broader context (e.g. social, political, economic) of the model.
To achieve the desired ‘Australian Manager’ for 2010 identified in the *Karpin Report*, a key mechanism is human resource development which encompasses three aspects: training and development, career development and organisational development (Delahaye, 2000; Marquardt and Engle, 1993; Sofo, 1999).

c. Human Resource Development

Human resource development (HRD) programs will be a significant strategy for any organisation wishing to work towards Karpin’s vision for 2010. HRD has variously been defined as:

... *integrated use of training and development, organization development and career development to improve individual, group and organizational effectiveness* (Marquardt and Engle, 1993:8). *Role of encouraging, arranging & promoting individuals’ development, particularly in an organisational and employment context* (Tight, 1996:29).

Every year, organisations invest a wide range of money into their employees for the provision of training and development, for some organisations this is quite significant amounts of money (Rylatt and Lohan, 1995). This investment may be based upon the belief that increases in productivity, decreases in wastage and improved motivation may result in greater ‘bottom line’ results as well as increased returns for shareholders. Over time, the manner in which training is delivered may be strongly influenced by various social, economic and educational trends. In the past two decades one particular mode of training that has experienced a varied degree of popularity is the role of experiential management development programs (Holman, Pavlica and Thorpe, 1997). This growth can partly be attributed to the belief that the use of experiential methods provides a more memorable and potentially exhilarating experience. The impact of these moments may be much more significant than more traditional classroom experiences (Rylatt and Lohan, 1995). Experiential programs differ from traditional modes of instruction in that there is a determined aim to interact with the cognitive, the physical and the emotional realms of the individual (Rylatt and Lohan, 1995). One might conclude that it is training for the mind, body and soul. This form of training draws upon a wide range of theories and philosophies. The diversity of these theories presents both the potential for a large overlap of many aspects of the theories, but also for significant gaps. This may occur where the theories have been developed in isolation or without consideration of their application.
to the specific needs of experiential or adventure based programs. These potential gaps may be the cause or the result of poorly facilitated experiential learning sessions.

**d. Experiential Learning in HRD**

In its broader sense, experiential learning programs in organisations may include on-the-job training, computer-based learning and apprenticeships. The variety of definitions and views of experiential learning will be explored at greater depth in Chapter 3, but for now Proudman’s suggestion will be of initial help:

... good experiential learning combines direct experience that is meaningful to the student with guided reflection and analysis. It is a challenging, active, student-centred process that impels students towards opportunities for taking initiative, responsibility, and decision making (italics added) (cited in Chapman, McPhee and Proudman, 1995:241).

This definition, with the combination of the key elements of: experience, meaningfulness, reflection and analysis, may exclude some of the previously mentioned methods. Proudman’s definition concurs with Dewey, who in 1938 wrote “Experience and education cannot be directly equated to each other. For some experiences are mis-educative” (Dewey, 1938/1976:25).

To move ‘the experience’ towards being experiential learning, Proudman’s earlier suggestion argues that there be “guided reflection and analysis” of the experience (Chapman et al., 1995:241). There are diverse words, meanings and methods relating to this process that will be explored in Chapter 3. However it may be suggested that the skills developed in the reflection and analysis of experiences may transfer to the ‘reflection in action’ recommended by Schön (1983) and also supported by Senge whereby individuals are able to “reflect on one’s thinking while acting” (Senge, 1990/1992:192). With Karpin’s vision for 2010 including the adoption of the philosophies of the learning organisation, there may be synergies that result from not just learning from the experience but also learning from the process of learning from the experience. When viewed in this light experiential learning techniques may be skills that are central to the learning organisation.
1.7. Learning as an Adventure; Facilitation as Risk Management

_Nothing seems to work out as it should (Brookfield, 1995:1)_

It is probably unusual to view learning as an ‘adventure’ and thus subject to the same rigorous demands of risk management that one may see in many outdoor or adventure programs. In these programs the concepts of risk and risk management are part and parcel of the process and in some instances are considered to also play a pivotal role in experiential education (Liddle, 1998:6). Risk may be considered the potential to lose something of value, while risk management is about organising the event or the process to manage the risks to acceptable levels (Haddock, 1993). If an adventure exists where there are uncertain outcomes (Crowther, 1995) and risk is the possibility to lose something of value, then where there is risk there must also be the potential for adventure. In the context of risk and risk taking, the possibility, and not the certainty, of losing something of value means the outcome is uncertain, and thus an adventure!

For many facilitators, instructors and/or leaders\(^\text{1}\) it may also be possible to define learning as an adventure. In learning, the outcomes are often uncertain (one need only speak to a teacher or lecturer about the consistency of learning outcomes of their students), the potential to lose something of value is constant and the process of assisting the learning process may be as much about managing risks as it is about being a good educator. The risks in learning may include the risk of losing social standing or acceptance by being seen as a poor learner, an intellect or merely an average student. There are many stories I have heard, from friends and family, about people not wanting to be seen as the smart one in the class, or maybe they would not try too hard for fear of failure. The risks in learning may also include the willingness to take intellectual risks, to take the risk of exploring the realms of ‘not knowing’, to tempt fate by questioning the basis of our understanding, beliefs and/or values. Experts from other fields may not agree with this view of learning involving risk, as

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\(^1\) The terms are used interchangeably. While each term may have a slightly different nuance or program emphasis, it is accepted that many readers and practitioners may use these terms without differentiation or discrimination.
risk in areas such as environmental management and insurance is more closely aligned with the expected annual mortality rates (Sandman, 1990; Slovic, 1990). Bernstein notes that the "word ‘risk’ derives from the early Italian risicare, which means to dare. In this sense, risk is a choice rather than a fate" (Bernstein, 1996:8). With risk researchers focusing on mortality rates, is it necessary that people have to die in order for a risk to exist? If risk is about the potential to lose something of value then maybe the death of one’s passion for learning, or the missed opportunity to learn may be as significant a loss as the loss of an individual’s life. If to risk is to dare, then surely learning is a potential risk.

If the loss of passion for learning or the missed opportunities to learn are risks, then facilitation, instruction and/or teaching is about risk management, that is, managing risks to acceptable levels, levels that may be determined by people, place and/or program. To best manage those risks it may be necessary, for those responsible, to equip themselves with the most appropriate resources that enable to them to be the most effective risk managers. For the facilitator, knowledge and experience of learning styles may be just one of the many items within their ‘bag of tricks’ that will enable them to be effective risk managers in learning environments. Other items that could also be in the bag of tricks are their skills and knowledge in the specific area, interpersonal skills, instructional design and delivery skills and a desire to motivate and enthuse students and participants.

1.8. Different Perspectives, Different Voices

The experience of males in the outdoors has been a dominant paradigm, but not necessarily universal for all males (Henderson, 1996:113)

Experiential learning and facilitation of, and reflection upon, those experiences, has been broadly examined, published, researched and discussed in many places and at many conferences, as Chapter 3 will demonstrate. An ‘orthodoxy’ seems almost to have arisen as to the right or best way to facilitate experiences. The dominant voices in the writing, talking and presenting has been that of males and predominantly white North American males (e.g. Dewey, 1938/1976; James, 1980; Knapp, 1993; Priest and Gass, 1997; Priest et al., 2000) with other notable writers being from the United
Kingdom (U.K.) but with substantial involvement in the North American educational system (e.g. Brookfield, 1995). Another shared characteristic is that they can be further categorised by including that they are predominantly well educated. Not that this is a problem for readers who are white North American well educated males, but I wonder about those readers who aren’t white, who do not originate from North America and for those with lesser education (or no education) and who are not males.

In reflecting upon over ten years of letters and stories on the original *In a Different Voice*, Carol Gilligan wrote that “by restricting their voices, many women are wittingly or unwittingly perpetuating a male-voiced civilization and an order of living that is founded on disconnection from women” (Gilligan, 1993:xii). Further, Bell suggests that “the subject, or author, of Western definitions of rationality was always those with access to the texts and their transmission: masculine, Caucasian (sic), well-educated and heterosexual” (Bell, 1993:21). In the context of experiential learning, and the facilitation and reflection upon those experiences, the same may be said, not just of women, but of any others who are not white, North American and/or males, who are the majority of the world’s population. The experience of this majority is often subordinated to the elite minority. Do the women and men outside of the dominant paradigm have the same or similar experiences of learning, of facilitation and of processing of experiences the same as for the dominant voices? In writing to a Malaysian readership, Ho Ha Yin suggested that “cultural sensitivity is an important factor in experiential learning in the Malaysian context. Not taking heed of cultural differences would be tantamount to a disastrous training career” (Yin, 1999:7).

While acknowledging that the participants may come from very different social, economic, cultural and educational backgrounds than the writers in the dominant paradigms of experiential learning may be beneficial, to focus just upon the differences of individuals in the experience may not be enough. Individuals in corporate experiential learning programs generally work for organisations; organisations want their objectives achieved and the ability to do so is threatened by constantly changing organisational, social and economic environments. Another issue that may be pertinent, but outside the scope of this dissertation, is the impact upon the experience from areas such as:

- the organisational culture;
• economic and social environments;

• climates of change, and

• innovation.

To facilitate the process of considering the differences between participants, one ‘lens’ that is used in this thesis is that of learning styles.

1.9. Learning Styles: What’s that?

Central to this thesis is the concept of learning styles. Chapter 3 addresses the question at greater depth by looking at the wide variety of learning style models and theories (some of which have been developed for children, others for adults) as well as the distinction between learning style, cognitive style and personality and the origins of the Learning Styles Analysis as used in this study. At its most basic a learning style is your preferred way of learning. Depending upon which learning style model you use, this could include categories such as:

• activists, reflectors, theorists and pragmatists (e.g. Honey, 1991);

• multiple-intelligences such as visual-spatial, logical-sequential and musical (e.g. Gardner, 1993a; Gardner, 1993b);

• concrete experimentation and abstract conceptualisation (e.g. Kolb, 1984);

• sensory modalities: visual, auditory, kinaesthetic and tactile (e.g. Bandler and Grinder, 1979; O’Connor and Seymour, 1994; Rose, 1985); and

• left brain/right brain (e.g. Caine and Caine, 1991; 1987; Edwards, 1979).

The Learning Style Analysis, as used here, goes beyond most of these categories by including not just ways of receiving information and processing information such as communication styles or cognitive processing styles, but also taking into consideration the physical environment, the time of day, needs for light, sound and food, social contexts and more. Learning styles as an area of study is not new, nor is referring to learning styles in the context of experiential learning (Holman et al., 1997;
What is new about this study is the intent to go beyond these narrowly defined models of learning styles and adopt a broader, more holistic, model of learning as presented by Dunn and Prashnig’s model (Prashnig, 1996). This model provides opportunity for people to create more effective learning spaces for themselves, thus taking greater control over their learning and, ultimately, become more effective learners.

1.10. There's Nothing New in This!

"Far from reasoning about experience, we listen to it. As musicians might listen to voices joined with them in producing a symphony" (Crotty, 1998)

While addressing learning styles within the context of experiential learning is not new it is interesting that one response to my interest, as alluded to before, has been that the focus of this study is not relevant, and of no importance. There is a risk of trying to wave a flag that bears the standard of learning styles and being told that the topic is dead. Yet as I look at my own experience in work (both in training and development and as a University lecturer), and as I participate in a variety of learning experiences, I continue to notice a push for achievement of outcomes at lower cost, with higher ratios, in less time and yet, somehow, achieve more. This had been my experience of higher education, of corporate training and of delivering internal training programs. Personally this suggests that the decision makers are out of touch with the needs of learning, of the learner and of the facilitator. In my experience, learning takes time. Not just surface or superficial learning, but real learning that involves changes is aspects such as behaviour, attitudes and perspectives (Delahaye, 2000).

I wonder what learning programs would look like if they were structured to meet the needs of the learner? Needs that could include the categories such as: sensory modalities, social context, formality, structure, time of day and mobility. What would a model of learning look like? What would the timeframe be? How could we ever budget for it?

More of that later. First to the journey ...
1.11. A Journey of Exploration

Exploration, whether of jungles or minds, is considered unfeminine, Anne Tucker, editor, photographic critic and historian, 1973

Wanted: Someone who wishes to embark upon a journey of exploration.

Essential: sense of purpose, the support of mentors, the willingness to take a risk, the time to make errors, the ability to gather resources and a spirit of adventure.

Destination: unknown. Length of time: unknown

Imagine if you saw this advertisement: would you want to join the journey?

This thesis, for me, is a journey of exploration. I have had a sense of the direction, but until I actually arrived, I did not necessarily know where I was going until I get there. Along the way I have spent time exploring paths that have turned out to be irrelevant, and at times I have become geographically embarrassed. Nevertheless, mostly I trusted my instinct to continue, to learn from those diversions, to reflect upon my experience and continue to move on.

1.11.1. Steps Along the Way

As part of a PhD it is often suggested that your question should be clearly defined. Progress reports include the titles of the thesis, friends and family want to know what you are spending all your time and energy doing. Yet this thesis passed through many variations on the one theme. The variations were influenced by my experience, my knowledge, my supervisors, what I was reading and at times, I think, it seems, the way the wind was blowing or what season it was! Thus the thesis had a range of incarnations and 'faces'. An example of the variations iterations and changes of direction is reflected in the range of titles that have been used:
June 1996: An Investigation of the Connections Between the Effectiveness of Experiential education and Individual Learning Styles (PhD Offer Documents)


September 1999: The use of the “Learning Styles Analysis” to aid insight into Individual Responses to and Learning from an Experiential Learning Program (Ethics Committee Application)

October 1999: How Does Knowledge and Experience of Learning Styles Change the Way We Facilitate Learning Experiences?: Tailoring learning experiences to optimise organisational effectiveness (Postgraduate Research Day)

July, 2001: Facilitating Learning: Mine, Yours and Others: Gaining Insight into the Facilitation of Experiential Learning through the Lenses of Personal Experience and the Learning Styles Analysis


What is the title? What is the focus? At the completion of the journey it was clear. But until then I took the maps of research designs, learning experiences and other’s experiences of doctoral study, the compass of supervisors and colleagues (I did not have a Global Positioning System (GPS) as there were no satellites flying over where I went!), the timeframes of PhD enrolments, personal energy levels and opportunity. In my ‘backpack’ I carried with me my acquired experiences of researching, writing, learning, facilitating, questioning and walking in untracked areas. At times along the journey I needed to ‘pitch my tent’, sometimes by the river, other times on mountain tops and all too frequently, deep in a valley surrounded by thick growth, unable to clearly see the path. Other times I ploughed through that foliage, scaling the mountain and seeing the views for miles and float along that river, knowing full well that where I was and where I was going is totally on track. The weather along the way also changed, storms of emotion, work stress, health and travel slowed my progress. Tail winds of support groups and feedback from conference participants moved me on and head winds of administrators, research committees and playing political games as a result of studying experiential learning in a department focusing on management, slowed me down. I was comforted by the fact that I could stop, pitch that tent, boil the billy, refocus, reorient, recharge and then move on.
1.11.2. Preparing for the Journey

In approaching this thesis I came with a range of experiences of experiential learning, as participant, facilitator, program manager and trainer of facilitators. I also had a questioning spirit, a mind that pursued answers and a desire that this be more than an epic academic adventure, but that it resulted in new learning, insights and questions for any who read this thesis, learning, insights and questions that the reader would be able to apply in their professional practice.

1.11.3. Scenery Along the Journey

As an exploratory journey some choices had to be made about what was seen and what was left for future journeys, much as when you make a photo, your choices determine what is inside and outside the frame. If a different person was to make the photo, they may choose to include and exclude different things from me. With interests that include the diverse topics of learning, facilitation, experiential learning, adventure based learning and others, it was not possible to explore each and every aspect at a significant depth. The structure, as discussed below, of the thesis is loosely connected (and maybe facetiously given my efforts at ‘subverting the dominant paradigm’) to a commonly used ‘debriefing’ structure: What?, So What?, Now What? (Schoel, Prouty and Radcliffe, 1988).

a. Starting Out

Chapter 2 outlines the diverse methods investigated and applied in this journey of exploration, including autoethnography, surveys and interviews as well as reflection and deconstruction of dominant texts. These methods, as with the whole dissertation, are held together with a heuristic research process. Chapter 3 focuses on the existing literature on experiential learning, reviewing where it has come from and questioning its ‘orthodoxy’. Chapter 4, the ‘What?’, tells my story as a learner over a period of more than a year. It raises the questions of motivation, place and space and creating time for learning. Connections are made between my experience of learning and my Learning Styles Analysis.
b. Not Always the Right Path

This journey, this process of writing and reflecting upon my writing has not always been a straightforward process as one might want from a PhD. Ideally, you might think, the research process would be clearly defined at the beginning and that the research process would be closely followed throughout. This has not been my experience. If there were time I could relate the many paths that I have followed, that seemed to be right at the time, but stopped at dead-ends. These have included seeking to use situations such as some conference workshops I ran in 2000 and 2001 as well as a range of postgraduate classes, which were just not the right group, at the right time for this research.

c. Back on Track

As part of the heuristic research process Chapter 5, the So What?, evolved into something different due to the different paths I have followed as I have gathered new and different information. In the end it has become a combination of three sources of information:

- an analysis of LSAs I have gathered from over 70 people, mostly postgraduate students
- insights from two unstructured interviews with NRG members about their experiences of learning, including experiential learning
- an analysis of the practice of facilitators who have attended workshops I have conducted at two conferences in 2002: one in South East Asia and one in North America.

d. Broadening the Scope

As with Chapter 5, Chapter 6 also evolved from what I initially intended, to what it has become as the beginning of opening-up my journey of exploration after narrowing the focus down to myself in Chapter 4, and the slightly broader scope of Chapter 5. In Chapter 6, the scope was broadened by looking at some of the traditional literature through different lenses such as deconstruction. I actively sought other literature
normally unconnected to experiential learning but which, I believe, may present a new light on my emerging themes of place and space through literature in areas such as human geography and organisational aesthetics.

Having shifted from the micro (Chapter 4) towards the macro (Chapters 5 and 6), Chapter 7 is the creative synthesis of this journey. It is an effort to pull all the elements together in the ‘Now What?’ of this thesis. Chapter 7 presents a creative synthesis of the journey and where it ends, a location called Place and Space. It is a weaving together of photos of places that have ‘spoken’ to me, interwoven with the words of Dorothy Mackellar’s poem, My Country.

1.12. If You Are Reading This, I Have Survived the Journey

1.12.1. Metaphors and Analogies: Peaks to Climb, Valleys to Descend

On a trip I led with Year 11 girls from a private school we spent a day and a half walking along a valley floor following various waterways. The only things we could see were the trees, rocks and the rising valley walls either side of us. On day three we ascended a long climb up a dry creek bed to reach a small gap in the cliff line. Before us lay miles and miles of another valley with large areas of cleared land. We could sit on the edge of ‘the world’ and look forward to where we were about to go. For this group there was a real connection to current experiences as they trudged though the valley of Year 11, knowing at some stage in the future, after a long slog through the Higher School Certificate, they would arrive at a point where their whole lives lay spread out before them. There were choices to be made, opportunities to be explored. They set their course and then moved off with a spring in their step. As they continued to walk during the next two days they could look back at the cliff line through which we had come and see the small notch in the cliffs, only just discernable, and at times they would wonder how they ever made it through. We reached our destination. We sat and shared their stories, celebrated and commiserated. They thanked God they survived and, often, determined not to do it again. But all the while, they were happy with their achievements.
I recalled this experience many times as I work through my PhD. The experience of being in that ‘valley’, where I believe I was on the right track but I could not find a point where I can take my bearings. It was not until I climbed that creek bed that I could find a place where things became clear. Here the path before me was easy to see and I knew that I was in a place where I believed I could achieve the task.

Throughout the thesis I have used many metaphors and analogies to help express myself. This is part of presenting my ‘voice’. Not everyone who reads these metaphors and analogies will like them, some may wish that I ‘just get to the point’, however, for me, they are part of who I am and how I best express my views. This use of metaphor and analogy may also connect with my more right brain and visual preferences of my preferred learning style.

1.12.2. A Reconnaissance for Another Trip

As a mixture of autoethnography and exploratory studies, this may be best viewed as a reconnaissance for future adventures. I did not set out to have all the answers, but I was setting out to find key points that would require future exploration. These key points may act as ‘navigation markers’ for others who may wish to follow a similar journey. By no means is this Thesis the ‘Lonely Planet Guide to Facilitation’. For future adventurers there will still be much territory to be explored, new paths and monuments to discover and there will still be many significant decisions to be made along their journey.