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 4: What?: The LSA and Me as Learner: A Room of One’s Own

... a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction (Woolf, 1929/1995:13)

4.1. Introduction

Moustakas (1990) suggests that in a heuristic research process the researcher must be willing to “commit endless hours of sustained immersion and focused concentration on one central question” (Moustakas, 1990:14). For heuristic research patience is essential as one seeks to find the data within me and to face the challenge of discovering and explicating that data (Moustakas, 1990). Intuitively I have followed that path of searching for the ‘data within’ through immersing myself in the topic, spending more than a year writing, noting, thinking, reflecting upon my own experience of learning that compliments my immersion in the literature as presented in Chapter 3.

Presenting My Voice

As an aid to increasing the ‘volume’ of my voice, the layout of the following text is such that my voice is written in the dominant font, while the ‘voice’ of the literature is presented using a smaller font and compressed line spacing. The ‘voice’ of my LSA is presented like a note on the side of the text, again in a smaller font. The ‘voice’ I want to appear dominant is mine.

Research About Yourself?

Sitting and writing about oneself might seem somewhat self-indulgent. To do that and then call it a PhD could be considered a joke, or at least amusing to some of my friends. As expressed previously, an autoethnography was one of the last things in my mind regarding my research, initially, I wanted to ‘prove’ something, to come away with a new model or a new means of assessing learning styles, at least something that would be of ‘value’ to other practitioners. For the most part, my investigations have revolved around my own questions and insights, and it is through the medium of an
autoethnography that these begin to be valued and validated in their own right, without the external validation that may occur through some quasi-positivist methodology.

As discussed in Chapter 2, my search for a methodology and appropriate methods has been a journey in itself. What follows is a record of my thoughts and insights, at times crowded out by the 'noise' of life and living, and at other times lucid and free flowing. As I have written I have taken the time to read back through my musings and to begin to relate these to my Learning Styles Analysis (Dunn and Prashnig, 2000) as well as, at times, to other literature that seems pertinent to the points I have made.

The autoethnography begins on 9th July, 2000. The only significance of this date, apart from the fact that it was the first day I sat down to record my thoughts, is that it is five years after my enrolment in the EdD/PhD, it has taken this long for me to value my own thoughts and insights enough to record them. The entries begin almost in a forced fashion. I do not know what I want to write nor why I am writing anyway and where it is all leading. Prior to this date I have made a few notes in a journal (a lovely leather-bound journal bought in New Zealand in 1998 for the specific purpose, with a spiral on the cover that was symbolic for me of my learning). However in the written format I have always been reluctant to put my thoughts down in ink – it does not allow the editing process, of thoughts, ideas and spelling that occurs as I type.

The final entry is on 7th August, 2001, 13 months later, through which time the entries and reflections became a much more relaxed and natural process, my awareness began to be raised about when and where these moments of reflection were occurring, and what, to some extent, would create or hinder my own reflective space. As the writing has progressed so has the tendency to include other stimulus or images that have jumped to mind, these include works or art and cartoons. The use of the visual is just one aspect that emerges from these reflections and my Learning Style Analysis that is important to me. Other themes that continue to surface include issues related to the physical space, emotional space, movement and views.

The timetable about when, how or what to write, was not pre-determined, it was only determined as I felt the need to write or to not write. The time period covers a significant decision I made to move from Sydney, a city of over 4 million people and
just 60km to work, to Jindabyne, with a summer population of less than 2,000 and over 400km to work. Was the move initiated by the reflections of the autoethnography or was the autoethnography able to happen because of the move? Or are they too entwined to be able to differentiate the two? I am not sure.

4.2. The Story Begins

Attempts at Beginning

9 July, 2000, Granny Flat, Caringbah

For the duration, to-date, of my enrolment in the PhD I have been ‘holed-up’ in a room where, as one person has suggested, I need to go outside to swing a cat. This place has been one of expediency, of economic advantage and of seemingly simplicity. Yet as I begin to ponder about what and how I learn I begin to feel the deep frustration I have with this location in terms of not just the space to be and to learn but also a space to expand, to socialise and to share. Let me explain ....

The room, or bed-sit for want of a better term, consists of a room and a bathroom. In this room of approx 400 square feet I have a lounge, a desk, a bed and a dining table as well as a compact kitchen.

... and to see their houses with their dark, cramped rooms, to realize that no woman could have written poetry then (Woolf, 1929/1995:65)

There is one window that looks out over the backyard and onto the back fence. When the curtains are open, not only can the other residences of this place see in, so can the neighbours. Over the top of the fence and the neighbour’s house I can see the sky. In the morning the sun comes in, but by early morning it goes, leaving this place in coolness. With no insulation in the roof, the room is hot in summer and cold in winter, difficult to cool and difficult to heat. The only other window is one that sits high and looks over the roof of another neighbour providing little light and even less inspiration.
If a woman wrote, she would have to write in the common sitting-room (Woolf, 1929/1995:73)

Even with the little furniture I have the room is cramped, with a small amount of space on the floor where I can sit (my preferred space often times). The lounge is old, it came with the room (I think my land lady didn’t know what else to do with it!). To make the lounge more comfortable I put spare blankets under the cushions to fill the gaps that are a result of sagging springs and failing stuffing. I cover the lounge with a crocheted rug my mother made that consists of colours that even the rainbow would refuse ownership of! The only chair I have is also propped up with old blankets and towels covered with a lovely throw rug purchased at the Melbourne Art Gallery. It seems such a contradiction to have such a sad chair draped with a creative and quality throw. The hope was to make this a chair of reading and learning, and yet I can hardly remember the last time I sat in it. There is something about it that is just not right (sounds a little like Goldilocks!).

What is right with this chair? What is wrong with this chair? Is it the colour, the size, the location or maybe the comfort? What chairs have I sat in when I wanted to work? What did they look like? Where were they placed? What is important about ‘chairness’? The only one that really comes to mind is in the sitting room of a Bed and Breakfast in Bundanoon, suitably called “Idle a Wile”. It is a large chair with big square arms. I can sit in that chair with my legs curled up with my work resting on the big, broad arms. The muted natural light flows in from behind and there is a lamp stand next to the chair giving out a soft and warm glow. The open fireplace is just near by; the walls of the room are dark and warm. Outside the days can be bitterly cold, yet inside all is warm and comfy with much work achieved. It is in this place where I have most recently sat and worked well. I concentrated, completed and corrected many exams and essays. The environment for me was one were my learning was focused. But was it just the chair and the light?

Bundanoon is also a place where I can play. A place to ride, a place to walk and to talk. The food is great, the environment friendly and there are people about.

Mobility: Whether you need to move while you learn, study or concentrate strongly depends on your interest in the topic or the learning situation itself. When you lose interest or get bored with a learning task you often need to move a lot more. … Light: You definitely prefer to learn and study in low light
areas ... For best results you need to read, study or learn in indirect, subdued lighting, away from bright sunlight or artificial light. ... Temperature: ... you prefer your environment to be more warm than cool ... Study Area: ... You do your best thinking, reading or studying on a bed, lounge chair, floor or carpet in an informal environment and a relaxed posture (Dunn and Prashnig, 2000:7-8).

A Room of One’s Own

... Intellectual freedom depends upon material things. Poetry depends upon intellectual freedom. And women have always been poor ... Women have had less intellectual freedom than the sons of Athenian slave (Woolf, 1929/1995:112)

What is my picture of a place of learning? Where do I see my self set up writing furiously, inspired, challenged, enthused about my learning and my writing? What would the environment be like to support my process of reflection?

The picture I see is one where all is ordered, where there is abundant space for books, files, papers and notes. A whiteboard for plotting and planning and a place for writing and dreaming. This ‘room’ would have a view, a view that inspired, challenged and encouraged me. The view would be of nature not of Colorbond fences and tiled rooves. Contrary to my previous thoughts my ideal place is not one of an urban environment, but a rural retreat, preferably with water and mountains. My heart yearns for a place of space. Where music can play, birds fly and the ideas may flow and grow. There would be a place for sitting at a table, for drinking coffee while reading an article. There would be room for walking and talking, for entertaining where ideas may be germinated, encouraged and shared with others.

Has my resistance and reluctance for writing been a result of not having created my own learning space? How have I considered creating an environment for myself that encourages learning just as I consider the needs of my students and participants? Maybe, again, I should walk my talk.

Phenomenology also offers valuable insight into the physical, ecological, and energy dimensions of locality, community, and place. An ecological phenomenology of physical environment and landscape asks how people-in-places work experientially and behaviorally as ecological units. A major concern is whether stability and rootedness in place promote a more efficient use of energy, space, and environment than today’s predominant-place relationship emphasizing spatial mobility and the frequent disruption and destruction of unique places (Seamon, 1984:3).
The LSA in my Own Life

Looking to my learning style I see that my preferred environment is one that is informal, warm, muted light and with sounds. (Dunn and Prashnig, 2000).

I am not the only woman who needed to find the ‘right’ place in order to write, but, as noted above, Woolf suggests that having the place is often linked to having the money. For me, the right place means a mortgage – hopefully not on my life. Having a mortgage is possible only as a result of a change of job in July, 1999.

My experience is not new, there are other women who have had similar experiences of needing to ‘get away’:

Virginia Woolf, well known author:

It was a thousand pities that the woman who could write like that, whose mind was tuned to nature and reflection, should have been forced to anger and bitterness. But how could she have helped herself? … She must have shut herself up in a room in the country to write (Woolf, 1929/1995:67).

Lene Gammelgard, Danish mountaineer and writer of her experiences on Mount Everest in 1996 when eight climbers died:

when I returned to Denmark, my Danish publisher … tries to help me get going on the book project with various words of advice. Unable to respond, I finally told him that he needed to trust my inner creative process, to have faith and leave me in peace for a while. I knew the book was already written inside of me: ‘The book is finished; I can feel it – it just needs typing.’

I spent the late summer of 1996 at a writing retreat … In seclusion I was finally able to feel (Gammelgard, 1999:xiv).

Barbara Prashnig, author and teacher of learning styles:

Knowing my own learning style, how I could work most effectively and which environment I needed to be creative, I had been dreaming about the perfect place for a long time. Armoured with my laptop computer, a lot of sun tan lotion, a suitcase full of reference books, and half my collection of classical CD’s I retreated to Fiji for a few weeks over the Christmas break (Prashnig, 1996:v).

What Place Jindabyne?

... the mind of an artist, in order to achieve the prodigious effort of freeing whole and entire the work that is in him, must be
Does the possibility of moving to Jindabyne open the doors to ‘my own room’?, a room where I can have the space to explore ideas and to reflect upon my learning? Jindabyne is a place I have often retreated to for peace and solitude. A place of refreshment and rejuvenation and a place of exertion.

Jindabyne is the gate to the Snowy Mountains, a place where my heart thrills at the places to explore and play. Yet is this what I need to ensure I complete my PhD? Am I clutching at straws only to have it all collapse around me? How important to my learning is the creation of a ‘room of my own’, my own personalised learning space?

How can I use the LSA to help create my own unique learning space? What are the risks? Are they worth the cost: financial, physical, social and emotional?

This journey may not reveal its answers until the very end.

Clearing the Head


After a week or more of doing little, both in terms of work (marking, class preparation, just the normal) and study, I went for a swim today. I have not exercised for over a week and I could feel the effects: stressed, uptight, short tempered and impatient. But I jumped into the pool and did a fairly hard 1km. Got home, felt a-buzz, went shopping, then home again. After dinner I then drifted to doing some work, finalising an exam paper, typing a whole pile of feedback on presentations as well as some class preparation (all the tedious stuff that I had been avoiding). All the time I was sitting on the floor in a warmish environment wearing comfy clothes. Then
as I was sitting watching TV (nothing very engaging) at about 8pm, my mind started drifting to thoughts about this PhD. I thought I’d make a quick few notes about deconstruction as a starting point for that section.

What is it about doing something physical and then ‘clearing the head’ by getting some work out of the way. What is it about place and space (physical, emotional and cognitive)?

**Noticing**

4/09/00 9:47, Office, Uni of Wollongong, trying to mark MGMT 908 Essays

Over the last few days (and even into weeks) I have been in the process of buying the unit in Jindabyne. Last Thursday the contracts exchanged, finally! On the weekend I began searching for house-type things more earnestly. One area I want to change is the bathroom, maybe by adding a border across the top of the tiles. What I needed was a tile shop. I knew that BBC has tiles as well as Harvey Norman, as I had been to these two shops many times in the last 5 years of living in the area. But, I had no clue where there might be a specialist tile shop. After looking in the phone book, I found the address and went to the shop. It was next door to an auto parts shop that I have also been to several times before, yet I had never noticed the tile shop next door. It is not new, nor is it hidden; I had just not ‘seen’ it before. It was only when I needed to see it that it became obvious. After ‘finding’ the shop I then began to ‘see’ other things, including advertising about this shop that I had never ‘seen’ before.

What relevance does this have to learning and to facilitation? Does this suggest about frontloading (Priest and Gass, 1993) being the way to go? Can we expect people to ‘find’ things in the experience when they don’t know what it is they are looking for? Do we need to give them the filters, frames and focus (such as the topics and the things to be learned) before the experience, rather than hoping that afterwards they will see the same thing?

In the area where the tile and auto shops were there were also places to buy furniture and Gyprock (I think I noticed these because I had also been thinking about furniture and Gyprock). If I were to take a group there what would they notice? What else is
there that I didn’t see? What different things would I see if I had other things on my mind? In some ways it is like buying a new car. It is only when you have bought it that you ‘notice’ that everyone else seems to own the same car, yet you never noticed that before.

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) writes about consciousness within a phenomenological model based on information theory. In this model the focus is upon the “events – phenomena - as we experience and interpret them, rather than focusing on anatomical structures, neurochemical processes, or unconscious purposes” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). The catalyst to translate an experience into consciousness is intent or attention. Without the focus of intent, or attention, the experience will only occur as information, with intent that information can be translated into action.

Crotty (1998) relates a story about the impact of framing or lenses on the interpretation of an experience through the story of students in a poetry classroom. Stanley Fish, a language and linguistics teacher, commenced a poetry class with a list of names still on the board from a previous class. Rather than clean the board, he placed a border around the list and told his poetry class that the words were a poem. The students then proceeded to deeply explore the meaning of this “poem” resulting in significant meanings being attributed to the words and the structure. “In Fish’s story we find human beings engaging with a reality and making sense of it. Obviously, it is possible to make sense of the same reality in quite different ways … strikingly diverse understandings can be formed of the same phenomenon” (Crotty, 1998).

Jindabyne Settlement Day

18/09/00 13:30, Lounge Room, Jindabyne

Today I officially own this place (well I should in a few hours, but I am in here already). Over the last week or so it has been very clear how much I like things to be just right when it comes to my study: the time, the place, the space. It all has to be the way I picture it. The pressure I put on myself to get into the unit this week was immense, and even possibly illogical. I have had in mind that I would spend this week (not last week, not next week, not the week after) focusing on the topic of deconstruction. It was irrelevant that I have another two weeks of the break, it had to
be this week. I spent much time and energy making it happen. And here I am. The weather is perfect, the sun is shining, I have my books and I have my computer. My study is not ready, but I am making progress. Today I am using a sampler pot of paint to test the colour, hopefully tomorrow I can paint and then move everything tomorrow night. I am going for a dark colour for a subdued feel and a comfortable setting.

"Visual (internal – visualising): ...You have the ability to ‘see’ the solution for difficult learning situations in your mind" (Dunn and Praschnig, 2000:7)

Being here I am much more relaxed. I am where I want to be, in a place that I can call my own (well, mine and the bank’s), and a place where I can live, work and play. This place provides an environment that goes beyond a room of one’s own, it also provides a place where I can indulge my desire for practical, hands-on things such as painting walls and restoring furniture.

Does this reflect my desire for movement?

"Mobility: Whether you need to move while you learn, study or concentrate strongly depends on your interest in the topic or the learning situation itself" (Dunn and Praschnig, 2000:7)

If things are not in place I get stressed and I miss “the flow”. I seem to work best when the moment is right, whenever that is. My preference for having everything just right even comes down to the chair I sit on. It has to be comfortable and preferably one with movement such as a swivel or rocking chair. The thought of not having a swivel desk chair was causing me stress and I even considered buying another. When it appeared that my sister was unable to bring my old desk chair down from Grafton I was beginning to almost panic! It had to be there to make things just right. Anything else and I did not feel as if I could concentrate.

My LSA profile mentions my preference for a comfortable and informal environment. My desire for a swivel or rocking chair may even be reflected in my kinaesthetic/tactile learning style.

"Light: ... For best results you need to read, study or learn in indirect, subdued lighting, away from bright sunlight or artificial light. ... Study Area: Your need for formal/informal furniture and classroom set-up while learning or studying is dependent upon what you do but you prefer not having too much formality" (Dunn and Praschnig, 2000:9)
I am sitting at my desk in my new study, with walls painted in a colour called Deep Henna. The colour is a cross between a burnt orange and a deep ochre. It is strong, dark and rich. The light is subdued, the TV is playing in my right ear, I am sitting on my swivel desk chair and I can look out over a beautiful view of a sunny Lake Jindabyne, and life is just right! I am working, thinking and I am relaxed, comfortable and ‘operational’.

“Sound: You often work with some kind of sound present – maybe music, voices, sounds of nature or even traffic noise” (Dunn and Prashnig, 2000:8)

Outside it is blowing a gale. With the wind-waves, the lake looks more like a massive river moving towards the dam wall. The combination of wind and sun gives a sense of movement and activity that differs from the norm. Even sitting in the lounge this morning I had the curtains wide open. The sense of space creates a much more inspirational place for learning than when I sat in my caged cupboard in Caringbah. I remember many years ago seeing a tiger in a small cage. She moved backwards and forwards in that small space, there was nothing around her that would look like a natural environment. People had unlimited ability to look into her living area, there was nowhere she could hide, no where she could get away from the stares and nowhere where she could run. I felt sorry for her and her plight. Often, during the time that I lived in Caringbah, I had a sense of being like that tiger. I had no where to move and when I opened the windows or walked out the door there where always people seemingly looking in. I need space in the area in which I which I live and I need the space in my own head where there is the room to bounce ideas around. That solitude is essential, I can achieve this in long drives, in walking to the shops, in going for a swim. But always on my own and normally when I am doing something like moving, walking or driving. Maybe this is why I enjoy the Snowy Mountains region: the big skies, the views that go forever, the colour and the inspiration.

“Visual (external –watching): You have a strong preference for seeing/watching/observing ... Looking at works of art or things of beauty
might quite excite you and your visual sense is probably very important to you." (Dunn and Prashnig, 2000:6)

While I like being alone there is also a sense that people are of importance. As I read my LSA Report I read the following:

"Pairs: You really need a friend or fellow student to learn or study with. When you have someone else to solve problems or exchange ideas with, you find it more enjoyable and achieve better results .... Peers: You are very flexible and usually have no problems fitting in a learning group consisting of peers. However, you don't always need people around you to learn or study with or think problems over" (Dunn and Prashnig, 2000:9)

The people component is important. Who they are, what they know and what they have to contribute are important factors. This may explain why I feel as if my family are an obstacle to my learning. They do not understand what I am doing; they do not understand my area of interest whether it be about learning or about experiential activities. I don’t want to go back to explain what I am doing, I want to move on, to clarify, to redefine to find the next step.

(In the intervening weeks I am back teaching, marking, and preparing to go overseas, life is too busy just to stop and think)

Not Now!

1/11/00 22:07: Tucson, AZ, Inn Suites, Hotel

As a presenter and as a student I am looking for the absolutely ‘right’ way. Often I get bogged down until it ‘feels’ right. I can’t just sit down and work when I have to or need to. If the moment is right the ideas seem to flow. What is right doesn’t necessarily have any consistency or external measure. Right is more about feeling right. As I have walked the streets over the last two days I have written nothing, I have attempted to write and plan the workshop, but the ideas don’t flow. There are many pieces in my mind, parts of a puzzle that are out there floating, but the big picture is not clear. I cannot ‘see’ where they fit. One of the pieces that is missing at the moment is what the room looks like and who will be there. What is the feel? What are the resources such as paper, data projectors, flipchart etc.? How many people are likely to be around? Today I bought some toys to use, but the whole thing is not together. I know that the pieces will fall into place when they need to, that is
usually just before I have to do it, but while there are some pieces missing I can’t force it to work.

Something that is also missing from this presentation is lack of motivation. I don’t really want to be here. I am tired after this year and am looking forward to a break. Presenting to an audience that I am not excited about is not helping. I am guessing that I will get the adrenaline rush when I do it, but with little excitement about being here and about the conference, the external motivators are lacking. Even if I thought there would be some critical thought from the audience or that there might be some professional challenge in presenting the topic or from the calibre of the audience I may also be motivated, however at this stage I am just going through the paces.

People who show a strong right brain dominance: Seem to be less organised..., Are more creative ..., Are often non-conforming, Tend to live and work in ‘creative chaos’, only follow through if they have to ..., Prefer to use their imagination and intuition ..., Need variety ..., Are more often found among females ..., The implications of these findings are: Over organisation leads to ‘mindlessness’..., The harder these people try to stick to the rules the more stressed, frustrated and unproductive they become ..., Nothing in the world will make people motivated and productive if they can’t or don’t want to work under strictly organised conditions (Prashnig, 1996:203-5).

It all sounds so simple and straightforward! Why don’t they tell people these things? I remember sitting in a PhD progress meeting being told that I should just sit down each day and write. I tried explaining to the Chair of the committee but they did not understand at all. For that person learning seemed to be about discipline, about structure. For her I was an example of being undisciplined and what she determined was necessary was for my supervisor to send me regular, semi-threatening, notes to keep me moving forward (little did she know!). It was pure Theory X/Theory Y motivation theory (Fulop and Linstead, 1999). If only the chair could have stood back far enough to see how her beliefs influenced the quality of her advice. She had much to offer if only she could stand in my shoes for just a few moments. She didn’t, I thought about her advice, briefly, then ignored her. She left. I went on my way. Is this stubbornness or just a clear manifestation of avoiding the state where “over organisation leads to ‘mindlessness’ ... and can become counter-productive” (Prashnig, 1996:205)?
The LSA doesn’t necessarily explain the need for things to be ‘right’. That is something that seems to have greater connection to DiSC Behavioural Styles, by Carlson Learning, with C, conscientious, providing more explanation for my behaviour than my learning style.

**Making Connections in The Big Apple**

8/11/00 12:53, Friends’ Apartment, Manhattan, New York

*The ultimate compliment for the artist is that their work becomes useful to their society, not in the monumental ways of the narrow utilitarian manner but as a natural, enlivening element belonging to the unselfconscious spirituality of everyday life where in people spontaneously make whatever sense they can of existence. In this vast, ordinary turmoil that artists work is inevitably rearranged, embellished, twisted, hybridised or broken down and destroyed by forces beyond the understanding or control of the original creator. To bear this gladly, to see it as an achievement or feel it as a relief the artist must believe in and delight in arts transitional, inconclusive nature, its ongoing, independent life and its vigorous tendency towards mutation and transfiguration because ultimately, what the artist is most interested in and enchanted by is not the form that art takes but the movement that is made, for its truth is not static – it moves, it can be felt, it is animated! (Leunig, 2001)*

Wandering the streets of New York I can feel the energy. There does not seem to be enough time to go everywhere, see everything. Each place needs time to sit and absorb, to read and to reflect. Streets are too long to explore in a day, bookshops have more books than one could read in a lifetime and museums have more artefacts than can be appreciated in several lifetimes. Yet, in the midst of this busy-ness there seems to be a few constant themes or streams of consciousness as I walk and think about experience and learning. These do not necessarily clearly connect in some linear way but they do connect in my experience. Some of the pieces that keep coming to mind include: Csikszentmihalyi on Flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Csikszentmihalyi, 1997), Frank Lloyd Wright’s architecture, and notions of space, place and noticing. These are not necessarily new ideas; in fact Frank Lloyd Wright dates back to my High School art studies when the outstanding notion, for me, of Lloyd Wright was the concept of form following function. As I walked around the Metropolitan Museum of Art (The Met) in New York today two other perspectives seem to connect with these,
Dali's The Persistence of Memory (Figure 4-2) and Escher's drawings (Figure 4-3 and Figure 4-4) which both portray images that challenge how we see and experience the world and thus the potential to challenge our understandings of the world.

Dali's The Persistence of Memory (Figure 4-2), with images of watches sagging over other structures, makes me think of seeing things differently. Time is fluid, flexible.

We would normally consider a clock as a hard, static object, yet this picture conveys an image of the watches like pieces of fabric, draped over a line. Time is flexible in our dry and barren land. What I would normally expect to see may not be what is there. What is Dali's reality may not be mine. Escher and Dali challenge my thinking and perceptions.

"Visual (external - watching) : ... Looking at works of art or things of beauty might quite excite you and your visual sense is probably very important to you" (Dunn and Prashnig, 2000:6)
Escher takes what might be taken for granted and twists it. What appears to be a 'head' in Figure 4-3 may appear as an orange peel to another and a ribbon to someone else. To another they may only see the clouds in the distance. The stairs in Figure 4-4 appear to be 'real' but as my eye climbs those stairs, my reality is twisted and I shifted through a range of perspectives, arriving at where I began. Reality is reinterpreted, and what I thought I knew I now find myself questioning and having to refocus and explore the meaning. It is not just Escher, but also others, those looking at the picture and those within the picture. Each of us have different perspectives, each of us may see and experience the world in a different way.

The visit to The Met followed a conversation last night with a long time friend with whom I went to high school. We briefly talked about school and what we are doing, yet there is a part that she does not understand about me, the part that does not learn in the traditional way. I survived school and did quite well (though not exceptionally). The more exceptional part was the little amount of work I actually put into the study.

I would say now that when I got to Stuvac at the end of Year 12 I did not know what to do, I didn’t know how to study, I still don’t think I know how. Stuff goes in and bounces around and somehow it links up with some other ‘stuff’ that is in my head. While talking last night I noticed myself trying to do what Bacon may call a transderivational search (Bacon, 1983), I was trying to make connections between what I was hearing (about the purpose of work) to what I had been reading that day.
Csikszentmihalyi, 1997. I wanted the connection, I wanted to make those links, those connections, but was too tired to help it happen; yet if I don’t try, sometimes it just happens.

The process of learning is wondrously spectacular and messy, and it does not easily fit within a closely defined, classroom-based curriculum (Abbott, 1997:6).

**Why Now and Not in Tucson at the AEE Conference?**

Last week while in Tucson I had ample time to think and to write. There was plenty of room in the hotel room, lots of spare time between preconference and conference events. Even the need to prepare a workshop wasn’t so daunting as to stop me thinking. What seemed a bigger issue for me was that I felt like that trapped tiger. I could not find a place for reflecting. A place of inspiration, a space for thoughts to roam around within my mind and to make connections. A group of international conference attendees spent a day travelling around the desert museum and going for a walk in the desert, but it was not a time to reflect. The most difficult aspect was that we were on someone else’s schedule. There wasn’t time to stop and enjoy the scenery, to ponder big and small things, to create the space in my head and my life to let the ‘free radical’ ideas flow. Busy-ness and lack of choice are like the antioxidants to the creation of free-radical ideas! Even now, as I sit here in NY, the opportunity to write and reflect is only possible as everyone else is out. I am here on my own. No children, no noise, no uncontrolled distractions (as distinct from music which I choose to fill the empty spaces and over which I control). I wonder what Csikszentmihalyi has to say about solitude? It seems that he suggests that people need people and that they don’t like solitude, but for me, without solitude there is no reflection, yet, I suppose also, without stimulus (e.g. people) there is no reflection. It is not just solitude it also about choice and control. In seeking to deconstruct the article by Priest and Gass (1993), one of the issues I raised is that of the perceived power of the instructor/facilitator. Priest and Gass seem to imply that the instructor/facilitator has great power over and in the process, yet maybe the exertion of that power will result in the risk of missed learning opportunities for the participants. Maybe in exerting their power through the design of programs, activities and reflective processes, the instructor/facilitator does so at the expense of the learning of the participant. This is
an issue I considered to some extent in the design of the activities in the workshop in Tucson to ensure that people had some level of choice, although not total choice.

The concept of having ‘space’ to learn, where that space is the mental and/or emotional space (as distinct from an external physical space) has correlation to Csikszentmihalyi’s reference to psychic entropy. Psychic entropy is the ‘noise’ or the disorder in consciousness. Information can “disrupt consciousness by threatening its goals ... a disorganization of the self that impairs its effectiveness. Prolonged experiences of this kind can weaken the self to the point that it is no longer able to invest attention and pursue its goals” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990:37).

**Losing Contact in Order to Make Connections**

7/12/00 12:30, NRG Group, Commerce Common Room

Today in our NRG research group meeting we were talking about other people’s learning as we discuss the progress of each of our PhD’s and other research projects. I began to feel my mind ‘glazing’ over as I blanked out of the conversation. Am I bored? Am I out of my depth? Am I suffering overload? As they continue to talk I begin to draw the following on a scrap of paper Figure 4-5, who knows where it leads or what its significance is:

"Auditory (hearing): You find it difficult to listen for longer periods of time, and may not easily remember what was said. In lecture-type learning situations, you probably ‘tune-out’ frequently and have to concentrate hard to ‘stay with’ the lecturer. In this case, use your other sensory modalities (visual, tactile, kinaesthetic and feeling) that are your strengths" (Dunn and Prashnig, 2000:5)
"It's Not the Destination that Counts, but the Journey"

28/12/00 20:58, Jindabyne, NSW

{Preface to these thoughts: The following notes have been made all at the same time due to lack of opportunity to sit down and make these observations. The last few weeks have involved a busy time in Wollongong, then a week teaching in Singapore before returning on Christmas Eve to go straight back out to go camping for Christmas. The last few weeks seem to have been filled with people, places and activity. I have not felt like I have had the space and place to work. Singapore was busy with lesson planning, shopping and touring, but also the hotel room was not conducive to me working. The desk was small and cramped, with little room to stretch out. Since arriving back, I have spent most of my time with others either eating, walking, talking or driving. There has not been the necessary space in my head for ideas to rattle around and make connections where they will.}

Bushwalking in a Crowd

Yesterday I went bushwalking with a group along two tracks: The Waterfall Track and The Pallaibo Track, both in the Sawpit Creek area of Kosciuszko National Park. I had only ever walked with the lead never with the other 10 or so people. The tracks we walked along moved through a variety of environments, with diverse plant life and changing geological structures. What seemed to occur was that for most of the group the aim was to get to the end, to finish the walk in as short a time as possible. Little time or opportunity was afforded to ‘stop and smell the roses’. However for one person, who was at the back, she walked much more slowly than most of the group (partly due to lower fitness levels) but she would also stop and notice the smallest of flowers, the variety of colours of blooms that ranged from white to pink to purple and yellow. She would also notice the intensity of the smells of the various eucalypts of the alpine environment.

Picture this: An experienced facilitator and trainer walks into a room of 16 students who have been studying together for more than a few months. I decide to do a few ‘get to know you activities’. Usually I begin with something less ‘threatening’ (or so I thought) such as categories (Rohnke and Butler, 1995). This involves getting into
groups with people who have similarities to you. I chose the categories such as interests in sport, number of children in the family (a learning for me: most Chinese people come from families with one child!), shoe colours etc.. But these didn’t work. People didn’t want to move. There seemed to be a reluctance for them to operate as individuals and to stand apart. The activities set the tone for the level of interaction and open independent talk for the remainder of the week.

That was my experience the week before Christmas, that I spent teaching in Singapore. There were 16 students, 13 came from mainland China, 1 Taiwanese, 1 Singaporean and 1 Indonesian. I have taught overseas students before, but never a full class in another country. I had some very limited ideas of what to expect with respect to their views about teachers (they respected them) and their perceptions of power, ala Hofstede (e.g. Hofstede, 1993), however I was not fully prepared for their absolute focus on success in exams. I conducted the LSA with most of the students (some were not present on the day and did not complete the analysis during the remainder of the week). The Group Report enabled me to gain a greater understanding of the preferences of the majority of the group, but it still does not give me the depth that I am after. It does not give the cultural understandings that was prevalent with such a group.

It wasn’t until I started reading a book entitled Why Asians are Less Creative than Westerners that I began to gain a further understanding of the cultural differences. These were the things that have been bugging me about the dominant experiential learning paradigms, it is these people’s experiences that bring to life the hunches that I refer to in the introduction to this thesis and the experience I had had observing an experiential program in Singapore in 1999. These students don’t seem use to being expected to have their own ideas. The ideas they are meant to have are the ones the teacher tells them to have. To explore, to think for oneself is to take a huge personal and social risk (Kwang, 2001).

What Experiential Learning Cycle?

For some time I have had concerns about the linear representation of Kolb’s experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 1984). Typically Kolb’s experiential learning cycle is represented as a four phase cycle. At one stage (13th April,
2000) I even download some images from the internet of other ideas of what experiential learning cycles might be for me (as displayed within this paragraph). The intent was to consider other ways of seeing the experiential learning cycle. To account for those times when the learning may begin with the theory or an experience or nothing at all. That learning isn't always operating to some predetermined agenda set by facilitators and/or teachers. Only in the last few days have I had the experience of learning where, in one case, it started as a result of reading some theory and then applying, but in the other case it was a situation of reflecting upon the experience and connecting and/or developing some theory. What doesn't really get considered in any of these representations is time, pace and non-linear (potentially random or chaotic) learning experiences.

If learning is not linear and culture is a dominant figure in the calculations, is it really possible to create meta models of how things work for all people in all times? I am guessing it is not. But what proof do I have? It is all my own assumptions and theorising. However, from reflecting upon my own experience (as per Kolb’s ELC??!!) it would seem that the basis of societal expectations, political ideologies and religious and/or faith experiences begin to shape the learning experience beyond the simplified models we see.

**Place, Space, Peers and Mutuality**

21/01/01 18:31, Outward Bound Australia Base, Tharwa, ACT

I have just returned from a week at the National Outdoor Education Conference in Bendigo, Victoria, with a conference theme of ‘A Sense of Place’. This would seem to fit into my thoughts and ideas at this stage. But I did not find my sense of place and I did not seem to be able to engage in the learning as I would have liked to. My role at the conference included presenting a workshop as well as facilitating two other workshops (the latter were about the conference process). Ten of us were facilitating this latter style of workshop in which we were meant to focus upon the issues raised
by the keynotes and to look towards actions or recommendations as a result. This new process had not been tried at a national conference before.

**Figure 4-6 Larson Cartoon**

Both workshop roles I found stressful, which was a combination of not knowing what the process should be, unsure where it was going as well as feeling under-prepared for my own workshop (I am unsure where I most felt my professional reputation was on the line, or if that even matters). Between these two roles (which included many meetings), as well as the normal rounds of networking, I found I had little time to think about or process what was going on. To me it is about having 'space' for learning. The image that comes to mind is the Larson cartoon (Figure 4-6) where the student asks the teacher if he can be excused because his head is full – a place I often find myself.

The space and place, for me, also extends to the physical, the emotional and the social. I know I spent time avoiding some people because I didn’t want to get into some conversations that didn’t go anywhere. Who I sat with and who I talked with became very important. Some people I was happy to sit and talk ‘industry things’ with, but they were usually the people who were doing something about it and were people with whom I have some similarity in direction. They would also be people whom I feel a mutuality in the relationship, while others I avoided tended to be people whom I felt where sapping my ‘energy’. Upon reflection, this was entirely selfish but it was, for me at that time, essential. In some respects, I didn’t want to be totally drained by the time I presented (on the last day). I wonder what would have happened had I presented on the first day? Maybe there are some comparisons to Tucson here when I presented on day 2 and then left!

“Teams: ...To be most effective make sure you have the right people set-up, that you are interested in the topic and that other preference in your learning style are met” (Dunn and Prashnig, 2000:9)

Stress or threat have been shown to influence our behaviours and may even cause us to “downshift into more automatic beliefs and practices” (Caine and Caine, 1994:106). Caine and Caine define downshifting as a “psychophysiological response to perceived
threat accompanied by a sense of helplessness and lack of self-efficacy” (Caine and Caine, 1994:69-70). Thus downshifting can have a detrimental impact upon our ability to learn. Stress, of the negative variety, can reduce the brain’s indexing capacities as well the “the brain’s short-term memory and ability to form permanent new memories” (Caine and Caine, 1994:71). Caine and Caine further suggest, that this being the case the ongoing distress may have an impact upon our health and emotions while the more positive eustress or excitement can follow on from an appropriate level of personal challenge. This later observation appears to have direct correlation to Csikszentmihalyi’s concept of ‘flow’, or optimal experience, that occurs in situations where there is a match between skill and challenge (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Baker et. al. (1997) emphasises the need to create space and time for conversations to occur through which participants reflect and share experiences. The contextual considerations they promote as creating an appropriate space include: making an effort to understand and be understood; creating a safe space through acceptance, respect and where judgment is avoided; the moderation of energy to ensure there is space for listening and reflecting; supporting the confrontation of difference; and engaging with the head and the heart (Baker, Jensen and Kolb, 1997:10)

I have spent the time since Christmas, following my return from teaching in Singapore, trying to avoid my PhD, but I have also had the ongoing weight of thinking about the book (that a few of us are trying to pull together) as well as having significant energy going into the new subject I am teaching this semester: MGMT 946: Personal Learning: The Reflective Manager. It is ironic that my own head seems too ‘full’ with projects and ideas that it is unable to be reflective about my learning and yet that is what MGMT 946 is about! It is not just my head being full, but also my emotions or stress levels. I can feel anxiety levels rise as I try to push more ‘stuff’ into my head and it is not making sense. There is no room and I am missing essential connections. I can feel the need to dialogue with people about it, people who will discuss with me and not talk at me or just think what I am saying is extremely important!

This week I am attending a Wilderness Leader’s First Aid Course. I have spent many hours doing the pre-course work, trying to recall things I learnt three and six years
ago. As I worked yesterday and this morning I found myself being distracted my menial tasks such as copying a list of terminology and abbreviations, which, if I didn’t do them would be distracting to my learning, yet they are not significant to my learning. The other thing was last night I sat and discussed the pre-course worksheet with Vin, Stu and some of Vin’s family, (Vin and Stu have done the course before), and I found that the discussions and the explanations were better for my learning than the reading and the writing. Probably the most important was the explanations. I wonder if they ever use small group stuff in the course or whether small group discussions tend to be more informally constructed by the students over breaks and when worksheets are due?

Vin and Stu would definitely be peers and colleagues. They are people whom I respect professionally, educationally and personally. I feel I can learn from them without they or I seeming to feel threatened. If it had just been me with Vin’s family I do not think it would have been the same learning situation for me. I needed that commonality, that mutual respect, and not an apparently one-way experience.

"Auditory (external – talking/discussing): ... Rather than just reading about a new topic, you often like to talk about it. Your understanding increases when you can discuss the content with other people and your memory improves when you can explain difficult learning concepts to someone else... If you have no-one to talk to you might find it harder to solve problems or sort out complex learning situations" (Dunn and Prashnig, 2000:6)

MGMT 946 provides an interesting opportunity to construct a class around the needs of the individual and to focus on. This subject may benefit from my experience of presenting the two workshops in November and January.

My Head’s Full!: Stuck in the Mire of Reflecting Upon Reflection

9/02/01 12:24, Study, Jindabyne

One could think that teaching others about reflection would be easy given that my PhD is generally about reflection, I read and write about reflection, yet as I read more now for MGMT 946 I am becoming aware of my own need to reflect upon what I am reading and thinking. What I want now is to stand back from the material and talk to someone who is like-minded and with an understanding of how I operate. I don’t
want to talk to someone who has little knowledge, or one who does not connect with my way of doing things. I feel a bit like a compost bin where someone has kept shoving stuff into it, and hasn’t given it time and space to do its job. If you keep shoving more in, it is only going to get worse, and could even result in maggots growing and destroying the process. But if you stop and pull stuff out, toss the contents around and then let it have time to decompose, then great things will result! And that product, the compost, can then be used to help other things grow.

"Peers: You are very flexible and usually have no problems fitting into a learning group consisting of peers. However, you don’t always need people around you to learn or study with or think problems over." (Dunn and Prashnig, 2000:9)

As I read I also notice (there’s that word ‘notice’ again) that I will come across an idea that my brain grabs hold of and I will want to go and follow up that straight away. I find it incredibly hard to read a whole chapter or book without wanting to go and refer to a dozen more! Yet I know if I don’t ‘seize the moment’ or the idea then it is probably going to be lost. That idea is a product of that moment. That moment can never be re-created, it is the sum total of aspects such as time, place, noise, reading, thoughts and feelings. Thus, I suppose, that is why I write this here and now and not later when other things have gone on.

... information does not create ideas; ideas create information. Ideas are integrating patterns that derive not from information but from experience (Capra, 1996:70).

Most of what I write is ‘stream of consciousness’ stuff (the other night I was watching something on TV where they suggest that Ulysses was a stream of consciousness – I wonder if it is...). As I wrote that I began to think about finishing my PhD and so I calculated how long it might take to finish writing another 40,000 words if I wrote 500 per day (it would be just over two months). Thus one side of my head is being incredibly analytical while the other is trying to ‘go with the flow’. I wish they would just get together to get this finished!

I want to write more (just for the sake of having written more), but to do so would be pushing out something that is not there yet. Back to the reading ...
Reflecting Upon Facilitation of Reflection

27/02/01 11:27, Study, Jindabyne

Last week I taught the first intensive for MGMT 946. It was three days. The session I presented on what is reflection, two people sat in to listen. As we met before the class I talked of how I was trying to create a space and place for the students to reflect. By this I meant a space in their heads, their lives and without an excessive amount of written material to cope with. My plan was to slow everything down and to use the process as the content and to encourage them to notice what helped them have a reflective space. We were going to have long breaks (well, 30 minutes each for morning and afternoon tea and an hour for lunch). The students were also to do a 90 minute solo. This plan was in contrast to another subject one of the students was taking where in a four hour block they got a 15 minute break. During our conversation one of the people asked me how I was going to create my own space and place for reflection. As I look back now I know that I was not 'walking my own talk'. I was doing what I was trying to stop my students from doing; being caught up in the busy-ness of life. I was so caught up with the theoretical content and the experience of the students that I have not had the space in my own life to reflect.

Too Busy ‘Doing’ to Think and Learn

30/03/01 9:39, Study, Jindabyne

"Yet it is in our idleness, in our dreams, that the submerged truth sometimes comes to the top" (Woolf, 1929/1995:40)

Sometimes I don’t think I am too bright!

After a shit of a day yesterday with long hours on ‘peasant travel’ in Sydney (i.e. public transport) trying to get something fixed on my car I finally started to drive home to Jindabyne at about 6pm. In the dark and the fog of my brain I started to think (this is not too unusual now). My thoughts were roaming around why I was annoyed with expectations that I should drop everything to attend a meeting in Wollongong today (with only 24 hours notice) and then my thoughts went to why I am taking so long to finish my PhD. I enrolled in mid-1995 so I should be close to finishing ....
And then I began to realise ...

- For the first 4 years I worked 2 part time jobs and served on a range of boards and committees. In 1995 I was working with Anglican Youth Department (AYD) and TAFE, in 1997 I started casually at Uni while still working at AYD, I was on the Outdoor Recreation Industry Council (ORIC) Board and probably Sport and Recreation Industry Training Advisory Body (SRITAB), Outdoor Recreation Council of Australia (ORCA) etc...;

- I completed enough subjects to graduate with an M Com in 1999;

- I started a new fulltime job at Uni in mid-1999;

- I have taught new subjects nearly every semester since I started;

- I have worked over both summer semesters (hopefully not next time);

- Last year I edited *The Risk Management Document* and this year I am trying to do a book with Tonia, Bruce and James;

- This year, while trying to arrange my program so I have blocks of time, this has been stuffed up by low enrolments and the cancellation of a class.

One day I might learn about my own learning!

How can I expect to be able to create anything new or insightful or to learn deeply when I haven’t got enough time for a life! Since moving to Jindabyne one of the benefits I have experience is that the time it takes me to drive gives my mind time to process things and time for body and emotions to relax. Thus, when I get home I have chewed over the ‘mess’ of uni or of boards and committees and have a much cleaner slate to be able to put some focus into my PhD. If I bring home marking or preparation then the ‘space’ has been lost. It is when I have large blocks that things begin to make sense.

If I have trouble making space in my life and my head to learn, what does that mean for others? How can we expect busy people to race into a training or learning situation and do what they need to do, to learn and to go away and apply that material?
What do they need to have an appropriate learning space and the opportunity to truly learn (i.e. achieve some change in behaviour) rather than just recall some facts? As I look back over my comments I see that I have not really learned, if I had then I wouldn’t continue to make the same mistakes of creating my own learning space.

Asimov, in reflecting upon his own ‘writer’s block’ talks about how he creates a space for himself to resolve problems or how he finds new directions for his writing says that “It is my feeling that it helps to relax, deliberately, by subjecting your mind to material complicated enough to occupy the voluntary faculty of thought, but superficial enough not to engage the deeper involuntary one. In my case, it is an action movie; in your case, it might be something else” (Asimov, 1977:98). This is not a new idea as he also relates Archimedes’ famous experience of scientific discovery about measuring volume whilst taking a bath.

Feedback and The Big Picture

30/03/01 9:39, Study, Jindabyne

On Wednesday I downloaded a Mindmapping program and I began to draw a mindmap of my thesis. The idea came from Eric. He said he had a mindmapping program that also enabled you to easily export files to Powerpoint. I was intrigued. Mindmapping is something I have wanted to do for ages, I had tried to do it last year using Powerpoint, but it didn’t work very well. Well, I fell in love with the program! As I plotted out my work and began to see the connections and also the extent of the work I have done the feedback was really encouraging. Things began to get clearer I could see where I was going.

“Visual (external—watching) .... Your understanding of a study text increases when pictures, diagrams and/or drawings are included. Rather than readings text passages you often just like to look at the pictures. To enhance your learning, you could use colours, pictures, magazines, films, mind maps and written materials with pictures and graphs.” (Dunn and Prashnig, 2000:6)
Why Is Your View Important?

25/04/01 10:20, In Car, Northbeach, Wollongong

It has been sometime since I have written anything and it was only as I started to talk with a friend the other night that I realised why that might be. Just prior to Easter on 10 April, I presented a Seminar at work, that night I presented a talk in the Blue Mountains for ORIC and then on Monday this week I had a conference presentation at the Duke of Edinburgh conference. Then to add to the mix, I also had assignments for MGMT 946 to be marked by yesterday. The last month has been filled with being a performing ‘seal’ with little impact upon the progress of my PhD (except, I suppose, for this entry). I have wanted to do something but I just have not been able to sit and do it. It is almost painful to make myself sit and read or write when there are other things going on in my life that are filling my head and emotions. The only reason that I am sitting writing this is that it is ANZAC day (a public holiday), I am in Wollongong because I have dinner with other PhD students tonight, I had planned to do a walk today, but I just don’t want to. So I am filling a day after an intense month of presentations. Some retail therapy would be nice (walking, looking, occasional coffee), but the shops are closed and I have no money! I had thought about going back to my office at Uni to write this, but the chair is not comfortable, the views are no comparison to the beach and the harbour and the radio is better in my car.

The seminar I presented for work was on deconstruction, and my aim was to present it in a way that was a-typical for those seminars, so I designed a Powerpoint presentation with music, pictures as well as being self-timed. Part of the presentation was to set the framework of why I was doing what I was doing: that most of the literature is coming from a particular paradigm of white North American middle class, well-educated males and that my aim was to present a different perspective, mine. The most outstanding moment of the seminar was when a colleague (mind you, white North American middle class, well-educated male) asked me why my point of view was important. My response was that “within the methodology I am using, the reason my point of view is important is because it is mine”.

Chapter 4: What?: The LSA and Me as Learner: A Room of One’s Own
What is Knowledge and Learning?

A while I go I sat in Cec's dining room and we got onto a conversation about the difference between knowledge and learning. We were playing with these ideas and as we spoke I was coming to the conclusion that universities are good about knowledge but not about learning, but what is the difference between the two? If I know something, is it just in my head, so what makes it learning? What makes it so part of me that I change my behaviour or that I confirm that my current behaviour is the way I want to stay? What I reached was that learning is 'embodied knowledge'. The knowledge that enables me to write a good essay, pass an exam or write a PhD has shifted from the head to the heart, the soul and the being. This is like the early Greek (?) philosophers who suggested that there was a divide between the brain and the soul. Is this what I am experiencing where on one hand I 'know' about learning styles, different facilitation methods and the benefits of experiential learning, but I have not 'embodied' that knowledge such that it has become part of who I am, not just what I saw. Maybe it is this transition that enables me to 'walk my talk'. Today I was reading about deep, strategic and surface learning (Fazey and Lawson, 2000). The deep approaches are the ones that seem to matter, the ones where making connections and understanding patterns is more important than the regurgitating of facts in the typical surface approach of rote learning (Fazey and Lawson, 2000:5). An experiential approach enables you to explore the deep, to go beyond the surface of writing the ten most important things about teamwork, and to move to a situation where you have to behave, make decisions and 'embody' that list, to give some visible or behavioural expression of those facts.

Csikszentmihalyi says that "(e)verything we experience ... is represented as information. If we are able to control this information, we can decide what our lives will be like" (cited in Fazey and Lawson, 2000:6).
A Sense of Being

28/04/01 15:30, Study, Jindabyne

Last week on a day walk on the Main Range I was carrying my mobile phone. Unusual for me, it was switched on as Robyn had been trying to contact me and so I hoped she may be able to get me while I walked. After lunch, while struggling through some thick chest-high bushes, the phone rang – it was a student. Here I was, hot, sweaty, getting scratched and I am talking to a student about a questionnaire they had designed.

I have grown-up in a time when I have been able to access all the ‘benefits’ of a fast-paced growth in technology and ‘toys’. As a child I had the transistor, then the cassette recorder, then my own stereo. I then moved onto the Walkman, the Discman, the mobile phone and the laptops and portable printers (I haven’t reached the point of having the mini-TV, yet!). I can go many places in the country and have music, communications and the ability to work. My parents didn’t have all the toys, even now my mother has never used a photocopier let alone a computer.

In the outdoor industry we are being increasingly pressured into carrying all the technology available: the phone, the radio, the GPS and the EPIRB. But why do we go into the outdoors? Why do I carry my pack on my back, only to be able to be reached by students and friends? Why can’t I just get away and be? What do I gain if I can just ‘be’ and go with the flow?

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) talks about the flow experience or the optimal experience. A time when you are doing something that is challenging, but achievable, requiring concentration, where there are clear goals and feedback, there is deep involvement, a level of control and increase in self and the perception of time is altered. These experiences are ones that may involve any skill, not just a physical skill. The climber can have it, the writer can have it, the art critic can have it. But can we expect it in the outdoors if our experience is open to the intervention of the ‘other’ world, by the beep of the phone or the pager or the knowledge that the world back there can intervene with quick calls home to see how things are?
I sit in my study overlooking the beautiful Lake Jindabyne as I write this. There are many times I can sit at my computer in that flow experience, not hearing my stereo, nor hearing the drier in the laundry near by. I write, the words flow, the world passes me by and time is of little significance. But as soon as I think I should check my email, that ‘other’ world intervenes. The flow stops, the thoughts end, the music becomes loud once more.

This flow, this optimal experience is one that I would love to see and experience in an experiential learning situation and the reflection upon that experience, where the participants are so engaged that the ‘other’ world is nowhere to be seen. Yet, in reflecting we are breaking that flow. The mere fact of intervening with a question, an uncertainty, or a refocus is an intervention in the experience, breaking the concentration, breaking the flow.

**Supervisors, What Supervisors?**

2/05/01 14:30, Office, Wollongong

Driving to work this morning from Jindabyne (the short 4.5 hour commute!) I began to think about my supervisors. This had come to mind partly due to problems a friend has recently been having with her PhD supervisors and partly due to my consistent thinking about whether I have the ‘right’ supervisors (whatever that might be). I realised that I have not met with both of my supervisors for several months. I have spoken with Tonia at different times and given her a mindmap or two, but generally I feel as if I have a fair idea of where I am going and that I just need to keep my head down and do it. One problem with this is that my PhD Progress Report always asks if I have been meeting with my supervisors and thus I have this imposed paradigm of learning that seems to be trying to pull my strings, or leash.

“Authorit> You don’t like being controlled and prefer to learn or study unsupervised. You find it easier to perform well when nobody is checking up on you ... You need freedom to carry out your learning tasks with very little supervision” (Dunn and Prashnig, 2000:9)
As I was reading through some of my thoughts about life as a learner, the themes of space and place kept jumping out. This reading was also interrupted by a conversation with a colleague about learning in our postgraduate classes and how we have shifted to 10 * 4 hour classes, instead of 13 * 3 hour. Some people seem to be struggling with this, I, however, have chosen to use block delivery, where I have a 3 day block and a 2 day block. I began to think about MGMT 946 and how I had used this block delivery process and how I had deliberately slowed things down in order to create more opportunity for 'deeper' learning of less material as opposed to having larger amounts of material covered in a more superficial way. One activity was a 90 minute 'solo' where I sent them away to do nothing for an hour on their own. For the other 30 minutes they could then write in their journals about what they noticed and thought about. This seemed to have a profound impact upon some students who were really challenged by doing 'nothing'. Some even didn’t think they could do it.

Dewey suggests that “A primary responsibility of educators is that they not only be aware of the general principle of the shaping of actual experience by environing conditions, but that they also recognize in the concrete what surroundings are conducive to having experiences that lead to growth. Above all, they should know how to utilize the surroundings, physical and social, that exist so as to extract from them all that they have to contribute to building up experiences that are worth while” (Dewey, 1938/1976:40).

Caine and Caine refer to deep meanings as providing “a sense of direction because they govern what people look for and what they are willing to do … in part, deep meanings are a source of the energy that people are capable of bringing to bear on a task or activity” (Caine and Caine, 1994:105-106).
Last weekend I went to the Thredbo Jazz Festival. This is the first jazz festival I have attended and I wasn’t too sure what to expect. My previous experience of jazz has been pretty limited, but I was very pleased with what I experienced. The thing that really stood out for me was the ability of the really good musicians to improvise. They could pull a band together from any mix of musicians and with only a little bit of communication they could be playing and improvising within minutes. They didn’t need a full score, often the most they had was a chord progression, even if they played piano or brass. You could see them listening to the melody and picking up the tune and the key and then they slipped into playing their own improvisations. Key changes, repeats and duets occurred with a simple hand signal or a nod and a wink. Any familiar tune can be reshaped to become a soulful melody, a celebration of life or an invitation for sex!

Their improvisations led me to think about facilitation. My experience of really good facilitators is that they have the ability to sense the ‘melody’ of the group, the key and the pace. They feel who is ‘in tune’ and who is trying to play a variation on the theme. A really good facilitator is creative, making do with what is around them, creating new ideas, new ways of reflection based upon the experiences and resources in the ‘here and now’. They don’t need great amounts of expensive resources to be able to facilitate and process experiences; all they need is their creative, innovative selves.

Jazz improvisers are interested in creating new musical material, surprising themselves and others with spontaneous, unrehearsed ideas ... there is no clear prescription of what is to played ... the art of jazz improvisation demands that the musician create something different (Barrett, 1998:608).

In talking about the role of the leader/facilitator as artist, Knapp (unknown) highlights the skills as being “flexible and respond with intuition and emotion at appropriate times ... Some of these more artistic skills need to be learned over many years through awareness and internalized experience” (Knapp, Unknown:10).
Over the last couple of days I have been reading sections from various books and articles. Some of them I have read before, I have even made notes and underlined. I have only owned one book for less than a year - yet I do not recall what I have read before. But as I read I ‘see’ new and different things. It is as if those things were not there until I needed to see them. It reminds of the idea of text having multiple layers and how different people reading the text will see and/or experience those different layers. Your ability to see those layers depended upon your experience, your preparedness and maybe even your maturity. It is almost as if there is a higher power holding the information until you are ready to really need or see it, timing the release for my optimal learning. If only this were so! This is not a new observation for me, yet I do not know how to empower or control this process.

The interrelationships of the words notice (verb), consciousness (noun) and attention (noun) are demonstrated by their dictionary definitions. The Oxford Dictionary defines notice as “to become aware of something … or to pay attention to” (Crowther, 1995:791), consciousness is defined as “the state of being aware” (Crowther, 1995:244) and attention is defined as “the action of turning one’s mind to something or noticing something” (Crowther, 1995:65). Baars (1999) suggests that there is a difference between consciousness and attention both at the common sense level, but also at the physiological level. Baars suggests that attention is a selective process while consciousness is an experiential state. The interconnection of the two is the result of the attentional processes being influenced by and having an influence upon the conscious contents, an ongoing cyclical process. Baars further suggests that the two events occur in different parts of the brain, attention in the prefrontal cortex and consciousness in the cortex. Thus, conscious events can influence the selections made in activities such as reading (Baars, 1999).
Like Climbing a Mountain

24/06/01 12:37, Study, Jindabyne

Today I went out for breakfast and as I was walking back I was thinking about photos and picture frames (I have wanted to display some of my pictures for some time). My thoughts crossed to a newspaper article I have that I have wanted to get framed for some time. It is from the travel section of a Reno newspaper about Craig, a photojournalist, and his experience of climbing Mt Kilimanjaro. I climbed Mt Kilimanjaro with Craig. The story below relates that experience. I don't know what this has to do with learning, yet, but I will go with it anyway ...

In 1994 I travelled to Africa, partly because I had an around-the-world air ticket that enabled me to travel there and partly because I had always been interested in going there. I didn’t have any clear plans, just to travel between Nairobi and Harare (my entry and exit points). Between those two points is Mt Kilimanjaro. I decided to climb it. This mountain is the highest on the African continent at 5,895 metres (approximately 19,000 feet). I had never been that high before. Before travelling in Africa I had been to Europe where I had done a bit of walking, but the highest I had been was on Schilthorn in Switzerland at around 10,000 feet. The difference meant I needed to approach this climb carefully.

I arranged to go with a local company who provided a guide and a cook. The guide had summited several times before. The original plan was that there would be a small group of us travelling together, but the others dropped out leaving me on my own with my two 'staff'. The plan was to take 5 days, allowing an acclimatisation day at around 14,000 feet. I set off from about 6,100 feet and travelled to the first hut at about 9,500 feet at Mandara Hut - there is no rush, the plan is to get used to the altitude. Along the way a I met up with a couple of Americans who were walking to the same plan, so we joined together as we ate and walked - it was nice to have the company.

The second night we slept at about 12,500 feet at Horombo Hut, this is where we were to spend two nights. The third day we did an acclimatisation walk to about 14,000 feet towards Mawenzi. It was a fabulous day, we walked, we talked, we stopped, we breathed. We then returned to Horombo Hut at 12,500 feet for another night.

The fourth day we walked to the next hut, Kibo Hut, at approximately 15,500 feet. Here we were to stay for a short time before getting up at about midnight to attempt to "summit". Apparently, most people suffer from altitude-induced insomnia. I had the opposite, all I wanted to do was sleep. At midnight, at the beginning of the fifth day, we arose for our walk in the dark. I drank some energy drink, given to me by someone else - bad move! I proceed to vomit most of that up as I climbed the scree.
I arrived at Gilman Point, at the top of the scree, for sunrise. As I lay there feeling like shit, I thought to myself that I had achieved enough, I had climbed higher than I had ever done before and I tried to convince myself that I would be satisfied with that. I told the guide this. He gently encouraged me to go further. I wasn't so convinced. But he knew the terrain, I had climbed the hardest part, the rest was flatter, so I decided to go on.

I made it to the top - I was the last of those of us who had set out from Kibo Hut to summit that day, but as I turned to go back down, my energy rose and I literally ran down the scree back to Kibo - I was the first back down!

The sequence of topics, while connected, is not logical, but reflects the different issues going on in my mind at the time. I didn’t intend thinking about mountain climbing, but that's where my thoughts ended.

"Brain Processing: You are definitely a simultaneous, right-brain processor who always needs the big picture or overview first. ... As a multi-task learning, you tend to live and/or learn in 'creative chaos' and often use a random thinking style." (Dunn and Prashnig, 2000:5)

As I continued my walk back home after breakfast, I began to see that climb as an analogy for learning and my experience of doing a PhD. The decision was not necessarily a well-informed decision, more a gut reaction, which has been followed by a long preparation phase. As the terrain has gotten steeper, as the demands of the PhD have increased, I have needed to pace myself, to take into account the environment around me and adjust what I do to the external circumstances. There have been times when I have tried to convince myself that a Masters or an EdD would be enough, that I didn’t need to go on and complete the hard yards to get a PhD. But I have continued on. If I try to go too fast for me, the environment, the stress will beat me. With a PhD you set off on a solo trip, with supervisors there to guide and nourish you, a bit like the guide and the cook on Kilimanjaro. Along the way you may meet people who are having similar experiences as you, who you can support and they can be supported by you. But in the end, the decision is mine, the progress is mine. I have to take those steps, I have to do the writing, I have to feel the pressures of things like time, money and waning enthusiasm. Others may be there on the sidelines, encouraging and pointing the way, but in the end it is me. I climbed that mountain, I walked those steps, I was supported, but I did it! I’m glad I listened to that guide.

I’d like to go back to that mountain before I am finished...
How much is learning like a challenge such as climbing Mt Kilimanjaro? The choices, the preparation, the support and nourishment, the guidance and taking things one step at a time.

"Motivation: You are a self starter! ... You get a sense of accomplishment from achieving, and this keeps you motivated. It is important for the quality of your learning to have a lot of input in how you go about your studies. You need self-designed goals and objectives, your own pace and self-evaluation of your study progress." (Dunn and Prashnig, 2000:10)

Taking things one step at a time is a theme mentioned by Hayhurst when considering the demands of climbing Mt Everest. For Hayhurst it was important to “set an incremental goal; you don’t have to do it all at once. Break the challenge into little pieces, little goals and chew them off, one at a time. That’s how you take on a huge challenge.” (Hayhurst, 1997:44)

A joke: How do you eat an elephant? One piece at a time!

More of the Same?

16/07/01 16:20, Study, Jindabyne

“All of my possessions for a moment of time”, Elizabeth I of England

Over the last month I have had visitors for about half the time. I didn’t think it would affect me, but it appears as if it has. I have found it hard to work and write with others around, the place is too ‘full’, with no place to be apart and let my brain do its thing. During this time I have also been trying to write an article, it too kept being moved to the back burner until everyone had left. The other thing I did during this month was work on a half-day team-building program. The program design has some similar aspects to my life: too busy, not enough time to think and reflect and doubtful achievement of the stated outcomes. I had hoped I would have the time to seriously consider how I was going to facilitate that program, but I didn’t have details about the client, the program goals or the activities until about an hour before the program began. There wasn’t even enough time to ensure I was familiar with the layout of the area so that I could use and/or adapt things as the program progressed. As I approach a three day block delivery for Uni, I have some similar concerns, I don’t have time,
many of the people I do not know and the location is new to me and I am uncertain about how well it will work. These experiences raise questions, maybe again, about learners having ownership of their learning process and also having the space and place to reflect upon their experience and also the questionable reality of facilitators having power-over the participants’ learning.

Creating That Space For Me

16/07/01 16:38, Study, Jindabyne

As I sit here now and I dream of what my ideal place of learning and writing would be I cannot think of a better geographical location than where I am now. This morning I worked to finish off that article and then over lunch I went for a ski. Upon my return, with one project out of the way, my adrenaline running from exercise and an exhilarating environment, I returned to my desk with its view over the lake, to write for the first time in a month. Yet, there is a feeling in the pit of my stomach of work undone and things to do – and mostly they relate to the Outdoor Recreation Industry Council (ORIC). This morning I received about 10 emails about ORIC and that was after sitting up until 11pm last night working on ORIC-related material. Even the two phone messages I received today are about ORIC. This is just another thing filling any available space in my head.

Yet, as I write this I also think of a student from last session, Mike. Mike has this amazing story of business crises, pressure from a difficult set of Uni subjects and a life to live. He was able to clearly set aside the pressures from one to clearly focus on what needed to be achieved. He didn’t need time or space (from what I could observe) to separate himself from one task before moving on to the next, he did it with apparent ease. He intrigues me the way he was able to do it, I am interested to explore further with him how he is able to do it. Many other people I have met need to talk through one thing before moving onto the next, but not Mike. We are different.
Over the last two weeks I have conducted two block sessions for Uni. They were for MGMT 908 Human Resource Development, with each block taking 3 days. One was in Wollongong the other in Sydney. Each student had been asked to complete the LSA prior to the course, my intent had been to spend time looking at their individual profiles as well as the group profiles so that I could more effectively take into account their learning differences. This didn’t happen!

With about 20 hours or more of classes in each block, my head and my emotions were wrapped up in getting prepared and overcoming the anxiety of teaching for that length of time. (It had been my choice to do the block delivery as I believe it fits my own learning style more effectively as I am able to concentrate on one task at a time, as opposed to juggling a range of tasks.) In addition, for the first block, I did not know what classroom I was using, sometimes until the day before. Management of self was important, managing the process was the ideal. The other contributing factor was students who had not handed in their LSA in time for me to enter their data. Thus, as I was sending most of the class off to read their material I was spending my own ‘down time’, or head-space time, punching in data and spitting out LSA Reports to give the students time to read their LSA before we met again.

As I was reflecting, amid my insanity, the following images (Figure 4-7 and Figure 4-8) came to mind about creating space. The images, I believe, may originate from Stephen Covey, but I see parallels to where my thoughts have been going in relation to learning. If my ‘head’ or my learning space is already mostly full (as in Figure 4-7) with other ‘stuff’ (eg: emotions, stress, family) then my ability to add extra things and to integrate that into my existing knowledge and experience is limited – there is no room to realign, and make new connections.
If, however, I am not already full of other ‘stuff’ (as in Figure 4-8) then I may be able to more effectively integrate additional information and ideas. In looking at various students around me, I believe that each person’s ability to cope with different amounts of pre-existing ‘stuff’ varies greatly. For some they can deal with lots going on in their lives, such as family crises, work pressures as well as study demands. For others they need more space to juggle what is going on. Is there any correlation to the LSA? Maybe, or maybe it has connections to personality, stress coping skills, support mechanisms etc… If it is the case that your ability to take on new information in a training/learning environment may be limited by what is already going on in your life, could we look at some form of intake inventory? This inventory could assist participants reflect on what is going on in their lives so that they may begin to identify what available space they have for new ideas.

4.3. Conclusion: And the Point is … ?

The risk of an autoethnography is that it could be a self-indulgent process of navel gazing. But as I look back over my entries I see the themes of space, place and noticing emerging as common threads. My usage of these terms has, generally, been uninformed, drawing upon my own tacit understanding and usage of them. Yet I know from interactions with others who have read widely in areas of urban planning, human geography and others that there is a strong basis for the use of these terms, a direction that will be explored further in Chapter 6. What follows, in Chapter 5, is a gathering of insights of the learning of individuals using results from Learning Styles Analysis as well as results from surveys of people’s practice from participants in workshops I have conducted at two conferences in 2002. Together these will help point to further considerations of how to help create space for individuals to learn as discussed in Chapter 7 where the aim is to draw together these diverse perceptions and perspectives into a coherent process of facilitation.