

# Netcheck

Where do you stand on outdoor training? Does it really work? Are the summer months a good time to try it out? Clare Forrest hikes through [www.wilderdom.com/research.html](http://www.wilderdom.com/research.html) and maps out some answers.

It's August, supposedly the height of summer – and I hope it is wherever you are – so I wanted to find a site this month with a summery feel to it. I began with a Google search for Training + Fun, which yielded several references, though none of much value. I was tempted (who wouldn't be) by 'I gotta go!: the music DVD that makes potty training fun and easy', but managed to resist. Changing tack, I went for Training + Adventure, which is how I found the quite extraordinary [www.wilderdom.com/research.html](http://www.wilderdom.com/research.html) – the subject of this month's 'Netcheck'.

This is the site of the Outdoor Education Research & Evaluation Center, the Mission of which is to 'enhance the quality and accessibility of philosophy, theory, research, and evaluation about outdoor education and related programs'. Its goal, which it achieves admirably, is to 'provide online access to academic resources such as articles, essays, papers, and theses about philosophical, theoretical, research, and evaluation aspects of outdoor education'.

Not by the remotest stretch of the imagination can this be called a summery site. In fact, it's probably more suited to wintry days and long dark nights when spending time on the Internet seems like absolutely the best plan. This is a mammoth website, hard to get around, hard to work out, and an absolute treasure house of all things adventure and outdoor training and learning related – especially research. And if there is one area that fires up fierce and polarised debate among trainers, then adventure training is surely it. If you want the 'horse's mouth' on what works and what doesn't, this is the place to find what you're looking for since there's wide access to research on adventure education philosophy, theory, research and evaluation.

Having said that, it's a weird-looking site, which breaks all the rules of 'good' design. It has a gloomy beige background with a mass of tiny blue text and reminded me of the equally wonderful and equally unattractive [www.creativeideas.org.uk](http://www.creativeideas.org.uk), reviewed here in April 2003, in that this is one person's lovingly put-together collection of resources and links, which needs time to get to grips with. The person in question is James T Neill, and you can read all about him by hitting the webmaster button on the home page – suffice to say here that he is *very well* qualified to run this site.

What you will find is a quite remarkable collection of research on everything to do with outdoor and adventure-based education

Once you've had a look at James' credentials, I think the simplest thing to do is explore some of the links on the left-hand side of the page ... so click on whatever takes your fancy. Be warned, though; this is a site put together by an academic, so it is not an easy read. Don't expect sharp solutions or slick graphics. You won't find them! But what you will find is a quite remarkable collection of research on everything to do with outdoor and adventure-based education. Just click on the headings – and there's a vast list – that interest you. I found the paper on ethics particularly interesting, not just for its relevance to outdoor education, but because it touched on ethical issues in my own training practice. For example, who among us has not considered the issue of deception (though we may prefer not to use this rather uncomfortable word)? I quote:

*Sometimes in outdoor education, deception is used for supposed benefit of students. There is often an element of intentional surprise, of purposely telling students misleading information, so that [they] encounter and work through challenges themselves. However, deception of others is a ploy fraught with danger – so when and how can it be ethically justifiable?*

Indeed, how can it? This is something that affects most of us every time we use some sort of exercise with a 'trick' to it. There are other ethical issues of relevance, too. Perhaps this is a debate we should have in our profession, since it's certainly not one I can recall having been explored in depth. There's a link on the ethics pages to a draft code of ethics that is worth a mouse click.

A further area I found thought provoking was the information on experiential learning (visit [www.wilderdom.com/ExperientialLearningCycle.htm](http://www.wilderdom.com/ExperientialLearningCycle.htm)) with its overview of several Learning Cycle models – far more than just Kolb! I was completely unaware of a model developed by Priest and Gass called 'The experiential learning and judgement paradigm' (dreadful name, but interesting concept), which has six stages:

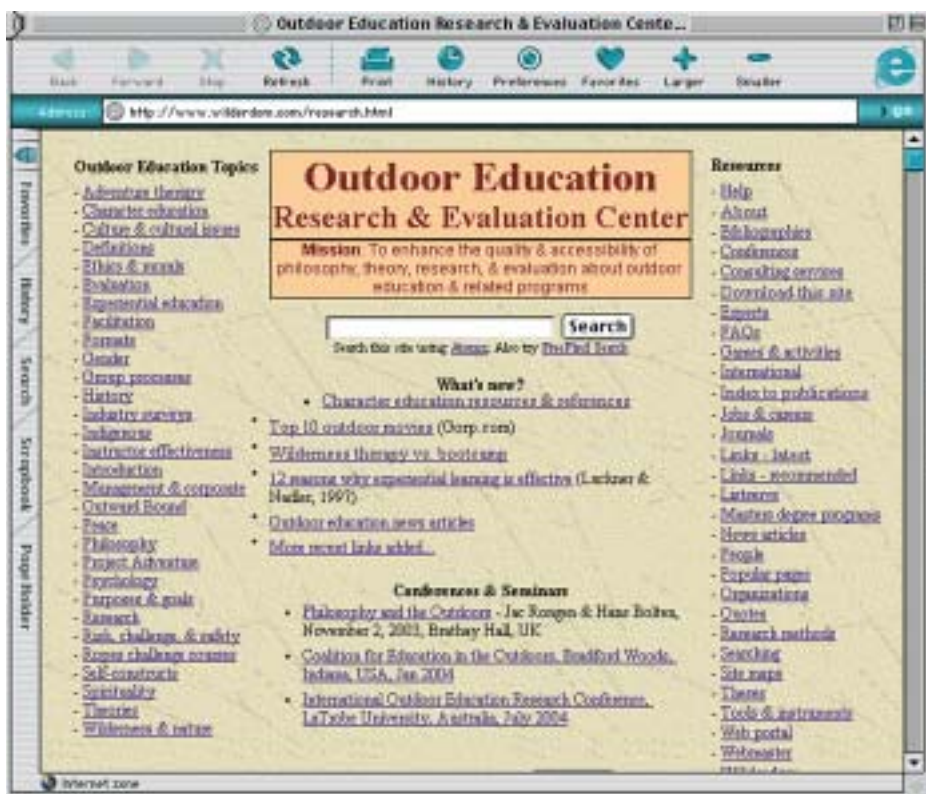
- experience
- induce
- generalise
- deduce
- apply, and
- evaluate.

If I've understood this properly, it means:

- do something
- draw on the experience
- pull out some general principles from this
- work out how these might apply in other situations
- try it out, and
- see how it worked.



Clare Forrest would be pleased to know by snail-mail, e-mail or carrier pigeon the URLs (web addresses) of any sites that you have enjoyed, loathed or found just plain indispensable so that she can bring them to everyone's attention. She can be contacted at [clareforrest@structuredlearning.com](mailto:clareforrest@structuredlearning.com) or visit [www.structuredlearning.com](http://www.structuredlearning.com)



This is nice, because it allows us to see how learning in one situation can be extrapolated into others, which is what we do a lot of the time in training when we create exercises and games. It also reminds us how crucial the debrief or review is to ensure that the induction, generalise and deduction stages are completed.

This is a genuinely excellent resource and one that can help us to find **academic, properly researched provenance** for the things we do

Another page of definite value is [www.wilderdom.com/gamespecific.html](http://www.wilderdom.com/gamespecific.html), providing links to a large number of games and activities, many of which are suitable for any training environment. Have a good look at the initiative and problem-solving games in particular. There's a mass of stuff here, some of which was new to me and some of which were old favourites, like the egg drop.

One more page I found stimulating was [www.wilderdom.com/InstructorEffectiveness.htm](http://www.wilderdom.com/InstructorEffectiveness.htm), which looks at how to be a great trainer in outdoor education. Again, there's plenty of relevance here to the strictly indoor trainer. This would be an especially useful page to visit if you are thinking of using an outdoor education company. It will help you to ask the right questions about how they recruit and develop their trainers.

And how about the following for a reminder of our role and our need for an ethical and professional framework as trainers?

*Being a trainer is a stimulating role and function. Being looked to for leadership and depended upon for guidance is a very heady thing. Experienced trainers have almost always been aware, however, that the degree of influence they wield is disproportionately large.<sup>1</sup>*

Yes, indeed.

On the whole, this is a fine site. It's not pretty and some of the links have disappeared, but the overall effect is extraordinary. It is a genuinely excellent resource and one that can help us to find academic, properly researched provenance for the things we do. Take a look – when the weather's not so good. CF

*Many thanks to Clare for this month's invaluable insight into the Internet. Garry Platt returns next month with the results of his recent findings. Meanwhile, Clare joins us again in the October issue of Training Journal.*

Reference  
1. M Lakin, *Interpersonal Encounter: Theory and Practice in Sensitivity Training*, McGraw-Hill, 1972.

Ratings	
Content	★★★★★
Originality	★★★★★
Navigability	★★★
Presentation and graphics	★★
Downloads and freebies	★★★★
Links	★★★★★

## Quick hits

[www.hrzone.com/articles/team\\_variables.html#higher\\_job\\_satisfaction](http://www.hrzone.com/articles/team_variables.html#higher_job_satisfaction)  
★★★★★

This site provides an interesting overview of a piece of research into teams, job performance and job satisfaction. The research confirms what we have been saying for years about the importance of recruiting team players, ensuring that team work is genuinely linked and that performance rewards are team based. A must read.

[www.trainerslibrary.com](http://www.trainerslibrary.com)  
★★★★★

I don't often recommend sites that require a subscription, but Trainers' Library is different and provides exceptionally good value by giving trainers unlimited access to a large collection of free-to-use training modules around topics such as creative thinking, time management, assertiveness, motivation and negotiation skills. This includes the renowned Murder at Glasstap Grange (which, on its own, previously sold for £95) and a Performance Appraisal Toolkit (which previously sold for £125). Since an annual, individual membership costs £95 a year, this has to be a great bargain.

<http://coachingandmentoring.com/Articles/mentoring.html>  
★★★★★

Recently, UK-HRD had a long debate regarding the differences between coaching and mentoring. The article on this site is the result of an online survey to define what protégés feel are the attributes of effective mentoring relationships and whether there is a difference between a mentor, coach and supervisor, and provides an interesting summary of the differences. I liked this quick definition: 'Mentoring is biased in your favour. Coaching is impartial, focused on improvement in behaviour.'