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First step

EXPERIENTIAL ENGLISH COURSE for TEACHERS  
@Nab Cottage July 7 - 13 2019

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### 1 THE COURSE

The 'Experiential English for Teachers' course is held at Nab Cottage in the heart of the English Lake District, overlooking a small lake and surrounded by mountains. It is fully residential beginning on Sunday evening with sessions and activities running right through each morning, afternoon and evening. The course costs £535 and includes all meals except one, shared twin accommodation and the full programme.

Course participants will learn:

- The fundamental principles of Experiential Language Learning
- Some essential techniques for creating a safe and supportive environment
- Techniques for establishing and maintaining a positive group dynamic
- Ways of working with mixed levels
- How to create motivating and rewarding classroom sessions
- How to inspire students to further independent study
- Basic relaxation techniques
- How elements of Neuro-Linguistic Programming can deepen the learning experience
- How different students learn in different ways and techniques for managing this successfully
- Ways to incorporate music and movement into language classes

The programme includes:

- Training skills in group dynamics
- Language modules giving you the opportunity to acquire new vocabulary and to work on fluency and specific language skills
- Personal development modules looking at awareness-training, interaction and non-verbal communication
- Workshops in voice work and pronunciation, drama, intensive discussion, and being creative with grammar
- Massage workshop, yoga session, relaxation session
- Guided walks
- Time for reflection, diary writing, integrating
- Social programme including theatre, pubs, local market towns, barbecue, party

## 2 THE THEORY

### What is different about Experiential learning?

According to Andresen, Boud and Cohen in Experienced Based Learning published in 2000, taken from the earlier work of Kolb and referred to in A Handbook of Reflective and Experiential Learning by Jennifer Moon it can be summed up as:

- The involvement of the whole person (intellect, feelings, senses)
- The recognition and active use of the learner's relevant life experiences
- The continued reflection upon earlier experiences in order to transform them into deeper understanding
- Facilitation. It is managed by facilitators rather than teachers. The former are normally seen as having equal status as the learners and aid the learning rather than provide the material of learning.

They go on to mention what they consider to be the 'essential criteria of experiential learning':

- That the learning that results is personally significant or meaningful to the learner
- That it is important that the learner is personally engaged with the learning
- That there is a reflective process involved

- That there is acknowledgement that there is involvement of the whole person in all their capacities and relationships with the present and related past experiences
- That there is recognition of the prior experience of the learners
- That there is an ethical stance of concern and respect for the learner – validation, trust and openness towards the learner which value and support the ‘self-directive potential of the learner’

Finally they list the 4 outside boundaries which are also important:

- We do NOT learn easily from experience. Experience must be processed in order that knowledge can result from it. IT TAKES EFFORT!!!!
- It is not just ANY experience we learn from – but specific experience – ‘in the right place’ and ‘at the right time’
- And not only **learning** but **unlearning** is key. Flexibility and openness to the possibility of mistake or error can be very important
- And finally, our experience is subjective, and experiential learning must recognize the ‘slipperiness’ of our processing of experience

### 3 OUR METHODS

We accept this totally as the basis for our work. For us, and specifically with experiential language learning, we synthesize this into 5 key features:

- It involves the whole person.

Our physical, emotional, mental and spiritual elements are interrelated. We cannot work at one level without regard to the impact on the others. So, for example, we find that as we relax into the body we allow the breath to flow more easily which in turn allows the mind to work more effectively. Similarly we recognize that many adult learners are restricted through feeling fear or anxiety and we work to allow these emotions expression which in turn transforms the energy held in the emotion into something more positive and expansive. As a result the student feels excited about speaking a new language rather than fearful or embarrassed.

- It is motivating and engaging.

Again, this begins to engage the emotions. Curiosity and eagerness are childlike qualities we rediscover together. This is in part due to the fact that it is task-driven, and the tasks - to tell our stories, to find out, and to learn how to - are universal ones we all connect to in some way.

- **It demands authentic communication.**

A key feature of the course is interaction and the basis for all interaction is the authentic self. We discover together what we really want to say, and what is really important to us. We discover what helps us to express ourselves and what holds us back. As if by magic there is a point here where communication comes from the heart as well, and not just from the head, and so we begin to avoid any mother tongue interference as we communicate clearly, simply and directly.

- **It is a new experience.**

The experience – of the people, the place, and the language – is new. And together we can choose to employ new models to explore this territory. We can be different, use a different voice, learn in different ways. We can choose to leave behind those old models which may not serve us well any longer and open to new possibilities. And here we employ a wide range of methods, including visualisation, active relaxation, suggestopedia, drilling, imaging, neuro-linguistic programming, peer learning, modelling, reflection and coaching. We use movement, music and art. We invite students to take risks and to be creative.

- **The experience is shared.**

All students here speak in English together all the time. They live and work closely together and we work to create a place where they all feel safe and respected. We continuously model the language and students interact and connect in English, constantly learning from their mistakes and developing more and more accuracy, confidence and fluency. They learn from each other in spite of their differences, with higher level speakers learning to moderate language and speak clearly, and lower level speakers encouraged to use language to maximum effect. Crucially, they learn to listen to each other and then to cooperate.

We find that the course is very empowering. Students give each other permission to make mistakes, to try new ways, to challenge their own limitations. And we create a space where each person is supported and free to be themselves so there is no judgement of failure, of humiliation.

**Students want to communicate, they realise that they're learning despite themselves, something inside them unlocks and they become aware that they're learning unconsciously - which is when most learning takes place.**