The Use and Role of Experiential Learning in the Doctoral Study

Hugh Kearns, Joe Provenzano, Lana Roediger

Flinders University, Adelaide SA, Australia

Experiential learning, for example, outdoor education, problem-solving challenge activities has long been used in the corporate sector. The rationale is that participants develop generic skills, like teamwork, problem-solving and confidence that can then be translated back into their work context.

With growing interest in generic skills in universities, what are the lessons to be learned? What role does this form of experiential learning play in doctoral study? Is this a valid way to develop generic transferable skills? How well can it be applied to doctoral and post-doctoral life?

This symposium provides an opportunity for research education developers, students and supervisors to discuss their experiences of experiential learning and consider its application in doctoral study. A brief experiential (non-threatening!) learning activity will be incorporated to assist with participant engagement.

In England, UK GRAD, a body funded by the UK Research Council makes extensive use of experiential learning. These range from short workshops through to five-day national GRAD schools. One of the panel members will describe how these operated and their outcomes.

Another panel member will describe their involvement with a program called the ‘PhD Experience’ that used outdoor exercises as a metaphor for PhD study, for example, traversing a maze blindfolded, and problem-solving with inadequate resources.

The third panel member will describe their experience with a program called the ‘PhD Challenge’. This is a two-day program aimed at developing skills that can contribute directly to doctoral study, for example, overcoming obstacles, getting unstuck, and maintaining a relationship with supervisors.

(60 minutes)