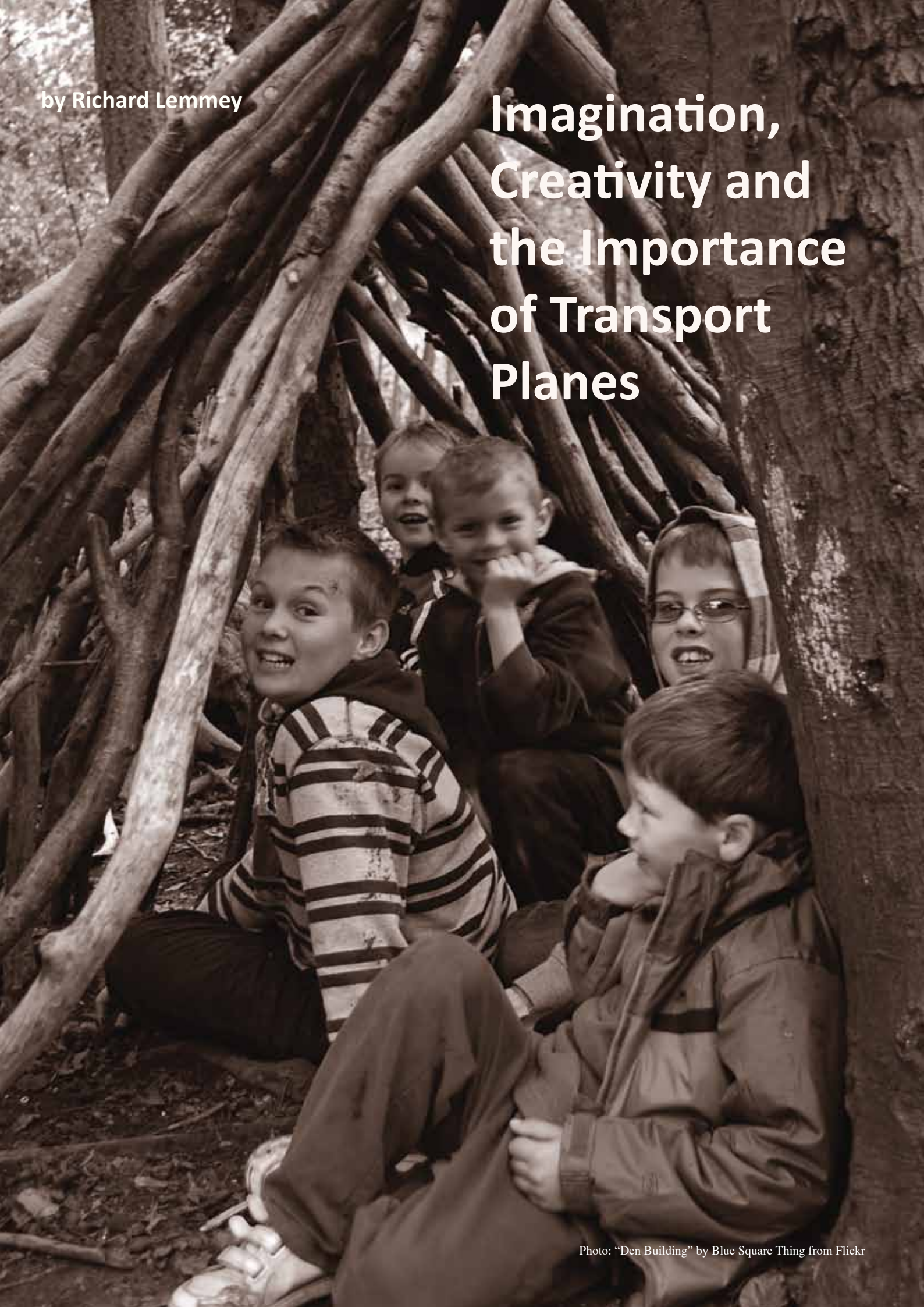


by Richard Lemmey

Imagination, Creativity and the Importance of Transport Planes



Some years ago I used to fly an old DC3 Dakota transport plane. It was pre-World War Two and whilst the skin had been repaired, there was still some damage to bits of the airframe. Keeping oil pressure up in the starboard engine was always a problem and the large tyres, although always good for rough airstrips, tended to give bouncy landings.

But then it would be tea-time and I had to go in.

All the flights were solo and nearly all commercial and, I remember, involved long sections flying over the sea or jungle with my fingers crossed. But then, in Sir Francis Chichester's book the Lonely Sea and the Sky I read his description of 'aiming off' to locate Pacific islands – and it worked! Every time!

In late summer there were apples on the tree and the DC3 went away for maintenance.

In the long holidays I was free to cross miles of gorse heathland and explore the woods. I followed the Roman Road and smelled the charcoal burners and talked (in my head) to The Amazons. The fallen tree bridging the river was the same one as I saw in the foothills of Our Everest Adventure by Sir John Hunt.

But then the apples dropped and it was back to polar flying.

Don't all children do this? I was clearly very, very fortunate to have been so unrestricted and allowed to be a small boy playing what I now see as very gendered play. I wonder what it is actually like for the comparable generation nowadays? Even in 1937 Kurt Hahn described one of the Seven Sins of the modern age as the Decline in Memory and Imagination. It seems to me that the two greatest influences upon my imagination were stories and opportunities to wander. Freedom if you like.

Imagination is the ability to visualise ideas, images and concepts that are not in the present reality. Nationally, in both educational and economic terms, our present reality makes creativity and imagination all the more important and yet it is amongst the first to suffer because it can't be measured for performance targets, exams and league tables.

In the Horizons Archive [searchable online archives of Horizons articles as PDFs] the word 'imagination' occurs many times. Often as 'fired imagination' or the 'imagination to foresee' circumstances – (that the wind will change, for example) but less often in the context of 'imaginative play'. There is clearly a continuum between imagination enhancing your understanding of the world (the wind will change) and imagination as a part of fantasy and enhancing your enjoyment of it. The word search in the archive is heavily skewed in favour of realistic imagination. Similarly with the word 'creativity'.

Research into Creativity and Imagination shows that there are no routines that can be used to encourage creativity.

'The best service we can do to creativity is to let it bloom unhindered, to remove all impediments, and cherish it whenever we encounter it.

'We probably cannot train it but we can prevent it from being suffocated by rules, regulation and envious mediocrity'. (Eisenck,H.1995).

Another pre-requisite for much creativity would seem to be solitude, in both adult and childhood.

"..collaboration and teamwork tend not to be a feature of the lives of the exceptionally creative – inconvenient though this may be for the advocates of brainstorming and group creativity.." (Robinson,A 2011).

When imagining options within a groupwork situation it is all too easy to experience the competition between ideas and the frustration of the imaginative process as social processes are worked through to democratically(or otherwise) arrive at a consensus. And yet within the archive, and in many other sources, 'Teamwork and Creativity' are conjoined, when research would indicate that to do this within a confined, group context

where there are social rules and fixed outcomes will not foster creativity at all. This is commonly confirmed by the observation that the quiet solitary group member provides the 'creative solution' early in a process but is rarely acknowledged.

If we were then to audit outdoor provision what would be the balance between programmed, linear, groupwork within a set of rules and experiences that are solitary, free and undirected? There is obviously a continuum between these two extremes but I would predict that more so-called creative activities conform to the former than the latter. Undirected freedom is, currently extremely difficult and expensive to provide and most of the time, unrealistic. We should though acknowledge the research, stop paying lip-service to creativity and do small things to redress the balance.

There are two senses in which creativity can be fostered within Outdoor Education. Firstly there is the use of Creative activities within outdoor programming and then there is a Creative Approach to Outdoor Programming itself. The opportunities for creative activity in the outdoors are enormous especially with technical assistance from smartphones and editing suites which are readily available, but also from the use of more traditional forms of poetry, drawing, art and sculpture. I would imagine that most learners would be unfamiliar with these and therefore the opportunity for a little adventure need not be limited to a literal physical experience of the outdoors. The application of the Creative Arts in the outdoors is an enormous subject and needs to be expanded beyond the confines of this paper.

Creative Programming, on the other hand, can be enhanced by considering how the components of planning can be transformed to provide novel, exciting, challenging approaches. These can be outlined in the following diagram which is solely designed to stimulate such thinking. It is partially completed to aid understanding.

The question then becomes, 'is your activity enhanced by transforming any of those components in the way specified? It is the thought process of filling in the table for yourself that provides the creative opportunity. This is in itself a contrived and laborious exercise, but once it has been grasped leads to a second-nature creativity.

Theoretical Matrix

Transformation	Reduce	Increase	Remove	Replace	Reverse	Substitute
Components						
Group size	Smaller groups	Larger groups	Don't specify size. Let them choose			
Group type	Make more specific	Make more general				
Content			They define the objectives.			
Sequence	More options and decisions	More linear	Let them sequence	Change at the last minute	Do it backwards	Change the rules
Leadership	Reduce the leadership given	Increase the leadership given	Remove the leader	Replace the leader	Make the leaders follow	Instead of leaders have internal critics
Equipment		Use a better bird book	Name birds themselves	No torches. Use lanterns		Use bouyancy aids not rafts
Communications	Fewer opportunities. More self-reliant	More checkpoints. Radio	None	No phones. Paper messages	They can't ask they can only answer	Use codes
Environment	Use a smaller wood	Use the open fell	Do it as a theoretical game first	Use made up place names	Swap made up names between groups	Would this work on the lake
Timing			Open-ended		Slowest wins	Do it at night
Safety	They carry first aid not you.	Increase monitoring	Self-reliant		They care for the instructors	

How can this be achieved in everyday programming?

Where appropriate, build more unknown into tasks. Don't give too much away. Let them wonder what's round the corner rather than tell them. What do you think will happen if...? (Steve van Matre's ideas on mystery in 'Earth Education' are relevant here. (Van Matre,S.1990))

Incorporate problem-solving tasks where individuals have responsibility for individual solutions. Don't do groupwork slavishly.

Use more self-directed, open-ended activities. Avoid single outcome tasks.

Provide safe solitary space. Tree-House. 'Space Capsule'. Tepee. Special Private Places. I once saw a 'Kiva' – a sacred hut used by the Pueblo Tribes of the Southern USA – used as a retreat for individuals and a story-telling space very effectively.

Use creative media for briefing and de-briefing (poems, sketches, photos, eavesdroppings), and sometimes as a fantastic background for an activity. Hermits in the Wood stories were my favourite.

Decorate your space with examples of excellent creative work done by students, staff and others. Be an example. Talk about your books and heroes.

Use sessions that are based on creative media. Story-telling and readings. Albums. Displays.

I might suggest the following tendencies:

Creativity tends to be 'untrainable' (contrary to Hahn's Fifth Law). You can only provide the right conditions and encourage it. The more unknowns there are the more the imagination has to do.

Creativity is largely an individual quality and can be smothered by groupwork. The most creative tend to be the most solitary.

Programming, rules, etc tend to hinder creativity. Creativity is unpredictable and might need a 'fermentation phase' before an inspiration. Time and space is needed for fermentation.

Imagination tends to be stimulated by media that leave most to the imagination. Books and stories are better than tv and computer simulations. Art tends to be more stimulating than photographs

The opportunities for creativity can be provided by freedom, solitude, individual activity, individual problem-solving and the programming of traditional creative activities.

If at all possible provide opportunities to be alone and isolated, preferable with wood fires, howling winds and things that go bump in the night.

All these could be wonderfully achieved through expedition work, with due reference to Kurt Hahn, but sadly, as the outdoors becomes more commodified, I suspect that students are increasingly taken on expeditions rather than go on them themselves. All the research on creativity tells us something I suspect we already know and that is that being alone and uncertain in a big environment makes us imaginative and creative.

(In the meantime, if anybody knows where I could get an oil pump for a Pratt & Whitney R-1830S Twin Wasp radial piston engine, could they let me know.) ■

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Author's Notes

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Photographs: Boy by Tim Massey. Den building by Blue Square Thing

