Experiential learning

This snapshot explains what experiential learning is, why and how we used it and what we learned. Experiential learning, also known as experiential education[1], means turning experience and hands-on practice into purposeful learning.

Why did we use experiential learning?

The Panel's working agreement called for learning that was social and enjoyable, collective and purposeful – experiential learning supported these aims. The GoWell research team wanted to learn about the Panel's experiences of regeneration "in their own time and in their own way", GoWell Principle Investigator Professor Ade Kearns. Results from our rapid assessments also indicated that experiential learning could be useful for helping the Panel and the GoWell team to work together – see rapid assessment snapshot.

> **"It was like a fix – to look forward so much to meeting up with people, it was like we had all known each other before."**
> Focus group with GoWell researcher and panel

How did we use experiential learning?

GoWell introduced the Panel to its range of research findings. GoWell and the Panel chose the topics and designed activities to explore them. For example, when the Panel asked to find out how the GoWell surveys were conducted, we invited one of the professional interviewers to take the group through this process.

Panel workshops were designed to share knowledge, skills and insights. A key aim was that everyone, GoWell and the Panel, gained new knowledge and reflected on what they learned from each other.

GoWell's research was presented in plain English, using participatory exercises and discussion that used, and built on, existing knowledge. The Panel said that in practice, we avoided "overly clever techniques". We explored physical and social spaces in neighbourhoods, discussing experiences of regeneration and the GoWell research findings with the Panel, our researchers, communities and organisations involved in regeneration.

What did we learn?

The Panel described the experiential learning approaches used in their workshops as "learning for all" because they found the activities interesting and accessible to everyone. They reported that this approach worked because it provided just as much of a social occasion as a 'learning' one – the focus was on exploring how regeneration was understood by researchers and communities out in neighbourhoods rather than undertaking a traditional 'learning' exercise in a classroom. We noticed that experiential learning had some empowering results. For example, the group gave support and encouragement for those who felt less confident, some of whom went on to achieve "firsts" like a community achievement award. The more confident realised that empowerment could be an ongoing process across their lives. An example of this was an individual who signed up for public speaking training with the group despite saying at the start she thought she was "too old to learn".

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[1] Go to The Association of Experiential Learning for more information: www.aee.org/what-is-ee

To get more information and to access the Panel snapshots, go to www.gowellonline.com