

# CHAPTER C1

## Lifewide Learning and Creative Artists: a small scale study of lifewide learning and development among creative arts students

*Jenny Willis*

### SUMMARY

This chapter draws on the findings of a study of creativity and lifewide learning among undergraduates at the University of Surrey and Guildford School of Acting, conducted in 2010 as part of a collaborative National Teaching Fellowship project, funded by the UK's Higher Education Academy and led by the University of the Arts, London. The project focused on how students developed themselves as creative professionals while they were studying at university. These data have been re-examined and re-interpreted for this chapter from the perspective of lifewide learning and personal development. The chapter begins with a brief discussion of the context of the research and some of the concepts involved. After exposition of the research methods and sample, quantitative data are analysed in order to identify the emergent indicators of successful lifewide learners. These are then tested through a qualitative exploration of six respondents' lifewide learning and development experiences. The stories are found to support the importance of these factors for lifewide learning.

### BIOGRAPHY



Jenny Willis' career began as a linguist teaching in Inner London comprehensive schools during the 1970s and 80s, a period of continuous radical change for education. She was Deputy Head of a comprehensive school as the 1988 Education Reform Act brought further important changes for the curriculum and management of schools. She later taught for the Open University, pioneering distance and on-line learning pedagogy for languages. She then undertook a PhD in socio-linguistics at the University of Surrey, where she also worked part-time as an Assistant Registrar. This enabled her to pursue research into professional training, which led to her gaining a Fellowship at the Surrey Centre for Excellence in Professional Training and Education (SCEPTrE). Yet another career began for her when funding cuts brought redundancy from the Registry: she became an independent consultant and researcher supporting many of SCEPTrE's projects for its last two years. She continues this work as a member of the core team of the Lifewide Education Community. Jenny is a published author and contributor to 'Learning to be Professional' and 'Learning for a Complex World.' She is a member of the Royal Society for the Arts and is currently involved in teaching and assessing lifelong education.



# BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH EVIDENCE

## Creativity amongst undergraduate creative arts students in England

In 2010 SCEPTRe was a partner in a collaborative National Teaching Fellowship project, funded by the UK's Higher Education Academy and led by the University of the Arts, London, which was investigating creativity in the creative arts.

SCEPTRe initially conducted a study of undergraduates enrolled on programmes in Dance and Culture, Music, and Film and Theatre Studies at the University of Surrey's Faculty of Arts and Human Sciences, as well as students from the Guildford School of Acting (GSA). The findings were such that a second, comparative, study was commissioned, focused on undergraduates in all other disciplines at the University of Surrey.

The complementary studies investigated the same two questions:

- a. Where in [creative arts/non creative arts] students' personally determined life-wide curriculum are they able to express and develop their creativity so that they realise their creative potential?
- b. What does being professional mean to [creative arts/non-creative arts] students and how do they develop professional attitudes, capabilities and confidence to be a creative professional through their life-wide curriculum?

The aim was to identify the experiences through which students develop their capabilities within and outside the credit-bearing curriculum.

A full report of the research findings can be downloaded from:

<http://creativeinterventions.pbworks.com/w/page/16609416/FrontPage>

(see also Willis 2010a and 2010b); a videoed workshop/ presentation is available (Willis 2010c), and related articles can be found in Jackson 2010, and Willis 2012.

## Assumptions and relevance

This chapter reviews the data from the perspective of lifewide learning as opposed to creativity. For this reason, it does not reiterate the theoretical literature surrounding creativity (accounts of which can be found in any of the above resources). Nor does it repeat the background to lifewide learning, a thorough exposition of which is given by Jackson in Chapter A1 of this e-book. The author assumes that readers will be familiar with key concepts and appreciate the importance of creativity for personal and social wellbeing.

An investigation into lifewide learning habits and experiences is inevitably pitched in what, only forty years ago, might have been described as 'wicked' problems (Rittel and Webber 1973). By 2000, Snowden had developed his Cynefin framework for categorising situations according to their degree of cause and effect, from simple, to complicated, then complex and finally chaotic. Our 'wicked' problems fall within the domain of complexity, where cause and



effect make sense only in retrospect, and the multiple factors contributing to a situation are unlikely ever to come together again in exactly the same form. Nevertheless, we are able to learn from such situations and derive principles for the future, as Jackson reminds us:

Wicked problems emerge from the technical, informational, social, economic, political and cultural complexity that we are immersed in. (...) Such problems cannot be solved through rational, linear thinking because the problem definition and our understanding of it evolve as new possible solutions are invented and implemented. (Jackson 2010:2)

If we track political thinking over recent years, the significance of our living and working in an era of complexity becomes clear. In 2010, the Institute of British Management summarised the situation in these words:

For CEOs and their organizations, avoiding complexity is not an option – the choice comes in how they respond to it. Will they allow complexity to become a stifling force that slows responsiveness, overwhelms employees and customers, or threatens profits? Or do they have the creative leadership, customer relationships and operating dexterity to turn it into a true advantage? (Capitalising on complexity, IBM 2010)

According to this powerful organisation, crucial competences for those successful in the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace are the ability to tolerate and manage change, to take risks, to be forward thinking, to manage customer relations, to be proactive, to be aware of local and global markets, to have good analytical skills, be capable of problem solving, have good organisational skills and be reliable. This list includes personal dispositions, skills, knowledge and competences and could arguably be applied to lifewide experiences and successful navigation of our broader lives.

And, of course, creativity is valued not only in the workplace, but also as a source of individual enjoyment and self-realisation. This is recognised in Kaufman and Beghetto's (2009) model of creativity which encompasses big-c (bringing about significant change in a domain), pro-c (change in a field of expertise), little-c (creativity in everyday acts) and mini-c (individuals' novel, personal, interpretations of events and experiences). Jackson once more provides a summary of the relevance of the latter:

Central to the definition of mini-c creativity is the dynamic, interpretative process of constructing personal knowledge and understanding within a particular socio-cultural context. (Jackson 2012)

So we are brought to the relevance of a re-examination of the research findings: what light does it shine on the nature of lifewide learning as experienced by this group of individuals as individuals making sense of, and directing, their lives?



## RESEARCH METHODS AND SAMPLE

### The questionnaire, audio-interviews and video-interviews

We have noted above that SCEPTRe's contribution to this collaborative project comprised two separate, but parallel, surveys. For the purposes of this chapter, we are drawing from the first, smaller-scale, study, which was conducted between February and June 2010.

An on-line questionnaire was devised and all undergraduate students in the departments outlined above were invited by email to complete it. The questions addressed aspects of learning through the curriculum and in extra-curricular activities, those that were and were not related to the student's programme of study, eg part-time work, volunteering, hobbies, carer responsibilities. Both quantitative and qualitative data were sought, through a mix of questions where respondents rated issues and others where they were invited to provide narrative responses. The chosen platform was ValuesExchange, a platform developed by Professor David Seedhouse to 'promote democracy, deliberation and tolerance' through a process of value-based decision making (see <http://www.values-exchange.com/>). Questionnaires were completed on a secure site where respondents can see an immediate analysis of the collective data, but the project manager has control over who may access individual responses.

The questionnaire was intended to indicate trends, as determined by statistical analysis of relevant questions. These enabled respondents to express their views on creativity, professionalism and lifewide experience, thereby producing a qualitative database and also indicating which students should be potential interviewees.

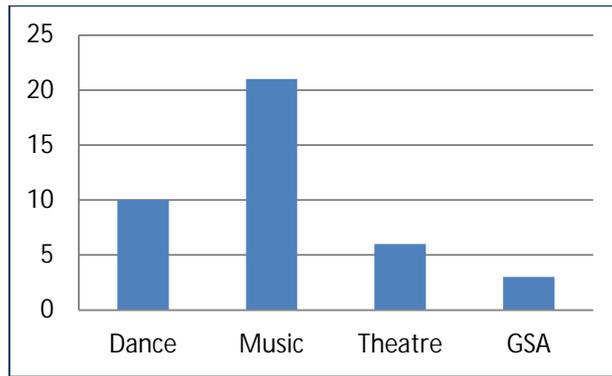
Respondents were asked whether they would be willing to take part in a follow-up interview, in order to expand on their narrative replies. Of these, a sample was interviewed for a second time, to create a video archive of their views. The author conducted each stage of the research so as to maximise emergent views and avoid having to recap before each new step.

### Respondents

The response rate for the questionnaire was modest (n=40 - annual intake for each programme was around 50), despite careful scheduling to avoid periods of assessment or pressure. Nevertheless, there was considerable consistency between the lifewide experiences of this group and those of the non-creative arts students in the parallel study, (n=206) and those found in a preliminary investigation of lifewide learning carried out in SCEPTRe in November 2009 (n=309). This suggests the data are reliable for the period and population involved.

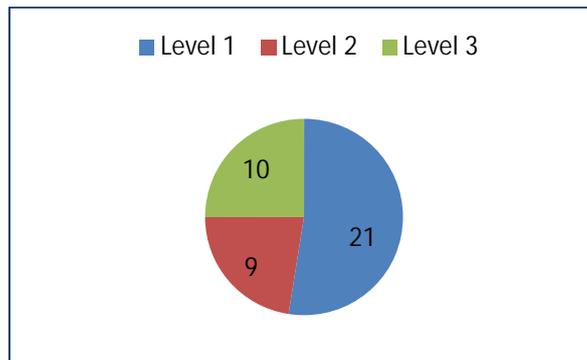
The spread of creative arts respondents is shown by discipline in Figure 1. Musicians represent just over half of the total, but it should be noted that they include both 'standard' music students and those following the Tonmeister programme of Music and Sound Recording.





**Figure 1** Creative arts respondents by discipline

The questionnaire was offered to relevant undergraduates in all years. As might have been expected given the time commitment, level 1 students were the most responsive, with those in their second and final year of study being almost equal in number (Figure 2).



**Figure 2** Respondents by level of study

## Audio interviews

From these 40 respondents, a sample of 10 was selected for interview. These students represented a balance in discipline, age, level of study and sex. In the event, some were unable to participate and funding did not permit extension of the study to recruit replacements. Six semi-structured interviews, each lasting up to one hour, audio recorded and fully transcribed were conducted, as illustrated in Table 1.

**Table 1** Actual audio interviewees

Age	Dance		Music		Drama/Film/Theatre		Tonmeister		GSA	
	M/level	F/level	M/level	F/level	M/level	F/level	M/level	F/level	M/level	F/level
18-22		2 x L3	1 x L3	1 x L1			1 x L1			
23-30			1 x L3							

This shows that, once again, Music students were the most highly represented. Perhaps due to the timing of the interviews (towards the end of the academic year), level 3s were those most keen to take part, before graduating from the university. There was an equal balance between male and female interviewees.

## Video interviews

The quality of interviewee feedback was so impressive that four were invited to participate in a second, filmed, interview. This was semi-structured and aimed to develop views expressed in the audio interview. Table 2 shows the discipline, level of study and sex of these interviewees. One of the Dance students was from overseas; all others were home students.

**Table 2** Video interviewees

	Dance	Music	Tonmeister
Male		L3 UK	L1 UK
Female	L3 UK L3 OS		

The remainder of this chapter draws from the data derived from these three stages .

## WHERE DOES LEARNING TAKE PLACE?

The questionnaire examined respondents' perceptions of where their lifewide learning takes place, and guided them through this process of reflection by structuring questions in four groups:

1. Personal and study data
2. Learning and development within the programme of study
3. Learning and development outside the programme of study and life-wide
4. Views on creativity and professionalism

Whilst it is question 3 that is primarily of interest in this chapter, it will be helpful to the discussion if we begin by identifying the nature of perceived learning both in the formal curriculum and in the less readily recognised, lifewide, context.

### Learning through the programme of study

Respondents were asked to rate a set of possible learning outcomes that they may be achieving through their programme of study, using the scale 1 = very little, to 5 = very great learning. The percentage of those who scored each outcome either 4 or 5, the highest levels of perceived learning, are recorded in Table 3.

The largest degree of learning was felt to relate to:

- Team work 90%
- Creativity 90%
- Listening skills 88%
- Evaluation 85%



Developing through Programme of Study	% 4/5
Subject Knowledge	80
Analysis	78
Evaluation	85
Synthesis	58
Problem solving	38
Design solutions	55
Enquiry skills	85
Research skills	68
Written communication	83
Verbal communication	85
Active listening	88
Use of IT	55
Visual/graphical	40
Other communication	5
Experience real work	65
Team work	90
Adaptability	85
Leadership	60
Being creative	90
Being enterprising	50
Ethical awareness	53
Self-management	80
Reflection. Self-evaluation	80
Learning another language	15

**Table 3** Perceived learning through the programme of study

Respondents added a few more dimensions of their own, which they did not rate:

- Acquiring greater confidence and assertiveness
- Opportunities to perform
- Learning from other students' strengths and weaknesses
- Refining interpersonal skills
- Listening and observing
- Collaborations and social interaction
- Applying academic knowledge to real life situations
- 'Delving into our past and personal emotions'
- Practical ('logic side') of career planning
- Re-establishing links with cultural background
- Increasing motivation
- Aspiring to a more professional standard
- Becoming more independent

Together, the two lists comprise a range of skills, competences and personal dispositions recognised by learners as being developed through their programme-related experiences.

**Table 4** Perceived learning beyond the curriculum (lifewide experiences)

Q8	% 4/5	Q9	% 4/5
Looking after yourself	90	Find/apply for job	20
Being a parent	0	Interview prep	13
Caring for someone	13	Being interviewed	13
Having a job related to your chosen career	33	Learning in work context	15
Participating in professional training scheme	28	Applying classroom learning	15
Creating or running a business	3	Gaining work experience	28
Volunteering	38	Understand how business works	15
Significant travel experience	35	Being managed	8
Living in another country	23	Professional skills	30
Meeting/interacting with other cultures	53	Written communication	35
Coping with personal illness	15	Verbal communication	45
Organising something	65	Graphical/visual communication	25
Fund raising	30	Listening skills	45
Participating in challenging experience	5	Assess a situation	35
Duke of Edinburgh Award	3	Find out for action	33
Learning another language	18	Make decision with little information	33
Learning a skill eg to drive	40	Evaluate/reflect on performance	40
Experience of performing in public	78	How to improve performance	38
Learning/playing a sport	15	How to use IT skills	18
Learning/playing a musical instrument	55	Work with colleagues	43
Being part of a drama group	23	Interact with others	45
Active involvement in other creative enterprises	30	Interact with clients	38
Being a member of a student society	48	Socialise with other cultures	33
Mentoring or coaching others	38	Manage others	20
Participating in skills-based SU activities	15	Manage self	38
Participating in Careers Service events	15	Manage emotions	35
Participating in SPLASH events	10	Behave ethically	30
Participating in other skills-based activities	38	Negotiate with others	25
		Persuade others	25
		Understand career goals	40
		Challenging situations	28
		Risk taking	25
		Managing challenging responsibilities	20
		Being creative	55
		Confidence in own abilities	40
		Other	3

## Learning beyond the programme of study

When asked about aspects of their extra-curricular (lifewide) learning, respondents were less able to recognise the extent of learning, as revealed by the lower percentage of scores 4 or 5 for each dimension. Two complementary questions addressed this form of learning, and some dimensions featured in both questions. To avoid editorial bias, the scores for all dimensions are provided (Table 4).



- Interacting with other cultures 53%
- Membership of student society 48%
- Verbal communication 45%
- Interaction with others 45%
- Listening skills 45%
- Working with colleagues 43%
- Self-evaluation 40%
- Learning a skill 40%
- Understanding career goals 40%
- Gaining self-confidence 40%

As before, we can identify the dimensions where greatest learning is perceived to be occurring. They are:

- Looking after oneself 90%
- Performing in public 78%
- Organising something 65%
- Learning/playing an instrument 55%
- Being creative 55%

Although the extent of perceived learning is less than in the formal situation (where feedback on performance, coursework and examination grades inform the learner), the lifewide learning dimensions bear striking similarities with those of the curricular context. If we remove performing in public and learning a musical instrument, dimensions which are particularly important to creative artists but which may be less relevant to the wider community, we are able to determine a common list of the areas in which respondents recognise significant learning. They emerge as:

- Opportunities to be creative
- Self-management
- Critical reflection
- Interaction/communication with others
- Working with others
- Growth in self-confidence

What, then, were the lifewide experiences that enabled respondents to derive a sense of achievement in these domains? The next section examines the stories of six individuals, as described in their own words, in order to illustrate the complex interconnections involved in lifewide learning.

## THE NATURE OF LIFEWIDE LEARNING

Jon

Jon is one of the youngest respondents. He is in his first year of a Tonmeister Music and Sound Recording degree, and hopes to work “in some form of music production/



composition/studio engineering/song writing/performance". The variety of potential career paths is typical of his enthusiasm for life. He has thought through how best to prepare for the world of work:

*I will need to be creative, assertive, technically minded, practical and good at working with a range of different kinds of people*

and he feels that his course is developing him in these areas. He has also sought work experience in recording studios.

For Jon, lifewide activities are closely related to his varied creative interests. Through them, he believes he gains personal fulfilment and professional originality, as he illustrates:

*I do a lot of composition - a lot of kind of music creativity, obviously. Aside from that, I also do a lot of art work and I sell art work, um, it's a different kind of creativity but it's still from the same source. Those are mainly the kind of things I enjoy doing in my spare time, and I'm also interested in more technical side of engineering as well.*

Whilst his hobbies may be predominantly creative, Jon distinguishes between those that relate to his career and those he chooses for leisure alone. He comments:

*And art's something I do pretty much for fun on the side although in some ways it was my best subject at A-level, I could never see myself doing it any further in higher education because I dislike the amount of control that is put on you, whereas I feel there's much more - just prefer to do whatever I want.*

*I mean I've left aside anything artistic, because I'm going to try and keep that as a hobby and not spoil it by having to do it for like money. Or rather having to do it to make a living rather than living to do it.*

In fact, Jon appears almost compulsive in his need to be active. He acknowledges the need for self-motivation but demonstrates his passion for learning, admitting

*Like, I hate the idea of wasting time. I mean if you're sat around - I mean watching TV is you know, it's relaxing but I find at university, without things like TV and things like that, that I spend a lot more time just learning, or making or enhancing stuff, that I'm forwarding my own knowledge. Knowledge as well, targeting my creativity, it's something that yeah, one has to work on.*

When probed at interview, a different aspect of Jon's life emerges: he brushes it aside, but has considerable experience of voluntary work related to disabled youngsters. Almost as an afterthought, he reveals a need to justify the learning he derived as he recalls:

*Another thing I did was when I was in college that was completely voluntary, which was going into school and teaching primary school kids about drugs. Again, it was a different age but a lot of it was about people skills. I think it's just an accumulation of things like that and then working in retail and earning money, learning how important it is to be sensitive to the customer all the time and working with them.*



Having opened up about this experience, Jon goes on to discuss the time he spent tutoring and befriending a disabled, isolated teenager, a little younger than himself. Amongst the ethical issues he found himself dealing with was a request from the boy for Jon to write his assignments for him. Jon stood firm, but admits

*It was difficult, particularly at times. There was a lot of responsibility when he's quite a big guy as well and it was very difficult to keep him on the right level - he'd just go off at a bit of a tangent. It was hard to keep him under control while not being controlling, as it were.*

Rather than give up, Jon developed self-confidence and, like many lifewide learners, turned a difficult situation into a positive experience. He illustrates this in his account of what happened when he was asked to take his teenage charge out to meet the boy's girlfriend.

*It turned out she was in a wheelchair and I was told by his mother one day when I was taking him out that his girlfriend would be there as well and her mother would be in town but not actually with us. But I wasn't told that she couldn't eat, she couldn't feed herself and couldn't speak - had like a voice box. And I don't think legally I should look after her. I wasn't told in advance but I'm pretty sure you have to have some kind of training to be qualified to care for someone who's in a wheel chair who needs that kind of attention. So that was quite challenging to be honest, but you know, it was enlightening. It certainly, I'm glad I did it, it kind of opened my eyes how difficult it is if that's say a sibling of yours, in the family, it's a lot of responsibility.*

So what does this snapshot of Jon reveal about lifewide learning? If we consider it against the list of six significant factors (opportunities to be creative; self-management; critical reflection; interaction/communication with others; working with others and growth in self-confidence), surely he has provided evidence of drawing on each of these.

## Ashley

For our second case study we look at the experience of a final year Dance Student, Ashley, who had undertaken a year on professional placement before embarking on L3. She is therefore a little older than Jon and has had greater exposure to lifewide opportunities.

Ashley's part-time work has included being a waitress and bar tender in several establishments, administrative work for a local council, and teaching. She also has a range of self-development and voluntary experience dating back to her school days, as she explains:

*Before university I did Duke of Edinburgh Award - I did bronze, silver and gold. So I took it right through. The DoE award is actually hiking and camping and for each bronze, silver and gold level that you do, you have to do more, you have to do wild camping, just have everything on your back, basically. It's really, really tough, but it's really good for yourself, for you to push yourself physically, in that sort of way, without having the facilities that make you comfortable in life. Other than that I've done a lot of drama again, and music, and I've done bits of teaching already at primary school*



*and at high school, so yeah, quite a bit other than just uni. I taught a bit, and still do, for uni sport here through them. I don't know if you've heard of a project, Guildford Grooves? It's a lottery funded project that helps children that originally shied away from sports because of confidence or, I guess things like low self-esteem, things like that, they just weren't comfortable with doing it.*

It is clear from her words that Ashley has reflected on the value, both to herself and others, of the activities in which she has been involved. Her assessment of her work with the children on the Grooves project is particularly sensitive: the work required

*understanding their dance ability because it was for children that originally, you know, aren't very creative and don't want to have to get involved in these things. There was er, some people, some of the children really bonded with it straight away, wanted to get involved straight away and show the class, others shied away and it would be 'Oh, I've forgotten my kit' or this, that or the other. It was like finding, you had to find the underlying problems for why they felt that way, and sometimes it was things at home, and other times it was just because they didn't get on with the Years 6s, the Year 5s, tiny little things. But by the end of it they all, they enjoyed it and you could see, even the ones that - it wasn't about being the best dancer, it was about other things, about helping them with confidence and things like that.*

Ashley's teaching experience had led her to reappraise her personal values and hence to decide against a career on the stage in favour of one in school. She says of the dance profession:

*I just thought their lives are jam-packed - they do 9-6 for 6 days, they go off on tour, which all sounds very nice for a while, but after that ... and still the money, for what they do, isn't that great either. You've got to think about that, too, I guess.*

*(...) I guess it's just because, you're like working with like council, if you're looking like far in advance, like maternity cover, there's a scheme that you can work up. I wasn't just interested in dance, I like music and drama, and I like the idea of being a head of department, and running the Duke of Edinburgh Award - because I did that at school myself. All the extra things that you get rewarded for doing, those extra things, financially as well, you get rewarded in your pay packet.*

She has realised that financial and professional security are more important to her than the immediate, but transient, thrill of performing. But her decision to teach is for other reasons, too:

*I guess it's because I've always had to learn, like, I don't know, there isn't much space in state schools, they have, you know, the main hall is taken over as the canteen, and the sports hall is being used for, I don't know, indoor football, because it's raining and so, you end up finding yourself as a student in a corridor, you know, creating something or in your bedroom, trying to figure something out. And sometimes that's where the best bits come, it doesn't matter what the location. You could have a beautiful mirrored studio with two walls of just pure glass and beautiful scenery around you and you've still not come up with something. So I think it's the drive of yourself that brings out the creativity as well.*



So we return to the theme of creativity and the intrinsic value it has for Ashley. She recognises that her creativity brings pleasure to herself and her students. When asked where she gets the drive she speaks of, she replies:

*My high school performing arts teacher who always pushed me. Pushed me, pushed me, pushed me. I'd hand a piece of work in and it would come back and I could hand it in, hand it in, hand it in, and it would still come back with things to do. She said there's always something that you can do, always push yourself so that you achieve what you want to achieve and with the roles that she gave me and the confidence that she had that I could achieve well then enabled me to do that better.*

In short, Ashley, too, exhibits the characteristics of a lifewide learner and this final quotation inspires us with hope for her success in her chosen profession:

*I think that even the students that struggle more, that might not be the A students in a class, can still achieve a lot. And it might not show in their grades at the end of the year, but it will show in them as a person, and how they interact with other people and other teachers.*

## JiaXuan

Our next story is that of an overseas student, then in her final year, following a year's professional placement. JiaXuan is a Chinese Malaysian who came to the UK to study Dance and Culture, a subject that was not available to her in her homeland. She specifically chose the University of Surrey because the course there includes a professional training year, taken between levels 2 and 3. This decision is typical of her rational approach to life, something she readily acknowledges:

*I think some people might think I take things too seriously sometimes. I try not to stress myself out. Even if I do, I kind of start managing my own emotions first rather than go straight into the problem, where the problem is. Yes, things do stress me out but I sort myself out first.*

Rationality is accompanied by a profound *joie de vivre*, and JiaXuan giggles constantly. She attributes this attitude to her own take on creativity, as she explains:

*I think my sense of creativity comes into how I see things in life, how I manage my own life, not so much in, I don't know, I don't know how to put it. I think being creative, it has to be within a framework, it's not something that you can go wild on.*

This complex mix of adventurousness and control may reflect the dual influences of her cultural background and personal desire to explore the wider world. Unlike Jon whose lifewide experiences were closely aligned with his artistic discipline, JiaXuan has set out to enjoy as many different experiences as she can whilst studying in the West. So, she looked for part-time employment:

*I just thought I needed something else to do. Extra money helps, yes ... umm, I just wanted that extra bit of money and I think, just to get away from dance and whatever*



*little world I'm living in. (...) So I worked in Yvonne Arnaud Theatre in my first and second year. That was at a café, café-bar. So we served coffees, gin and tonic with lime yeah, just basically serving drinks, cashing up tills, stocking up. When I was in London doing my placement, I worked in a Japanese restaurant, just outside my house. Oh, that's a takeaway restaurant, so phone calls, packing bags, taking stuff from the freezer ... (Interacting with people?) Yeh, and it's interesting because that Japanese restaurant is opened by a Hong Kong guy, the sushi girls are Brazilians, and front desk, customer service or whatever you call them are Vietnamese and Malaysian. Welcome to London! We're only allowed (to speak) English in the restaurant but yeah, it was fun just talking to other people really. I really enjoyed living in, kind of, a multicultural environment.*

Multiculturalism is a theme to which she returns when she describes her accommodation at the university:

*I've a brilliant house this year, on campus in Guildford Court - Ghanaians, Algerians, Nigerians, Spanish, Germans, Netherlands - some British, but Asian people, me, Chinese, so it's really fun. I think this is the best house I've ever been (in), to be honest. We're really, really close, going out for a meal tomorrow.*

Her passion for new experiences and different cultures has driven her to make the most of her extra-curricular time. She describes how she came to be working in the USA for nine weeks then travelling alone for the next six weeks during her first summer in the West, and what she has learnt from this experience:

*So I just kind of bumped into this and it's like open to all UK students, instead of residents, so I thought okay that's a good opportunity, so I went there. I worked as kitchen staff in a performing arts camp, which was really good. All my other friends, they were camp counsellors, so they were with children and things. But I'm not really good with children so I said, okay, I'll do kitchen staff - a nasty work but more freedom and more pay kind of thing, so it was really good.*

*... It's the confidence of being able to be within a community - and that would be the camp people, because it's just like, Scottish people, Polish people, whatever, but we've only got nine weeks to live together, so we really need to build up that relationship, that bond, so that's one part. And then afterwards it's me travelling alone - yeah, totally alone, so that means I have to live in hostels and talk to ... Well, I think it's alright in America, unless if you say I would go travelling alone in Cambodia or something, I think I would be, I would think that's an achievement, but I don't think that in America it's that hard. But really, living in hostels, asking for directions, just all by yourself. And you have to organise your own, my own time, my itinerary where I am going to and so on. So that one plus, on top of everything I've learnt in my first year as a student here, culture shock, everything.*

We are reminded once more of the key dimensions of lifewide learning, the enhancement of self-confidence through self-management and successful negotiation of new experiences.



JiaXuan fills every moment with meaning. The long vacations are brimming with new opportunities and encounters:

*It's kind of like a five month gap so I went to Europe, America, Australia, and back to Malaysia, and back here, so it was like a long trip. But since I've been to America, travelled there, first year summer I went there, second year I went there as well. So I thought, well, third summer I'd better do something different so I volunteered in this ethnic dance festival in San Francisco for three weeks, just helping out in their office. Because I just want to get as much experience as I can. In just the general kind of administration, so I know which area I'm interested in, so I just said, okay, I just want to help out.*

Again, we see her taking control and making things happen. Nothing is too menial or daunting for her. She sums this up:

*I think that for me is creativity, when you don't see a problem as a problem any more, but how to make that a better situation.*

Yet JiaXuan is realistic about her own limitations, as she reveals in the comment above regarding her lack of skills in dealing with children. Like Ashley, she shies away from performing herself, choosing instead to have a career in dance management. She concludes

*As much as I enjoy dancing, I think, what I really want to do is to help dancers achieve their dreams - that is my aspiration really, and I'm pretty kinda good in that, (laughs) kinda organised!*

## Omer

Omer's story is interesting because it shows us how breadth of experience is secondary to the depth of learning derived from opportunities, and how some individuals need support in recognising their personal development.

Omer came to the UK from Israel when he was around the age of eight. He therefore has potential benefits of experiencing different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. However, from the outset, he is a self-deprecating interviewee who needs a great deal of coaxing to talk about his experiences and to appreciate his achievements, even within his field of study.

He is in his final year of a music degree and reveals the difficulties he had before coming to university:

*I'm 22, so I took my time getting to uni, so I feel a lot older a lot of the times (...) I had a year out and then afterwards I retook my second year at college, then I came here. (...) I didn't kind of go abroad - I basically worked full time for a while, um, in pretty much the worst job I've ever been in. It's the most difficult job I've ever been in. Which did, er, you know, was very good for me, because now, whatever job I get is, you know, very easy .... It was uh, kinda being a runner, a waiter runner in this hotel/restaurant/bar and it was pretty much like slave labour there, I mean it was definitely illegal, what they were making us do, I think. I mean, sometimes you would*



*work kind of a 12 hour day with ten minutes break. Sometimes you'd finish at 2 o'clock in the morning then the next day you'd have to wake up at 5 to get there for 6 for a breakfast shift, which means you have two or three hours sleep for another ten hours, ten hours to 12 hours so it was definitely (...) Most of the time I was, the thing was I thought I'd just be a waiter but I ended up doing kind of the whole waitering thing for the restaurants and also for all the function rooms where they'd have business meetings, **at the same time**. And also at the same time, there'd be room service at the hotel all the time, and sometimes I'd be the only member of staff who knows any English, that's working there. And the chef's trying to say you have to say what the meals are and yeh, just crazy.*

Omer shows insight into the personal qualities he needed to withstand this pressure but does he value the true degree of learning? He left the job, then worked in a cinema, summarising the year with these words:

*I didn't really get much done apart from that. I, actually I did my grade 8 piano exam. That's when I started teaching, I also started teaching piano. I was pretty much forced into it really, 'cos I really wanted to do it but I didn't think I'd have the confidence. I didn't think I'd be good for teaching, 'cos I'd never done it before.*

Rather than recognise the wealth of these accumulating experiences, he once more focuses on the negative. Ironically, he has decided to go into teaching after graduation, albeit *faute de mieux*, and contrary to his real interests. He says of the teaching profession:

*I really don't think I would be suited for it, that's the thing. You have to be good at public speaking, which is something I'm absolutely terrible and terrified of. And, uh, you have to be quite authoritative as well, which I'm very much the opposite of. I mean I even struggle when it's one-on-one tuition with some of my students so it's, er, it's quite a scary concept. But it's something I'm just gonna have to do with the current economic climate and everything, it's probably best to have a stable kind of secure income, that you know ...*

Again, he is to be commended on his determination but one fears for his survival in a classroom of children - until he opens up and recounts his experience of privately tutoring the children of his mother's friend.

*I had students that were five years old, eight years old, and that was a nightmare some of the time. I really didn't know what I was doing, (...) I taught them for about a year and then they moved house... Yeah, it was, I mean the eight year old, for instance, he was just very disobedient. And not being very authoritative, I couldn't really, and plus I'm not his parent, I couldn't shout at him or anything like that. And yet he was throwing things about, jumping across the sofas when I was trying to teach him. His parents forced him into it (learning music). And I guess the other thing that I really kind of learnt from teaching was how to try to inspire students, and how to, even if they don't initially have much enthusiasm, try to build enthusiasm. For instance with that kid, I um, I was asking him what his favourite music is, if he has any favourite bands, sort of thing, and so, for instance, he said Gorillaz, so I looked out some Gorillaz tracks and tried to transcribe the notation by a few songs and tried to*

*simplify them to the level of music I was teaching him, and then, yeah, trying to teach him his favourite songs. And that kind of worked a little bit ...*

Objective readers might feel Omer had made an important discovery and displayed ingenuity and perseverance in the face of these difficulties; he had to be persuaded to view events from this perspective. Yet, he has not been without external opportunities and he has clearly reflected on them, as we see from the following account:

*The cinema job I learnt that you need, you kinda need to look busy no matter what you're doing. Look kinda constantly like you're being productive, because the cinema job was just, after doing the most difficult job ever was just, doing that was just a joke because you'd be doing a shift for six hours and maybe an hour and a half, two hours of that time you'd be actually working. You know, when there's a film showing, everybody comes in for a drink, you serve in the bar then you show them into the auditorium and restock the shelves and that's it. The rest of the day you're - there's absolutely nothing to do, so I ended up bringing a reading book just for that time where there's nothing to do and that didn't get across very well.*

And he has been working throughout his degree, potentially gaining valuable skills as well as providing himself with an income:

*I've been working in Tesco now four years almost. It's stock control, so everything from, just basically seeing, looking for any products on any shelves that are on use by date, or sell by date are the next day, and then you reduce the price. It really is a job you could do in your sleep. It's er, I mean I guess there is responsibility I mean, for instance with the fish, with the raw fish, you know, you've got to be very careful, for instance if a customer buys out of date raw fish, that's deadly. I mean it's pretty much just, the thing is they do emphasise a lot productivity, and that's kinda problematic because a lot of people that work there, they go through everything in two hours time, which is impossible, so they obviously don't look very well. So I'm very slow at the job but I kind of make sure, especially with raw fish and meat and stuff, that, you know... But yeah, they tell you exactly what you need to do and by what percentage to reduce the price by if the display date is until tomorrow and so on, so yeah, there's a training for it but it's a very, very boring job. (What keeps you there?) The money, I mean, it's very good money. I work just Sundays and it's pay and a half, so it's £10 an hour there. It's after the customers leave, it's during closing hours, so I can listen to MP3. My boss is fine, I've got no problems with the managers there so yeah, it's ideal really.*

These words are revealing: not only is Omer meticulous and committed to his work, but he has, whether intentionally or not, found a form of employment which is suited to his rather withdrawn personality. If only he had the self-confidence to view his experiences in a more positive light.

This lack of self-confidence is surprising in a performer and we witness it even when he talks about his musical endeavours.



*I kind of started off writing music when I was 14, um jazz, blues kind of stuff, um, then went on to more kind of experimental, kind of bringing in ideas from kind of modal music - I'm kind of influenced by Miles Davis, also kind of influenced by world music so to speak, like um using sitar and you know all kinds of stuff like that and then, um, um, kind of went into the more electronic side of things, like electronic dance music, you know. And so, yeah, you know I've been writing a lot of, in the past few years, writing a lot of er, kind of club tracks, dance music, electronic music. Also kind of experimental, electronic music with kind of world elements. Again, that's something, that's been, I mean, kind of always been brainwashed for want of a better word in terms of my parents' music collection is everything from you know, Middle Eastern music to Blues, to Rock and Roll, to kind of avant garde jazz, to er, African, kind of everything, Chinese, everything.*

Many of us would be proud to have such achievements, yet he remains self-critical. His timidity extends to when he is performing on keyboard, and he tellingly only enjoys this when the focus is off him:

*I've had quite a lot of performing opportunities and I was terrified a lot of the time through that but also, another thing in the gap year, I got into a band where we'd start performing in local pubs and bars and stuff like that and, um, that was my first time doing that and I was very scared at first y'know, doing that. But once I actually started doing it I found it was really one of the most kind of laid back performance sessions you could do because I mean, everybody's talking amongst themselves. Yeah, it's very laid back, I mean, I don't usually have stage fright from that, it's very different from kind of a concert setting with classical repertoire.*

Occasionally, Omer displays insight, but it is rarely self-directed. Recalling one of his 6<sup>th</sup> form college tutors, he says:

*There was a music technology teacher, this Scottish guy who's brilliant and he was completely, he didn't care what people thought of what he said, he would just say it. He told me before, that's just rubbish, do that from scratch again, after I'd worked probably 12 hours on it, and he was like, rubbish. (I felt) a bit annoyed at first but you know it's er, at the end of the day he was right, he was right and I could see where he was coming from.*

What, then, can we deduce from Omer's story? He had a range of pertinent and varied experiences, he demonstrated creativity and self-management, but he remained reluctant to accept his achievements. This is a tendency often found in the British culture, where we feel we should not 'sell ourselves': any teacher who has tried to encourage a student to write a CV will be familiar with the problem. Omer serves as a reminder that to have appropriate experiences and lifewide learning is insufficient: the process of critical reflection and development of self-confidence are essential if the individual is to value and maximise their achievements.

Let us return to a positive example of lifewide learning for our final case study.



## Dan

Like our first respondent, Dan was also studying Music and Sound Recording (MSR). At the time of the research, he was in his final year of a four-year degree programme, which had included a year on professional placement. He is the only child of what he himself describes as unconventional, artistic, parents, and is the first in his family to go to university. His choice of MSR might seem surprising given his views of musical performance:

*my parents kind of forced me into learning piano and violin when I was young. But I think it's partly because they were making me do it that I didn't WANT to do it. So that's why I kind of stopped doing those at about I guess eight or nine. And I started about three or four I think.*

However, he goes on to explain his antipathy:

*I don't think I was anti music. I think I was anti piano and violin basically, just classical traditions that I wasn't that interested in whereas the bass guitar was more modern. And because I chose it, I knew that I wanted to do it, if you know what I mean. So music's always been a big part, even when I wasn't really interested in learning the instruments at an early age, I was still writing music and things like that so, yeah, just because I stopped playing those didn't mean that I hated music, just a subset of that.*

Already, Dan is revealing his determined nature and analytical mind, characteristics which recur throughout his story.

He acknowledges that 'the things I do in the programme of study and in my free time are quite similar' but this is not to be mistaken for his being one-dimensional. Indeed, he stresses:

*I don't like the monotony of the same thing every day. I'm not sure if I can cope with that for like my working career, for the rest of my life or whatever. I'd like to do, I'd like to do different things, certainly and music seems quite a good way of attaining that goal. Because in music you're always doing, even if you're - even as a teacher - you're always doing different things so, it's not just the same process every day.*

Dan has been active in different fields since he left school, explaining the variety of work he has experienced:

*I took a gap year before I started university and I worked pretty much solidly for six months in offices, just kind of doing temp work. But that built up, you know, enough funds that I can kind of comfortably support myself for the moment, anyway. Which means that over summers and things I haven't had to worry about money - I've just been doing the work experience for work experience sake. And hopefully I'll have enough by the end of the year so I can set aside, you know, five to six months or something, and say I just want to try and work with this and if I can get somewhere with it, that's great and I'll keep doing it, if I can't, I'll maybe think about something else to do.*



His pragmatism and self-management are clear, but so, too, is his insight into the learning derived from his experiences. Of the administrative job, he says,

*It was mostly data entry and liaising with occupants. It was quite, um, it's probably the worst job I've done out of all the jobs that I've done. It was organising gas and electrical tests on an RAF base in Uxbridge for like the 6000 houses around London that they own. But there were all sorts of problems like the engineers wouldn't turn up or... so we used to get hundreds of phone calls from angry people complaining and having a go at us when there was literally nothing we could have done about it. (...) I thought it was going to be strictly data entry which is kind of why I went for it. Because I'm not such a fan of dealing with really confrontational people over the telephone - it's quite hard to do, I think.*

When challenged that he seems very self-confident, he refutes this:

*I don't think I am, either, to be honest. I'm not doing a performance module but I have done a fair amount through my time at university and before that but I don't feel any, most of the time I don't feel any less nervous than I did the first time I did it or anything. And I guess I have been performing, pretty much throughout my life, when I was playing piano, violin my parents were always pushing me into concerts and things, and at school as well, school plays and that. But I still feel just as nervous now as I did then, so I don't think it's gone away or I've conquered it or anything.*

So, when another data job presented itself, he embraced it because

*I did work in a very nice office job which was just basic data entry and everyone in the office was nice and it was just, it's probably the easiest job I've ever done - that's probably why I liked it. It was only for a couple of weeks but ... It was a very lenient job. Basically, if I finished early I could still kind of sit there and do whatever I wanted on the internet and they'd still pay me for it. So that suited me fine. I'm quite quick at typing, so I generally got things done quite quickly then I'd sit there and get paid for sitting around. In a summer job, that's kind of fun.*

Dan has worked in other jobs, always enjoying their variety. For instance:

*I've also worked at 'a', it's a music summer school, so I've done that for the past four or five years now. All I'm doing there is kind of being a runner and being a kind of assistant to the managers of the event, but that's always been quite fun 'cos you're always doing different things and kind of running about the place and making sure everyone's okay and sorting things out.*

He sought out his own professional training year placements, displaying perseverance and determination ('I spent the first few weeks of summer just emailing everyone I could find, and trying to sort something out'). This resulted in two jobs which suited his need for variety:

*I worked at two small production studios in London, they both kind of dealt with, because they're small, they're very versatile and adaptable, so they could kind of turn their hand to anything, really, which was, you know, very good for me 'cos I got to see what something like that would be like. And unlike an office job, it's continually*



*changing. They're continually dealing with different things. So they mostly did things like voice-overs for adverts and TV shows and things like that, so I got to meet some interesting people through that. And they wrote, they were also composers and sound designers, dudes like that, and I also got to do some of that work, help them out which was quite good. I wasn't just sitting there watching.*

Readers might think Dan is always on the go, but he confesses to 'wasting' time:

*I seem to waste a lot of time quite easily. You know about Facebook and everything, but I don't just sit on Facebook, just the internet in general is incredibly good at wasting your time. Although I enjoy wasting it on the internet I don't think it's ... most of the time it's not very productive. That's just one of the things. Obviously, I watch quite a lot of TV programmes and play a lot of games and things, they also eat up a lot of time. I do kind of, I always feel, if, if I could ever be motivated or if I actually sat down every day and worked for the same amount of time you'd be in a job, for like nine hours a day or eight hours a day, if I worked for that time, I'm sure I'd get everything done really quickly, I'd get my work done, and then I'd just enjoy the rest of my time at university without having to stress about the next deadline. But that's not the way it goes. We had a deadline on Monday and even though I've had, you know, more than a month to do the work, and I had started it, but I had to still end up finishing it the night before, rounding it off and printing it off and everything. It was just a case of I had to get it done because that's when it was due in. Some people, various people I know, are very good at getting things in days before the deadline. I'm not sure if I've ever been that good at getting things in. I meet the deadlines but not in as timely a fashion as I'd like. I'm doing okay sort of marks, so can't be too bad.*

Like other respondents, he seems to think he should be perpetually productive. He readily acknowledges the need for motivation, and does not seem to have a problem in this respect:

*Motivating yourself is probably the biggest challenge. Because once you've decided you're gonna do it, you start working towards your goals, it's generally not as bad as you think.*

So he is even contemplating trying his hand at teaching, of which he has only limited experience, and which he recognises has limited appeal:

*Even that wasn't professional teaching, I wasn't paid for it. It was just for a few friends of mine who wanted to kind of give it a go really. But I found it fun, I found it rewarding and enjoyable to kind of be helping them. So I don't know, I think it's something I would enjoy if I can get into it. I wouldn't want to go back to school, if you know what I mean - I think that would, it would feel like a step backward for me. Teaching whole classes as well I think would be quite hard work. From friends that I've talked to I mean, the hardest thing is keeping the class under control, making sure everyone's doing what they're meant to be doing and not mucking about too much ... I remember what it was like to be at school and it depended on the teacher obviously. Some teachers were better at keeping control over the class than others. I wasn't naughty ... but yeah, it depended on the teacher, I would worry that I wouldn't be able to control the class effectively. And it seems like a lot of hard work, to be*

*honest. Although the one benefit is holidays, I think, that would be good. I mean, I don't know, I don't think I could keep control over a class of kids. They're going through a lot of changes as it is, I think it would be quite hard to stop them from ... I guess it depends what you're teaching. But if it was one-to-one instrumental tutoring then that would be fine.*

Through his words, it should be evident that Dan encapsulates all the characteristics of successful lifewide learners. He embraces opportunities for being creative; his self-management enables him to seek out new experiences, and through them, working and interacting with others, and reflecting on them, he grows in self-confidence, ready for the next new experience.

## CONCLUSION

We began with the identification of six emergent characteristics of successful lifewide learners, *viz.*

- Opportunities to be creative
- Self-management
- Critical reflection
- Interaction/communication with others
- Working with others
- Growth in self-confidence

We noted that some of these were gaining recognition as being the characteristics of successful business leaders, as found in the IBM survey of 2010, but we suggested that they were, arguably, more important for successful navigation of lifewide experience. What, then, do our case studies reveal?

The most successful learners appear to confirm the importance of the six identified characteristics: they creatively manage their lives so as to maximise the opportunities they have for encountering new situations, meeting new people and hence growing in self-confidence. This builds a spiral for ongoing exploration and development.

Omer stood out as less successful as a lifewide learner, essentially because he had not yet developed the skills of personal critical reflection. Consequently he did not recognise the value of his experiences, seeing the negative rather than positive aspects of his new encounters. His story reminds us of the need to support individuals in the early stages of critical reflection, especially when they have a cultural background which encourages people to 'hide their light under a bushel'.

Whether recognition of personal development is confined to our sense of self-actualisation or is used in the pursuit of professional goals, we need only recall the exuberance of JiaXuan and Dan to justify our belief in the importance of lifewide learning.



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