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# LEARNING ECOLOGY NARRATIVES



Featured illustrator:  
Kiboko Hachiyon

# INTRODUCTION

## Jenny Willis Executive Editor

One of the goals of Lifewide Magazine has been to have issues that were essentially created by a Guest Editor. A second ambition is that student learners will be major contributors of content. In this issue of the magazine we have managed to achieve both of these ambitions!

We hadn't planned for it to happen this way. Like much of lifewide learning, the possibility for this follow-up issue emerged unexpectedly when Guest Editor Christine Fountain invited Norman Jackson to contribute to the induction week of a new cohort of Human Resource Management Master's students at Southampton Solent University. One thing led to another and Christine and several students became enthused with the idea of producing a themed issue around learning ecologies - the subject of the August issue of the Magazine.

The Editorial Team was of course delighted with this response from our community and readily agreed to the proposal. On



behalf of the Editorial Team, I would like to thank Christine for her leadership in putting the issue together and for the wonderful narratives provided by the seven student contributors. It demonstrates very well how Lifewide Education is working with the higher education community to turn the ideas that inspire us into meaningful educational practices.

In addition to the learning ecology narratives that form the core of this issue we feature four new chapters that have been published in our E-book, update you on how ValuesExchange is proving an invaluable tool for our research, preview our forthcoming Learning Lives Conference to be held in March 2014, invite contributions to the conference E-book 'Lifewide Education in Universities and Colleges' and celebrate our first graduate from the Lifewide Development Award.

Thank you, Christine, for this special edition of Lifewide Magazine! You are an inspiration to your students and a model for our future guest editors.

*Jenny*



## Christine Fountain

### Guest Editor

I am delighted to have the opportunity to edit this Supplementary Issue of Lifewide Magazine on **Learning Ecology Narratives**.

When I read the August issue on Learning Ecologies I was struck by the relevance of the idea of learning ecologies for my students on the MA Human Resource Management (MA HRM) course at Southampton Solent Business School. students who enrol on this intensive one year course aspire to become Human Resource Professionals and members of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). I felt that seeing the way people develop through their own learning ecologies might help them in the developmental aspects of their future role as HRM professionals.

Thanks to a relationship that the Business School has established with the Lifewide Education Community to examine the ways in which lifewide learning and development might be used in the School, I invited Norman Jackson to introduce these ideas to our new cohort of students beginning their course in September 2013. His workshop engaged the students in thinking about the relevance of lifewide learning for the developmental aspects of HRM. It included an introduction to learning ecologies and an invitation to prepare a narrative that gave substance and meaning to the idea in the lives of students. Several students were keen to participate so I set up a small writing group for those who were interested and the results are contained in this issue of the Magazine.

As a course leader I learnt a great deal from this process which began when I sat down and wrote my own reflective

piece on the ecology I have created for myself around my love of gardening. I found the process of writing and reflecting enjoyable, enlightening and dare I say it therapeutic as it helped me appreciate myself. It convinced me that there was merit in trying to apply the idea of learning ecologies to our own lives as it only really makes sense when the idea is contextualised in something that has meaning to us.

The students' collaborative writing project effectively created a new ecology for leaning. They were a new group of young people coming together for the first time with no history of sharing or working together. The writing group we established proved to be our first group project of which I felt very much a part. Their personal stories reflect the diverse ways in which people find meaning in their lives, and the learning and skills developed as individuals reflected on their passions and interests, or significant events in their lives. Their stories reveal their own learning ecologies in the different facets of their lives whilst highlighting transferable skills and coping strategies relevant to the MA HRM experience.

As the course leader I feel privileged to have read these accounts and reflections and I hope you enjoy the journeys these young people have made and are making. I am constantly amazed and inspired by the stories and experiences which students bring to augment their university learning experience and my own learning and understanding of my students has been much enhanced by being part of this ecological learning process.

*Christine*

**Christine Fountain is  
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## HOW DO YOU KNOW WHERE TO CUT?

### *The ecology of gardening*

Christine Fountain

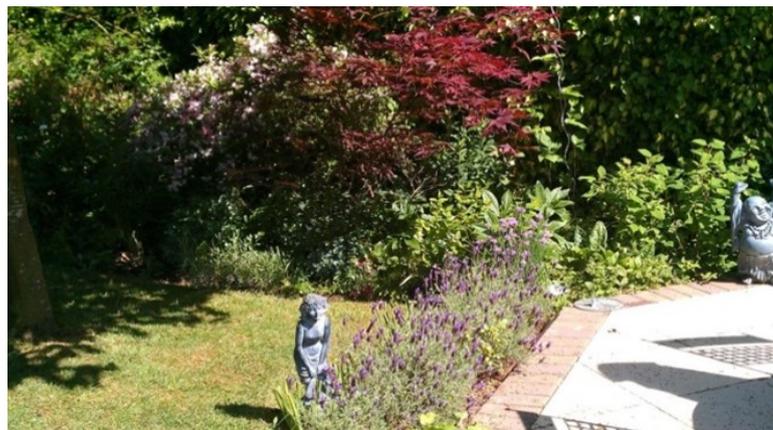
Over the past years this is a question I have been asked many times by friends and family who seem to be afraid of cutting back (pruning) plants. I am asked similar questions in the vein of how do you know what to pull up and when?

Ever since I learnt about the idea of Lifewide learning I have been mindful of the learning and development we achieve in 'situations which are not structured or supported by educators'. As an HE lecturer with previous roles in learning and development and operations management, there are many formal educational experiences on which I might reflect. But it is to my love of gardening I turn to in considering how an informal learning ecology has provided me with myriad learning opportunities.

I first started gardening more years ago now than I care to admit. But I was relatively young when I caught the bug inspired by an ex-boyfriend's mother's garden I suppose naivety actually helped me embark on what became a lifelong passion. I was inspired to try and emulate what she had achieved but I had very little idea of what to do.

When I first started I asked questions and listened to people who could answer them, read the blurb on packets of seed, watched the great, late Geoff Hamilton on TV and lusted after Barnsdale, his wonderful garden.

I have desire, passion and interest and indeed am quite driven when I discover something that really motivates me. This has seen me through many new situations and learning opportunities. So when I became interested in



gardening learning how to create my own garden and developing my knowledge and skills to achieve this became my passion.

Over the years I have grown (a good gardening metaphor!) a lot of knowledge so that I now know lots of 'stuff' about gardening. I know I garden on quite heavy clay and what plants will and won't thrive. I know which clematis to cut and when to cut it; I know how to bring on the most difficult of seedlings. I understand where on a stem or a branch to cut and what to do after I take a cutting. I appreciate that when you cut into the old wood on a conifer or Lavender it won't grow back! This and many other skills; root cuttings, grafting, division and propagation I have mastered.

### ***"Gardening has taught me patience"***

How interesting it is that for the most part I cannot tell you how I have developed this knowledge and skill—it seems I have imbibed them – perhaps through osmosis. Or more likely the continuous ecological process of trying something in the context of my own garden and seeing if it works so that my accumulated wisdom is itself part of my garden's ecosystem.

I have never attended a gardening lesson. But I have 'flicked' my way through any number of gardening magazines and books and I am not averse to a glass of red wine and Gardeners' World on a Friday evening (albeit the hard landscaping and design principles still do nothing to inspire me!).

Ah, I hear you say – so what you are talking about is experience and the learning we take from it. Well yes, in the literal sense of gardening this is true. However, since I have been involved with Lifewide Education I have reflected not simply on what I know in terms of gardening but what my skills and enjoyment in gardening have given me in the wider context of my everyday world.

Gardening has taught me patience. I have to wait; wait for seeds, wait for cuttings, wait for the next season. It has taught me tenacity. If at first the plant or position is wrong try again! It has given me peace and refuge. At times of stress I know where to run: I have a slab embedded in the turf in front of the area that we euphemistically call the 'wine patio' – on it is written 'An hour in the garden puts life's problems in perspective' - how true this is. It provides the perfect space for contemplation and deliberation.

***“As a teacher and a tutor my gardening has taught me a lot about helping students to learn and develop. I understand that if you plant seeds and cuttings they usually grow but now and again one will struggle.”***

It requires my energy and time to sustain it in the way I want it. I still pick snails off my Hostas on dark, damp evenings and transport them to the field near the house! I know that if I wasn't there my garden would carry on but find its own way to grow.

Perhaps gardening, then has taught me to 'live and let live' a little. I have learnt that I miss my garden when I am away from it for too long. I am frustrated by weekends when I cannot get out there. I long ago understood that in being a keen gardener I shall never have 'nails' and that conversations about infills and 'Shellac' will forever be anathema to me.

Were my husband to contribute to this reflection he would tell you that I don't mow lawns, which I consider to be outside vacuuming. This is true – it is boring and although I value a good lawn as the backdrop to my garden mowing simply does not inspire me, and besides my husband needs the exercise more than me. My husband would also counter my claim of patience. I won't plant bulbs, I leave this to him. Yet I am happy to rejoice in a daffodil filled spring garden. So clearly there is more to learn and more on which to reflect.

I am conscious of the years passing and contemplate what age will bring in terms of how much I can achieve and maintain. Surely more learning in how to adapt and garden as I begin to creak.

So is what I have learnt transferable to other contexts? Yes, I believe there are a number of lessons that can be drawn from this reflection. As a teacher and a tutor my gardening has taught me a lot about helping students to learn and develop. I understand that if you plant seeds and cuttings they usually grow but now and again one will struggle. Sometimes because of something I have or haven't done or sometimes for reasons beyond my control. I know that intervention is always worth it and has frequently paid amazing dividends.

I know that if you dedicate time and passion to something you can often bring it back from the brink. Occasionally I put a plant in the wrong place and it struggles. However, if I move the same plant to a new, more suitable location it perks up and roars away. Again, I perceive parallel and applied learning with the student who perhaps is on the wrong course or module.



Nadine Stair said *'if I had my life to live over. I would pick more daisies'*. Gardening has taught me that if I had my life to live over I would *plant* more daisies.



## WELCOMING A VIP INTO MY LIFE

*Sasha Bedells*

When I was twelve years old I became the proud owner of a horse called Sky. We had just moved in to a brand new house with two acres of land, one of which was no more than a muddy overgrown field. My younger sister was also to have a horse so the hard work began for us both. Together, we planned for the life changing experience of owning a horse.

I had been having riding lessons since the age of six and as much as I loved riding, I began to find a number of things difficult like always riding a different horse, or having so many in a class that we would spend most of the lesson standing and waiting. I had also suffered a number of falls, one of which broke my wrist. My confidence was therefore low and I often felt nervous when I was allocated a new horse to ride. Looking back now to when I was terrified of riding I'm surprised that I ever went through with the process of getting my own horse!

I knew so little about a horse's needs but with the help of a computer and many books on horse and pony care, I set about learning as much as I could. At that time, I couldn't understand why my parents didn't just sort it all out for me but I have grown up to now understand that this enquiring journey has led me to be self-motivated in



exploring new information, a particularly helpful skill to me throughout my time at University. My sister and I

became a team searching for information and gathering knowledge as we planned a home for our horses. We studied details about stables, space required for riding and exercising a horse, the environment they needed and the care we had to provide. My parents had to gain planning permission for the stables and also for a school in which we could exercise and ride the horses.



There were a number of hurdles that we had to overcome before the horses' home was finally completed. We had realised that getting through the winter would cause us a number of issues in

terms of exercising the horses and having somewhere dry for them to go. Heavy rain and the dark evenings would also make riding impossible. With this in mind, we had a drainage system fitted underneath the riding school, floodlighting installed around the outside and stables built. This process seemed to take forever as all I wanted was to have my horse at home but it certainly taught me that perseverance pays off in the end!

When the initial project of the horse's home was finished we set about finding the two horses that we would buy. Fortunately, within the family we already had a horse lover who had a horse of her own and so was therefore well experienced. We started to look at horses for sale and we planned days out when we would go along with her and our parents and start looking at horses. I can still remember to this day the mix of emotions, part of me eager to ride and try these new horses and the other part of me absolutely terrified. Sky was the last horse of the first weekend that we went to see and I knew straight away that she would be the one for me. A White Grey Arab, with a soft, laid back personality. My sister soon found a horse too and within a couple of weeks both were settled into their new home.

I was now 12 years old and responsible for a very, very

big animal who depended on me. I learned so much, so quickly. I was forever asking my parents to take me to the horse supplies shop as I became more aware of what she would need and even what I could buy for her. There was all the tack, saddles, food and cleaning equipment. Much to my parents annoyance it was never ending! Every morning and every night she needed cleaning out, feeding and coat brushing. It didn't matter what the weather, wet or dry, light or dark, it had to be done. I realised that responsibilities were something to rise to with enthusiasm, not to fail. I have grown up to understand that I am responsible for all activities that I undertake for example my voluntary work for St John Ambulance and my studies for my Masters degree in Human Resource Management. I am responsible for ensuring that I work hard and succeed. Weekends were also always full of the excitement of bathing her, riding her, caring for her and just being with her. It was such fun. My friends would all come over too and we would spend hours with her. I knew she needed me and as I learned everything I needed to know, my confidence was increasing. We had to learn to trust one another. This increase in confidence has also had an impact on other areas of my life, I now believe in myself more as a person which pushes me to go out of my comfort zone and try new things.

Eleven years on and I still visit Sky twice a day to care for her. My sister and I still work as a team, more often now through sharing the care to enable us to meet the other commitments we have. In many ways, the hard work and commitment of owning a horse at 12 years of age has become even more of a commitment now. Sky's needs remain unchanged but my responsibilities in life



## SELF CONFIDENCE

have increased with my higher education studies and voluntary work so I have to continually balance my life, ensuring that all those responsibilities are met. With my increased work load, due to my Masters degree, a successful balancing act of all areas of my life is more important now than ever before.

## RESPONSIBILITY

## COMMITMENT

I have learned so much from this huge animal that is a very important part of my life. In 11 years, I have never once felt reluctant to carry out the work involved. There have been times when I have gone over to the stables,

having something on my mind or been upset and I have worked away cleaning and tidying while she has stood beside me like a friend knowing she was needed. When we go out for rides I now recognise how she is feeling, often when we go for rides she can get quite nervous of buses and bigger vehicles but I trust her and she trusts me and we deal with it as a team.

## TEAM WORK

I wholly recognise the incredible opportunity that I was given at such a young age and how with the encouragement from my parents and the privilege of owning my own horse, the whole experience has had such a beneficial effect on me as an adult. My confidence has grown amazingly and I understand the importance of team work and commitment. I have developed skills owning Sky that I will use throughout my life. Both teamwork and my increase in confidence will help me to deal with individual and group work assignments at University and in my future work life. My commitment to activities will also encourage me to work hard and achieve the results I set out for.

Sky has taught me such and I hope to have many more happy years with her.

## SHALL ONE STICK TO THE RECIPE?

*Lisa Jessnitzer*

This is a question I thought about a lot when baking and cooking, but have just recently put it into a professional context when starting my Masters in Human Resource Management. I moved to a different country just over a month ago to start my postgraduate studies and doing a CIPD qualification on top. Although I have lived in the UK before and have left my home country a few times for study reasons, it is always a new and challenging process. But overall, I enjoyed that process and it has been highly beneficial to me as I have not only gained my undergraduate certificate, but have developed and grown personally as to say I am a much more culturally aware, strong and outgoing individual.

Before learning about the idea of *lifewide learning* I have not spent too much time on realising and analysing any achievements in regards to learning and development. And if so, then rather within a formal education setting. However, there is such a broad spectrum of experiences that we can learn from and develop as individuals which are outside the formal but within the informal learning environment – i.e. apart from those support by educators. Looking back, I have learned tremendously from an informal learning ecology but for this purpose let me just focus on my excitement for baking and cooking.



*Sticking-to-the-recipe-example: Walnut flavored Tofu with green peppers and wholegrain spaghetti, served with a dried mango-curry sauce.*

I was neither 'into' cooking nor baking as I lacked motivation and creativity and also confidence in myself in this regard. However, a couple of years ago, this changed when I met a person who inspired me with the

knowledge and creativity not only about cooking but the part of healthy eating. So apart from spending my free-time with friends and in the gym, I read articles and browse websites about the most nutritious foods and pore through Jamie Oliver recipes. One cannot believe how enthusiastic I can get about this topic.

Assuming this is what most of people would do when new to a certain area or topic, I made use of technology rather than skimming books (in this case cooking books) and 'googled' very simple recipes to cook. With the help of my shopping list I knew exactly what to buy in the grocery store – nothing could go wrong now, following the recipe, could it?

I became very passionate about exploring new things and sharing with my friends and especially my mum, who was relieved that I was finally getting into it with 😊 21. But would one consider cooking after a recipe as 'exploring'? I came to a point where I have turned my back on the online recipes, this was when I had only different leftovers at home and could not follow a recipe. That situation was new, but drove my creativity to a point where I was the creator of my own recipes. At first I was a little worried how things might turn out but my passion in exploring and growing confidence in the subject helped me try things and the more confident I got cooking without a recipe the less worried I got and very much enjoyed it.

So far so good. I guess it had to go wrong at some point – and it did. That rhubarb cheesecake looked delicious when I took it from the oven, however looks, as we should all know by now, is not everything. That faux pas did not stop my trying again, so when baking the lemon drizzle cake a few weeks later I knew from my cheesecake experience that I needed to add enough sugar. My confidence and motivation to try again rewarded myself with a perfect and tasty cake. Such an informal learning experience helped me in formal learning situations as for instance in conceptualising and writing an essay at



university. It takes research, effort and motivation to grasp and understand a very new topic and ultimately applying the topic to a given assessment task. However, understanding and correctly applying a theory are rather two separate aspects. And as with the cake, the first approach to the task may not be the right one.

I am considering myself as a person with a high self-motivation. My previous study experiences in the UK gave me the confidence to reach out to the extremely supportive university lecturers in order to get my approach to the task right.

*“I am definitely agreeing to not stick to a straight career path, but exploring and mixing the opportunities around.”*

Such an informal learning experience can become very important to the workplace as well. During my internship with a well-established global company in the aerospace sector, there was a situation in which I could not stick to the routine process I usually do as the circumstances just did not allow it. My boss asked me to handle the situation however I thought may be appropriate. I was not nervous at all, I followed my knowledge gained so far and mixed it with intuition – and succeeded in handling the situation to the customer’s and my boss’ satisfaction. I have learned two aspects from this situation: first, having confidence in myself if something may not work as I have planned it out to be, and second, if the situation is appropriate, it may be helpful to not even starting out with a plan, not

having a recipe in the first place. During the last years and my various baking and cooking experiences I have developed confidence to experiment and having faith in myself and my actions.

Cooking taught me a feeling for when to stick with the recipe and when not. The very first tries of creative cooking without a plan have very much brought me out of my comfort zone but I have learnt that I can still perform well and I know I have the confidence to try new things. Months later now I think that people should proactively take part in projects or slide in situations being aware they have to leave their comfort zone – but it is only for the best: individual development.



I believe that, in a professional context, side-steps and cross-functional project experience is helpful and inevitable for any professional. Moreover, as I study an MA Human Resource Management (CIPD) course I believe especially such experience is important for an HR professional in order to have a broader understanding of the business one operates in but also to develop as a professional. In this, I am definitely agreeing to not stick to a straight career path, but exploring and mixing the opportunities around.



**A recent tour around the New Forest with a stop in Lymington**

My journey into the life of a triathlete began early this year when my life situation changed and I found myself free and eager to get the most out of life. I fell in love with the euphoric feeling of pushing your body and mind to its limits.

Triathlon seemed to fit the route that I wanted to take in life; already having been interested in running, I had experience in that field, the swimming aspect required a lot of confidence building on my part and cycling, well that was a whole new world.

I began by buying my first road bike in February, the first time I tried to ride my bike it felt wrong, initially it scared me so much that I had to get off and walk home with it. However, I refused to let the feeling of failure stop me in my path. With this in mind I went out on a few short cycling journeys around Southampton Common to become acquainted with it. It wasn't long until cycling began to feel like an amazing venture to me; I am now so in tune with my bike that nothing can stop me, I have built up so much confidence that I find myself riding on busy 50 mph roads and fast country lanes. This is something that I feel has contributed to my learning in other parts of life, such as putting myself way out of my comfort zone; an assignment may seem huge and really unappealing to begin with, but when you put your mind to it you can really



**Running action shot at Southampton Parkrun**

## SWIM, RIDE AND RUN

Joanne Restall

achieve anything. My favourite place to cycle is in the New Forest, my distances are growing and the hill climbs are getting faster, those hills remind of the uphill battle that a Master's degree is, but knowing that if you keep going you will eventually reach the top.

I would say that running is the toughest part of triathlon, in a race you have already been swimming and cycling, then with your jelly state legs you have to find the energy to somehow run. In my last triathlon I remember being at the transition from bike to run, feeling like I want to give up, but I wanted to finish so much that I mustered the last bits of energy I could find and carried on to run my 5k personal best.

I find that running often requires more mental strength than physical, the pain you feel can be so intense; your head pounding, legs burning and heart racing. But your mind is the key to endurance, which is an idea that I transfer into all parts of my life including studying. Putting a positive mind set to a piece of work, enabled me to successfully complete difficult assignments and has even spurred me on to continue studying in higher education. One thing that running in particular has taught me is that unless you are an elite athlete, you are mostly going to be running against your personal best. That is what I find the most enticing thing, when you gain a personal best you have exceeded yourself, which ultimately means an improvement and is the single most powerful thing that makes us crazy enough to compete time and time again. Personal bests are valuable when studying; maybe it is be gaining a higher mark on assignments or achieving something you thought you would never be able to do.

## OPENING THE BOX!!!

Karishma Kapoor

To be a teenager, travelling to a distant land, far away from your friends, to have strange people surround you, while you are mortified? One word comes to mind – “Daunting”. When you’re a teenager, you act way too dramatic and you are easily irritated by the things going around you. It is a very uneasy feeling. I should know that, I was one of them.

Moving from India to the United Kingdom was a huge cultural and social change for me. I still remember when I entered into this new house; it was not home for me but merely a sanctuary of solitude, for 8 months. I didn’t want to go out or explore. I was in my own little world and that world was a constant reminder of what I left behind. I came here in November and it was too late to get into a school, at that time. I had to wait till summer was over, to get admission. And when I got in at Year 9, it took me ages to make new friends and get used to things. The fact that girls carried a tiny handbag with make up in it and students were allowed to bring mobile phones to school was a complete shock for me, as Indian schools, were quite strict and they provide a very formal education.

Education back in India was way tougher than what I had experienced in the GCSEs here and this was one of the reasons I let myself stray. I didn’t concentrate much on studies, as I got overconfident. However, when I got into the A levels, I felt the pressure and it took me a while to get back on the “geek” saddle. The transition affected my grades badly.

When I got into the University, I had a mindset that it was going to be even tougher and I needed to buck up. I was more productive in my undergraduate degree. Guess, the tribulations I faced at the “horrible” A levels was a turning point for me as a student.

Years ago back in India, in my summer holidays I learnt to make Stocking flowers from an institute. I used to go with my friends every evening for a few hours and learn. I hated it to begin with, I just couldn’t do it, it takes so much effort however I had very supportive friends and I used to encourage them and they used to encourage me and



slowly we all started to master this art. I must have made countless flowers and I have distributed every single one of them to my friends and family. So when I came to UK, I had nothing to do as I was still

waiting for my admission at school so in my spare time I made these flowers. It is a very creative art and requires a lot of patience and time. It taught me a lot of things and

one major thing was to “open the box”. I was having a positive attitude towards life. Art, no matter how big or small, it always has a meaning and I only understood the meaning after I moved to UK, when I felt loneliness. For my small, yet “joyous” art you need to have stocking net, beads, floral tape, nylon thread, wire to make ring sizes and scissors. You use the stocking net to put it on a ring made of wire in a petal shape using nylon thread and you make as many petals as you want. More petals and the flowers get bigger. The beads can be bought and can be combined with the petals one by one to another petal and then you have two petals. You can combine with the third and so on. This makes the final pretty flower. Use the tape for the stem and give it a flower look.

So coming back to the point of why I hated being in the UK, one reason was that I had left my bedroom and my teddy bears back in India. My friends and the home in UK didn’t feel like home for years. However, things changed, they took time but they changed. So much that I just don’t want to go back to India.



I was thinking about everything while making stocking flowers and as I was making them patiently and combining the petals, stems, beads, using a thread and making it look like one pretty flower. I realised that it is exactly, like



my life. Aspects just lost and I had to put it back together, to be happy again. For example, I missed my teddies and room. So, I just collected all my teddies back here in UK, painted my room myself and started going out with my new friends. I took a step out of the house and into the world so strange. I started exploring and accepting this new society, just like the petals, I was bringing the things I missed the most, one by one back into my life so basically I “Opened the box” in which I had lived in for years.

The change in my thinking was brought into my life with this hobby of mine. However, there are other things that influenced my acceptance of this new home but they just can’t be told. Over the years, this has taught me so much about exploring new things, it has actually made me love travelling and accepting new challenges. Me taking MA HRM is a huge challenge on its own, it requires patience, time and dedication. Therefore, the changes in my life have just made me stronger. I am 21 and I am a much happier person now.

P.S: I don’t want to go back!

## SKILLS FOR LIFE –STAYING AFLOAT

Chris Sparey

Throughout my life as I have matured and grown as an individual I have realised the importance of lifewide learning and how this affects my ambitions, behaviour and motives when embarking on a new challenge, such as the MA in Human Resource Management.

Ever since I can remember I have had a passion for swimming, whether this is competitively or just relaxing in the pool when on holiday. In my opinion swimming from a young age has allowed me to gain many transferable skills which I use on a day to day basis, in both professional and social contexts.

### TRANSFERRABLE SKILLS

For instance, when preparing for a swimming competition it is important to dedicate sufficient time prior to the event for training and relaxation. This



element of time management has been developed in an informal learning environment and has aided me when meeting deadlines for university in addition to permitting me to have an outlet to relax and 'take time out' of the stresses of life... unless training for a competition.

### TIME MANAGEMENT

I believe that swimming has provided me with the opportunity to discover and develop and ultimately progress my own skills over time which has resulted in me becoming a more rounded individual because of my awareness of learning and development in both formal



and informal learning environments

Swimming is often described as an individual sport; however I believe my interaction with fellow competitors, colleagues and coaches reinforced my communication skills and team work fundamentals, such as being adaptable to change and making decisions under pressure which I imagine are essential for continued lifewide learning.

### COMMUNICATION SKILLS

When I initially started to swim I would have described my learning process or journey as a short one – after not enjoying it very much. Nevertheless I persevered and continued to overcome barriers and obstacles to achieve my goals. However the main lesson I have

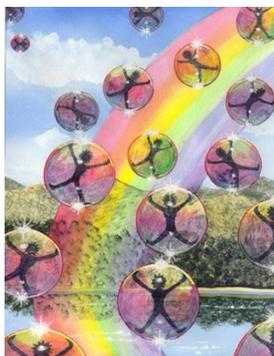


learnt from swimming is to never be content when you reach your goal – you can always do better, progress and learn both in and out of the pool.

**YOU CAN ALWAYS DO BETTER**

## EVERY CLOUD HAS A SILVER LINING!

Helen Reed



Like most young individuals starting on their adventure of moving away to university and living independently, I was very excited but slightly apprehensive as was expected. Little did I know that this experience would quite possibly be one of the biggest learning curves that I would ever have, although this wasn't for the reasons that I would have hoped.

On arrival at my accommodation for first year, it was warming to see so many people moving their stuff in, making countless trips up and down the stairs and back and forth to the car park with their parents. Instantly, I felt slightly more comfortable as it was then clear that I wasn't alone, so many other people were experiencing this mix of emotions too. My proud parents soon left me to settle in. As I was unpacking my belongings, it suddenly dawned on me that 'this is it, this is my home for the next nine months', this experience would form part of my future identity and would shape me somewhat for the future.



The first couple of weeks, 'freshers fortnight', was a hectic but exciting time; settling into my flat and getting to know my flatmates, getting to know the university and my course and course mates etc. However, now looking back I can identify that something wasn't quite right from the beginning and this seemed to be where the problem and learning experience began.

Despite the excitement of starting University, I did feel rather isolated and fairly separate to the rest of my flatmates and living with nine others, this can make someone feel very low. The others used to do things without me, go out together, make dinner together etc. without even batting an eyelid at me. I started to question myself, whether I was confident when it came to meeting new individuals? Whether it was different when meeting new individuals on a larger scale for example, nine others at once? I was able to identify from this particular aspect of my experience that I am someone who has low self-confidence and struggle when it comes to meeting new people on a larger scale in the sense that when there are others who are loud and confident, I tend to back down and just listen rather than



speaking up and putting my ideas across. However, the others didn't make it very easy for me or make me feel any more comfortable, they tended to carry on together and leave me out.

After a period of no change, in fact it was like it was getting worse; I started to feel closed off and alone. I tended to lock myself away in my room and go my own separate way to the rest, coming in from Uni and going straight to my room, locking the door behind me. It seemed surprising that a bunch of 19 and 20 year olds were making someone feel like this and acting in this way. To me, this seemed as though it should have been left behind at primary school! Hearing other students having fun did sometimes make it worse as, quite selfishly, I can remember thinking, 'why are they having a nice time when I'm not'? Over the course of



the next nine months, the situation didn't seem to improve, but I gradually learnt to bear with it slightly so that it didn't ruin or impact on my university work and grades.

Although this was a very dark and low period in my life and a very negative experience, I have now, looking back on it, managed to relate to the saying, 'every cloud has a silver lining', although this most definitely wasn't what was going through my mind at the time. I have now learnt that I should do things for myself and not think about others so much, take opportunities that come my way with both hands. This was evident in the final 2 years of my degree. I would say that from this experience, I identified that I needed to work on my interpersonal skills coupled with rebuilding my self confidence. As part of my undergraduate degree, I undertook an internship with a recruitment agency based in the City of London. This was an extremely valuable experience which I used to build these skills. As a recruitment consultant, I was expected to headhunt and call individuals and hold conversations with them in a professional and confident manner. It was also expected that I socialise with the team that I was working in so I would go out on a regular basis with the team after work for a drink in the City. I can say that the bad experience enabled me to identify and develop skills and qualities that I maybe didn't have or wasn't so strong at before. As a result of the experience, I have been able to develop my professionalism, self-confidence, communication, interpersonal skills etc, that going forward, will be necessary and benefit me greatly in my future career in HR. I have been able to rise above my experience and turn it into a positive learning experience. After all, bullies are the weak ones in the end; it's the victims that come out stronger!

## CRYING DOES NOT MAKE IT OK BUT THE ABILITY TO FIGHT MAKES IT BETTER

Odigie Osahon

It is difficult to have a positive mentality in a situation where it appears that you have done all that you could but still end up as a failure; however, the ability to see beyond the present situation makes you succeed in any area of life you may find yourself in.

Many years ago in my childhood, I have always wanted to be a winner in any of sports I find myself in because been a looser makes me think it is impossible to make it through in life. As a young boy who loved sports so much (football) I decided to join a football team in my school and I was very happy because I have a great passion for football and am also a fan of a local club in my town. I became involved in training with other peers of the school team twice a week to keep fit and get ready to play. During this period our team played friendly matches with other schools such as Principal Cup and many other matches were won by our team, and everyone was excited and my team became the leading team among other schools.



As time moved on, many schools got involved in football matches and the schools committee decided to host a football tournament competition for over fifty schools with a ground price which was very attractive to all teams. The tournament lasted for five months due to the number of teams involved in the competition. In order for my team to be a winner of the tournament, we needed to work as one team. During this period, we were encouraged by our coach to be fully dedicated and committed in training ourselves and to improve our skills in order not to lose in the tournament. He also trained and motivated us towards the upcoming game;



and I was so proud to be among the team playing in the tournament. I had confidence that my team would be the winner of the competition because of past victory with other schools. As a team we played very well and made it through to the final with the other school team.

More time was spent during training to reduce the tension of losing the tournament focusing more on how to win because both teams played very well during the tournament and the winner of this competition will be either my team or another school team. At this stage, nothing was more important to me in life than my team winning the tournament having this confidence in them. Our families and friends supported and showed us love during this period buying gifts to cheer us up for the match. I realised during the tournament my team did not lose any match and the same applied to the other team which meant both teams had a unique way of playing football but there was only going to be one winner of the tournament. Both teams played very well and my team missed a chance of scoring and the other team missed also, but at the end of the match my team lost to the other team. The winning team were excited and celebrated their victory with the ground price from the tournament. Although my team came second in the tournament we were not happy but sad and kept crying that we had lost the tournament thinking that our best was not good enough. As a result of this everyone in my team was de-motivated and no one was willing to motivate the team including the coach of my team; this reduced individual self-confidence and it became difficult to attend training and that led to the dissolution of the team.

A few months later, I came into contact with the coach

of the team who won the tournament and he said that they could not make it to the next final because they lost to another school during the tournament but the team were still motivated and training very hard to win the next football tournament.

**MOTIVATION**

**DETERMINATION**

**SELF-CONFIDENCE**

His words encouraged and motivated me to believe that I can still be a winner if choose not give up in any situation I find myself in life. It often said that 'winners never quit and quitters never win' no matter what happens to you, remember not to focus your energy on your failure but you should focus more on how to win. I have learnt a lot from families and friends with similar issues who never give up on what they believe in and they are successful regardless of their past failure. I have decided not to give up in any situation but believe in myself so much in the past years, to always fight with a step of bold determination regardless of me being winner or not and my confidence has increased. I was a quitter because of what happened to my team during that football tournament I lost my confidence, thinking I could not make it but today I'm a super success with a strong the

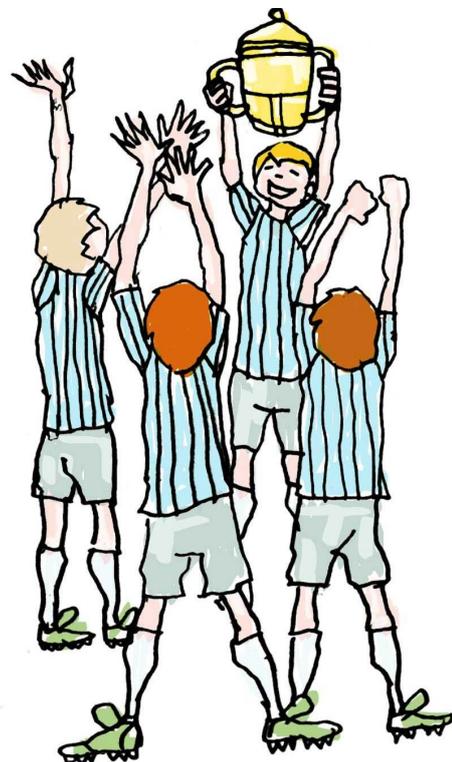
**Winners never quit and  
quitters never win**

determination that winners never quit and always fight to the end. As a team or an individual, you cannot stop fighting for the change you want to see in your life. The thought I have from this is that, putting so much effort in whatever you do does not necessarily mean you are going to win as you intended to, but do your best and do not quit and all will turn out for good. Do not



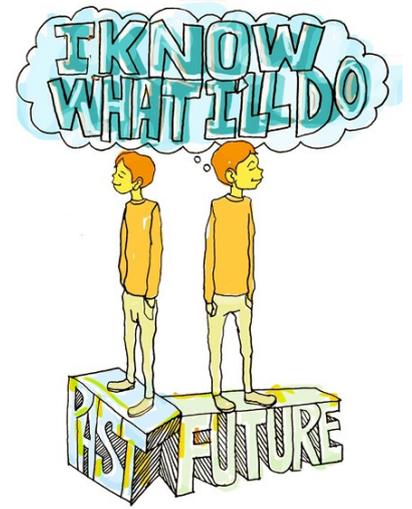
compare your past victory to the present situation because winning before doesn't mean you can be a winner now. It does not mean you can't win but if you don't win, that should not make you a quitter but keep on fighting.

Most people cry if they do not make it at that point in time, and lose the courage to fight back because they see it as failure rather than a challenge. The old saying goes "winners never quit and quitters never win" simply means do not give up and you will end up winning. I have learnt a lot from this and it has taken me through various stages of life because I refuse to allow what happened to me stop me from quitting when down - I still keep going. The ability to be a winner in life requires you not to quit even though you are winner now that does not mean you cannot win but you keep on fighting because "WINNERS NEVER QUIT"



## LEARNING NARRATIVES: A COMMENTARY

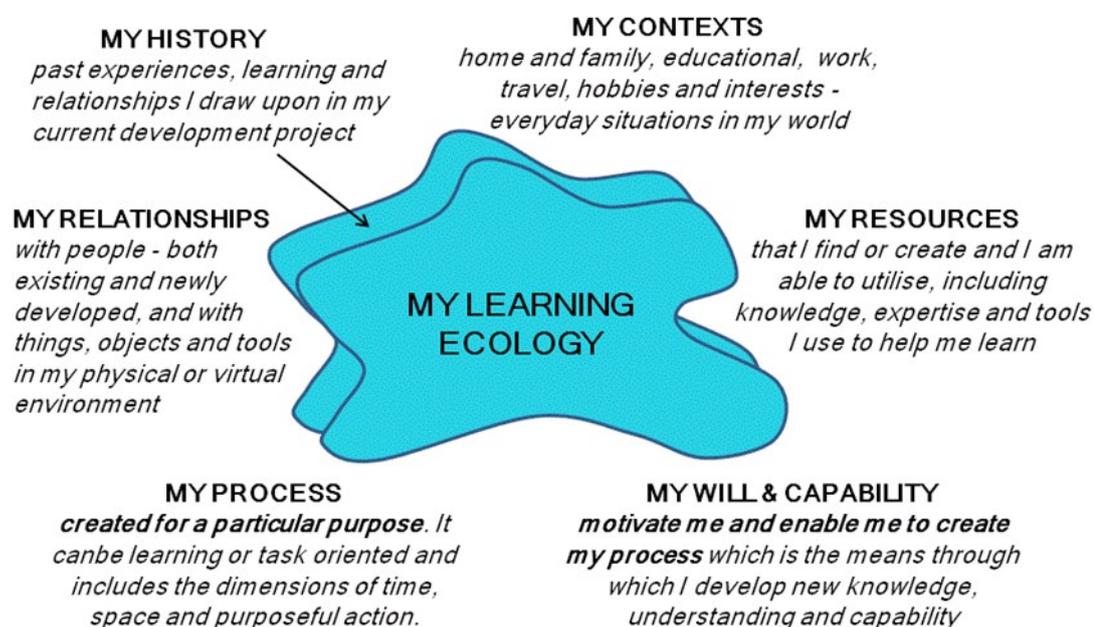
Norman Jackson



The purpose of Lifewide Magazine is to introduce, explore and give new meanings to ideas that are relevant to lifewide learning, education and personal development. So the editorial team is delighted that Christine and her students have seen value in the idea of learning ecologies and appropriated it for themselves. By creating their narratives of life experiences and what they mean, the contributors have provided a practical example of how the idea can be contextualised in a formal education setting. But what more can we learn from these narratives about the concept of learning ecologies?

In September we published two chapters in the Lifewide Education e-book on the theme of learning ecologies (Jackson 2013 a & b) which provide a theoretical context for this commentary. The figure below illustrates the essential features of a learning ecology which links the past and present, and actions that will connect the present to the future.

We can use this as a tool to illuminate some of the essential characteristics of the foregoing narratives.



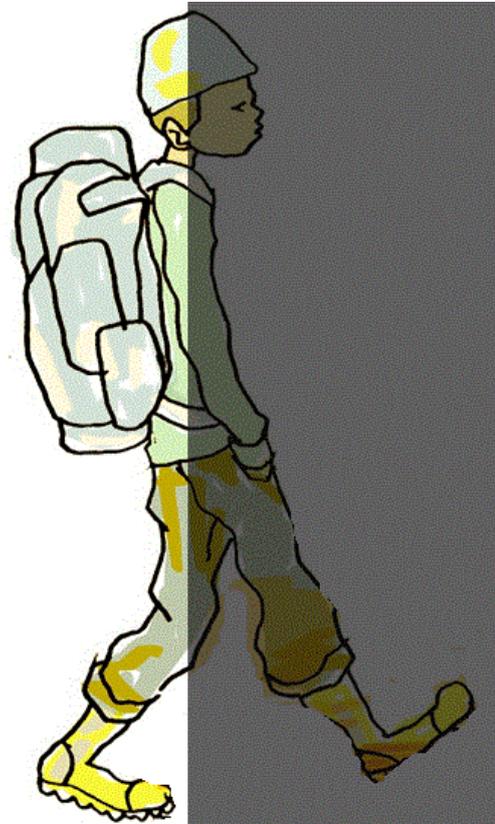
### Histories

As adults we never start a new learning project as if it is a blank sheet of paper. We have a complex history of experience behind us which helps us frame our current and future actions. Our histories provide us with memory to imagine what we might do and how we might do it when confronted with new situations and problems. Directly or indirectly, all the narratives talk about history for example in the contexts of: a lifetime of gardening - '*naivety actually helped me embark on what became a lifelong passion*', or riding and looking after a horse, '*I had been having riding lessons since the age of six*', or swimming '*Ever since I can remember I have had a passion for swimming*' or past experiences of leaving home to go to study in another country '*Although I have lived in the UK before and have left my home country a few times for study reasons, it is always a new and challenging process*'.

However, we often begin our history of involvement with something with not very much experience or history that is relevant or significant. We might, for example, have a lot of experience of eating food but little in the way of preparing dishes or eating particular types of food, '*I was neither 'into' cooking nor baking as I lacked motivation and creativity and also confidence in myself*'.

## Context

Our contexts are the social, physical and virtual environments in which we think, act and reflect. They host the problems and opportunities that we have. Our contexts provide the resources and relationships we need to sustain a meaningful and purposeful life, and specific contexts like study are nested within wider contexts like studying in the UK rather than the country you grew up in.



Each of the narratives elaborates the contexts in the lives of the contributors that shaped them in significant ways and many of them describe a particular context like learning to cook and set it in a broader context of coping with living in

another country. For Christine her context is her garden which provides her with a personal physical space to fulfil her passion as well as a place to think and reflect on other aspects of her life. For Joanne, her context is that of an athlete running, swimming and cycling in the physical spaces she trains and competes.

A number of narratives talk about transitioning from one context to another and the change from living at home to going to university was a significant change in the stories of several contributors. For example *'my life situation changed and I found myself free and eager to get the most out of life'*. Helen Reed highlights the mixed feelings of excitement and apprehension when students leave home to study at university. *'Like most young individuals starting on their adventure of moving away*

*to university and living independently, I was very excited but slightly apprehensive as was expected.'*

The loss of a familiar context and the replacement by another context is one of the most disruptive changes anyone can encounter and it may take a long time to adjust. *'Moving from India to the United Kingdom was a huge cultural and social change for me. I still remember when I entered into this new house; it was not home for me but merely a sanctuary of solitude'. 'My friends and the home in UK didn't feel like home for years. However, things changed, they took time but they changed. So much that I just don't want to go back to India.'*

## Significant relationships

Relationships are an important part of the dynamic of our narratives. Relationships are the source of inspiration and motivation. For example, *'I caught the bug inspired by an ex-boyfriend's mother's garden'. 'I met a person who inspired me with the knowledge and creativity not only about cooking but the part of healthy eating.'*

Relationships also lead to important co-contributors in the learning and development process e.g. *'My sister and I became a team searching for information and gathering knowledge as we planned a home for our horses'* and for sustaining a collaborative enterprise, *'My sister and I still work as a team, more often now through sharing the care so we can meet other commitments'*. For one contributor it was his interactions with the whole community that enabled him to develop. *'Swimming is often described as an individual sport; however I believe my interaction with fellow competitors, colleagues and coaches reinforced my communication skills and team work fundamentals, such as being adaptable to change and making decisions under pressure'*.



Relationships, even if they are transient, might also lead to important new insights that change perspectives. *'I came into contact with the coach of the team who won the tournament and he said that they could not make it to the next final because they lost to another school during the tournament but the team were still motivated and training very hard to win the next football tournament. His words encouraged and motivated me to believe that I can still be a winner if choose not to give up in any situation I find myself in life.'*

But relationships can also be a cause of emotional negativity as well as positivity. *'Despite the excitement of starting University, I did feel rather isolated and fairly separate to the rest of my flatmates... this can make someone feel very low. The others used to do things without me, go out together, make dinner together etc. without even batting an eyelid at me.'* The desire to change such a situation can be the motivator for new experience and relationships that lead to a more emotionally supportive environment. *'I can say that the bad experience enabled me to identify and develop skills and qualities that I maybe didn't have or wasn't so strong at before.'*

## Resources

Narratives reveal that individuals access resources in their immediate environment and create their own resources in order to achieve what they value. Relationships, that are supportive through which knowledge is shared are an important resource as signalled in several narratives. For example, *'Fortunately, within the family we already had a horse-lover who had a horse of her own and so was therefore well experienced'*.

Other resources are sources of information, for example - *'I have 'flicked' my way through any number*

*of gardening magazines and books and [listened to] Gardeners' World on a Friday evening'. And 'I read articles and browse websites about the most nutritious foods and pore through Jamie Oliver recipes.'* *'I made use of technology rather than skimming books (in this case cooking books) and 'googled' very simple recipes to cook.'*

Some activities involve specialist tools in order to participate, for example *'I began by buying my first road bike'* and new competency has to be developed in order

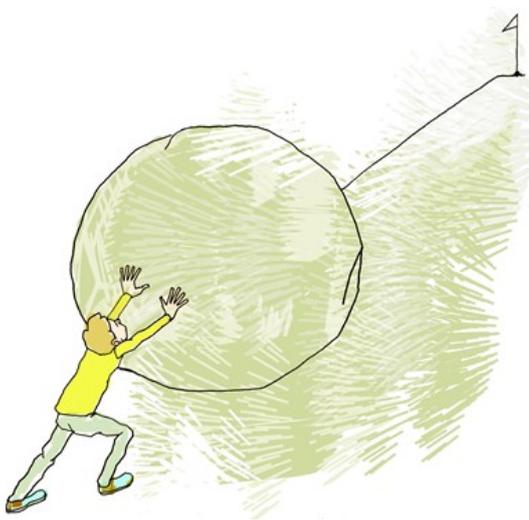


for them to be used effectively, *'the first time I tried to ride my bike it felt wrong, initially it scared me so much that I had to get off and walk home with it. However, I refused to let the feeling of failure stop me in my path. With this in mind I went out on a few short cycling journeys around Southampton Common to become acquainted with it. It wasn't long until cycling began to feel like an amazing venture to me.'*

## Purpose and will

What shines through all the narratives is a sense of purpose, will and determination to achieve or master something, to change a situation they did not like, and or to become a different sort of person. Ron Barnett reminds us that will is the most important concept in education for without it nothing is possible and with it everything is possible (Barnett 2005) but will relates to a sense of purpose. When a purpose is created the will to engage with that purpose becomes intrinsic.

All the narratives relate to individuals' purposes nested



within which are particular needs or ambitions that drive deep intrinsic motivations to become different and achieve more of their potential

as a person. Four general reasons for this drive to self-actualisation are apparent. The first relates to the desire to build self-esteem and confidence particularly in new social or cultural contexts. Two narratives reflect this journey towards greater confidence.

*'I took a step out of the house and into the world so strange. I started exploring and accepting this new society.. I was bringing the things I missed the most, one by one back into my life so basically I "Opened the box" in which I had lived in for years. '*

*'Although this was a very dark and low period in my life and a very negative experience, I have now, looking back on it, managed to relate to the saying, 'every cloud has a silver lining', although this most definitely wasn't what was going through my mind at the time. I have now learnt that I should do things for myself and not think about others so much, take opportunities that come my way with both hands'.*

The second type of intrinsic motivation stems from the desire to express oneself creatively which is deeply embedded in Christine Fountain's passion for gardening

and Karishma Kapoor's flower making craftwork. *'In my spare time, I made flower stockings. It is a very creative art and requires a lot of patience and time'* while Lisa Jessnitzer used cookery as her creative outlet, *'The very first tries of creative cooking without a plan have very much brought me out of my comfort zone but I have learnt that I can still perform well and I know I have the confidence to try new things.'*

The third motivation of the actualising self derives from the responsibility of caring for others, an expression that clearly manifests itself in Sasha Bedell's story of caring for her horse. *'I was now 12 years old and responsible for a very, very big animal who depended on me. I realised that responsibilities were something to rise to with enthusiasm not to fail.'*

The fourth motivation revealed in several narratives relates to the desire to improve one's own capability and performance in some sport-related activity. Joanne Restall's journey as a triathlete and Chris Sparey's life as a swimmer and Odigie Osahon's story of his footballing life all reveal this inner drive. In these narratives there is a strong sense that actualising self is driven by the ambition to improve performance to achieve a personal best and not to give up illustrated by these quotes,

*'The ability to be a winner in life requires you not to quit even though you are winner now that does not mean you cannot win but you keep on fighting because WINNERS NEVER QUIT'.*

*'the main lesson I have learnt from swimming is to never be content when you reach your goal : you can always do better, progress and learn, in and out of the pool.'*

*'when you gain a personal best you have exceeded yourself, which ultimately means an improvement and is the single most powerful thing that makes us crazy enough to compete time and time again'*

Our learning ecologies are the means through which we become who we want to be and all the narratives reveal growth in the direction of who the person wants to become in line with their self-determined ambitions and intrinsic motivations. As they develop they improve their capabilities for achieving or dealing with situations. Many of the narratives begin with the narrator describing a state of little or no capability in an area of interest and the narratives then reveal a developmental trajectory towards greater capability and with this capability comes new found confidence.

## Process

Fundamentally we are dealing with process when we think of learning and development as an ecology. Processes that often unfold over a long period of time when they are significant in a person's life and processes that connect all of the above in both planned and deliberate and more spontaneous and opportunistic actions and events. The limitations of length inhibit the detailed elaboration of process in most of the narratives and if we were to probe more deeply this would be an important area for further reflection. Nevertheless we are given a clear sense that all narratives reveal individuals' journeys towards becoming more capable and experienced in something that they have chosen to do and/or more comfortable and confident in a new context after adapting or coming to terms with an entirely unfamiliar context.

Narratives often depict this process as one involving exploration, of finding things out or trying things out to find a way and of trial and error. As Christine explains, *'for the most part I cannot tell you how I have developed this knowledge and skill it - seems I have imbibed them – perhaps through osmosis. Or more likely the continuous ecological process of trying something in the context of my own garden and seeing if it works'*. And, *'At first I was a little worried how things might turn out but my passion in exploring and growing confidence in the subject helped me try things.'* This willingness to explore in one context can then be brought to bear in another *'I am definitely agreeing to not stick to a straight career path, but exploring and mixing the opportunities around.'*

The lesson is clear that in order to develop, in order to achieve or fulfil a purpose we must be able to create



processes that enable us to move in the direction we aspire. This perhaps is the fundamental transferable capability we need to develop as we engage with the challenge of learning how to learn in all the different contexts that comprise our lives.

## Co-creative ecology

As a commentator on this process, I echo Christine Fountain's words in her introduction to the issue, *I feel privileged to have read these accounts and reflections'*. But more than this I feel privileged to have played a small part in a new learning ecology through Christine's invitation to contribute to the students' induction programme and then through this commentary.

Ecologies involving collaboration for the purpose of learning and achieving something have to be led and facilitated. Christine led the process not as a teacher telling her students what to do, but as a gardener might tend her garden - creating the optimum conditions for healthy growth. She fertilised the process through her conversations, actions

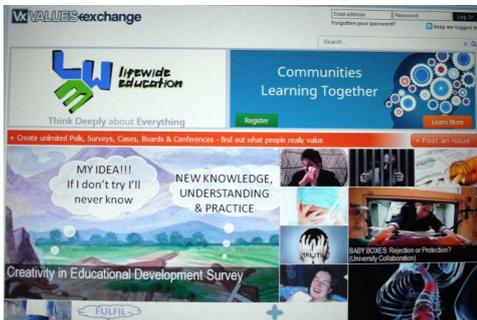
and example and encouraged the growth of her students' personal narratives and sharing of ideas and understanding and the building of collaborative relationships through a writing group. It will be very interesting to see how this learning ecology relates to what will be the bigger ecology of the course itself. Perhaps Christine will let us know in a future issue of the Magazine.

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- Jackson (2013a) The Concept of Learning Ecologies. In N J Jackson and G B Cooper (eds) *Lifewide Learning, Education and Personal Development* E-Book available on line at: <http://www.lifewideebook.co.uk/research.html>
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# ANNUAL REVIEW AND HIGHLIGHTS OF 2013

As we near the end of our second full year it's a good time to look back on what we have achieved in the past 12 months. We set out our goals for the year in January with the main emphasis on consolidating and sustaining what we had established, and creating, exploring and developing new opportunities as they emerge.



During the year our community of interest grew steadily and we currently have around 320 registered members. We maintained our existing websites

and our presence on Facebook, Linked-in and Twitter and we added our Values Exchange website which enables us to be part of a global network of VX sites concerned with values and ethics in education. It also gives us new capacity to undertake on-line surveys. Since April we have undertaken four surveys. It has proved to be particularly useful in engaging people before an event so that the results of the survey can be utilised in the presentations - for example a keynote presentation at the annual SEDA conference was formed around the results of a survey into creativity in educational development.

During the year, under the editorial stewardship of Jenny Willis, we produced four issues of Lifewide Magazine which had a combined readership of nearly 2000 an enormous expansion on the previous year. Thanks to Brian Cooper's diligent editing we also published eleven chapters in our Lifewide Education E-Book - including conceptual reviews and syntheses on wellbeing and learning ecologies, moving biographical accounts of lifewide learning, research into wellbeing and learning ecologies and overviews of lifewide learning in universities and colleges. Our research and scholarship has focused primarily on examining the idea and perceptions of wellbeing and developing and applying the concept of learning ecologies to individuals' learning and development processes, work that will continue through the coming year.



During the year we developed further our tools for supporting lifewide learning and one of our student volunteers Yalda Tomlinson, helped us pilot our approach and successfully completed the Lifewide Development Award (LDA) providing future learners with an example of an on-line portfolio of

recorded learning and development. We also explored the idea of Open Badges and we are now introducing them in the current stage of piloting. We are working with Christine Fountain at Southampton Solent University's Business School with students on the HR Management masters course to examine the ways in which the LDA might be incorporated into the learning experiences of students.

Members of the team contributed to, and or participated in a total of ten conferences in the UK and overseas. In June we were invited to participate in an EU Foresight workshop by the research group who support development of EU educational policy. This was the first time that we have been invited to share our views in a *close to policy* forum. Through our involvement in conferences we have formed new relationships with people who are sympathetic to lifewide learning in Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, China and Argentina. Ultimately, our future lies in the relationships we form with the people who want to promote and implement lifewide learning in their own educational and learning contexts.



The coming year will inevitably bring with it new challenges and opportunities which we can face with confidence. In March we will achieve another of our ambitions - to host our first national conference on lifewide learning and education in universities and colleges and publish a new E-book on lifewide learning and education in universities and colleges.

None of the things we have achieved in 2013 would have been possible without the help, support and encouragement of a wonderful group of volunteers and the generous financial support of our corporate sponsor Chalk Mountain Education and Media Services. But we can always use more help and if you would like to join us as a volunteer please get in touch.

I would like to sincerely thank all the members of the team who have generously given their time and expertise to support the Lifewide Education Community.

## Core Team

Norman Jackson (Director & E-Book Commissioning Editor); Jenny Willis (Magazine Editor); Brian Cooper (e-Book Editor); Russ Law (School Education Lead); John Cowan; Nick Bowskill; Vicky Mann (now on maternity leave); Ron Barnett; Elizabeth Dunne; Osama Khan; Sarah Campbell (student); Yalda Tomlinson (student); Navid Tomlinson (recent graduate); Sarah Jeffries-Watts; Kiboko Hachiyon (community artist/illustrator).

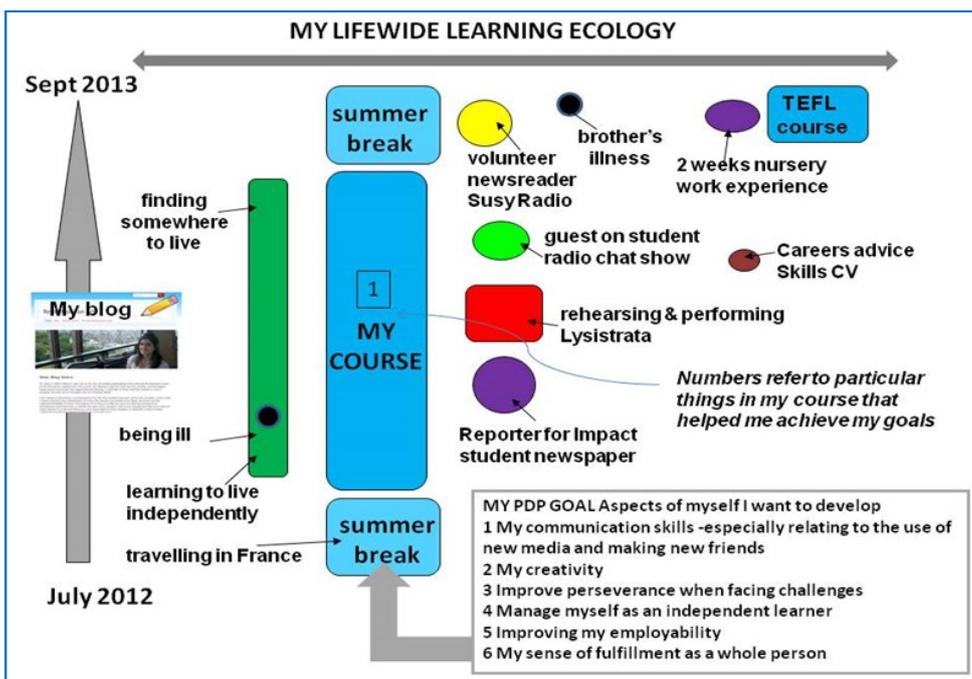
**Norman Jackson, Founder Lifewide Education CIC,**  
**lifewider1@btinternet.com**

## Lifewide Development Award Celebrates First Graduate



It's always special when the first graduate achieves your award. After launching our open access award a year ago we have our first graduate. Yalda Tomlinson has been a volunteer student member of the Lifewide Education Team since we began and even helped us at our public launch in November 2011. Just over a year ago as she was about to go to university she kindly agreed to enrol for the Award and assist us on piloting the guidance, the tools including the weebly website building tool and our approaches to mentoring. She created her first personal development plan as she started university and kept a blog describing her experiences and what she gained from them. In September she created a summary account describing what she had learnt and how she had developed and the Award Panel judged that she had provided sufficient evidence of her own self-managed development to warrant the award. Thanks to Yalda not only do we have our first graduate but she has kindly agreed to make her website available so that future participants in the award have an example of the ways learning and development can be represented.

### Summary of Yalda's learning ecology during her first year at university



One of Yalda's personal development goals was to become a better communicator in the context of ultimately perhaps seeking career opportunities in the broadcasting industry. During her first year she engaged in a number of activities that created opportunities for her to gain experience of communication in radio and this is something she will try to take forward in her second year at university.

The portfolio of activities she engaged in with this purpose in mind provide another example of a learning ecology.

### Personal learning ecology for the purpose of becoming a better communicator

To find out more about the Award, which universities and colleges can adopt and adapt, visit:

<http://www.lifewideaward.com/>

**Activities undertaken outside my course**

- University Course
- My Facebook page
- Assessed powerpoint presentation
- Lifewide Development Award
- Reporter for University student Newspaper – produced 3 articles
- Creation of own website, written/audio/video blogs.
- Contributor to two university radio chat shows.
- Significant role in university production of Lysistrata
- Susy Radio
- Volunteer News Reader with Susy Radio a broadcaster based in Redhill Surrey



## An update from Jenny Willis

<http://lifewide.vxcommunity.com/>

We have reported in previous issues (e.g. Spring 2013), on how Lifewide researchers are using the ValuesExchange (VX) online network to expand our understanding of personal and professional development. We at Lifewide have concentrated on the survey facility that VX offers, but as founder Professor David Seedhouse reminds us, each user has identified their unique use:

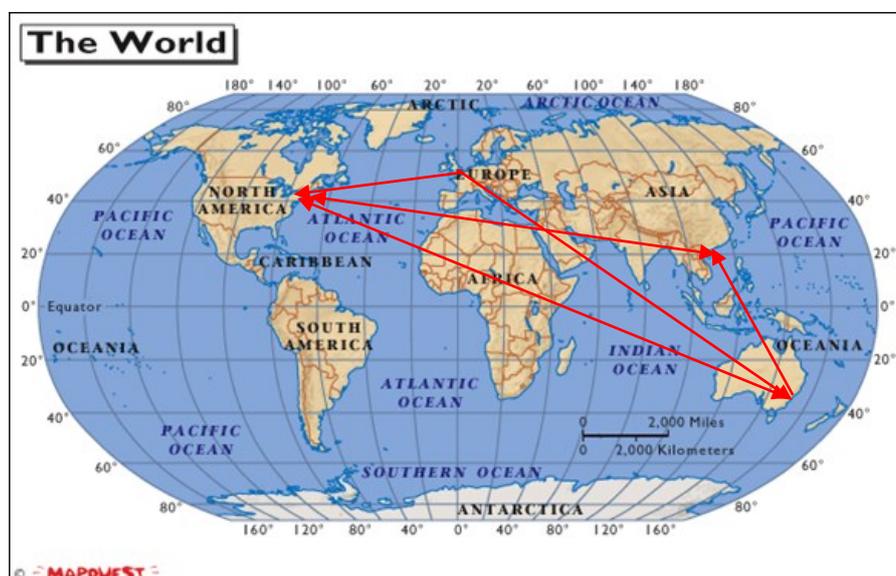
*"There are over 50 VXs and each is used for different purposes. Some universities use the system for entire online courses, preferring the VX community aspects over LMSs; we have two language schools that use the survey functions to teach English; and we have just finished a Business Week at a Sydney school where students use it intensively to explore ethical and practical issues in business. Lifewide uses the VX as an international survey tool, which makes obvious sense. One of the most important aspects of this use is the transparency of the results - no-one needs to wait for reports and can filter and explore as they please."*

David Seedhouse, November 2013

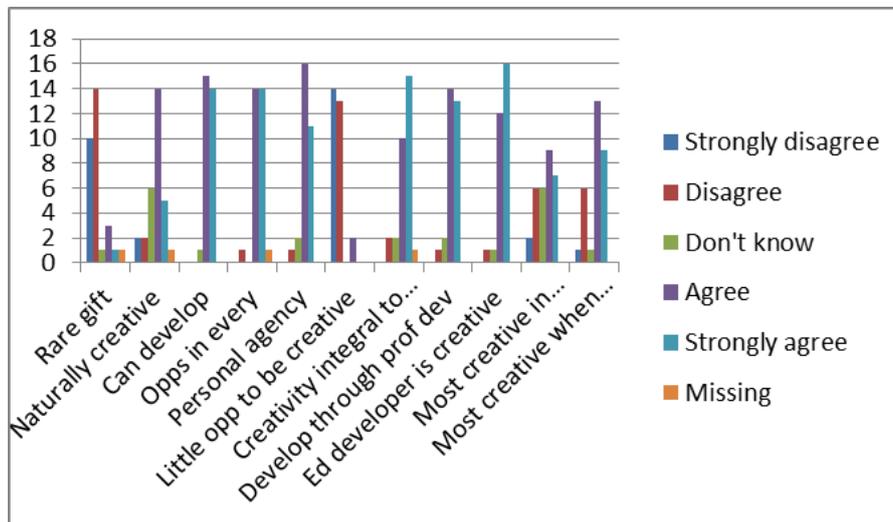
There have been two particular themes for our recent research: the cultivation of creativity, and notions and practice for personal wellbeing.

### **Creativity**

We were never more aware of the global access provided by VX than in October when Norman Jackson was in Australia prior to attending a conference in Macao, and I was in Canada. We had a very tight window in which to set up a survey on creativity in the student community, collate and analyse the results so that Norman could present them at the international conference. From our distant locations, thanks to the user-friendly nature of VX, we were able to conduct the survey, I analysed the data and shared it with Norman, who in turn disseminated it at the International Symposium on the Cultivation of Creativity in University Students 2013.



Lifewide Learning without frontiers



What is creativity? Perceptions of education developers, October 2013

Through VX, we can continue the work on creativity that has been a significant of our research for more than a decade (see e.g. <http://www.lifewidebook.co.uk/research.html> ). The graphic above shows the results of an enquiry of educational developers' perceptions of creativity and how it featured in their development work. Stand by for a forthcoming chapter in our e-book.

## Wellbeing

The second topic that we have we have been working on extensively is that of personal wellbeing. The ease with which we can copy the same survey and personalise it for different audiences has been a boon to our canvassing perceptions in different parts of the world. We began with a group of 25 UK respondents in Spring 2013, followed by a similar sized group in Beijing. In September, I attended an international conference on mental health and gathered data from a group of predominantly South American respondents. Most recently, I had the opportunity to repeat the questionnaire with a group of tax inspectors in London, Ontario. The figure below gives a taster of emergent data, which suggests that notions of wellbeing and personal practice have distinct cultural differences.

	UK	Beijing	Argentinian
<b>1<sup>st</sup> most important</b>	(10) Feeling valued	(12) Achieving my ambi- tions and goals	(1) Having good every- day relationships
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> most important</b>	(9) Having a close rela- tionship	(2) Being health and fit	(=1 <sup>st</sup> )(10) Feeling valued
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> most important</b>	(= 2 <sup>nd</sup> ) (1) Having good every- day relationships	(5) Continually learning & developing myself	(5) Continually learning & developing myself

Most important dimensions of personal wellbeing, by national group

Readers of our e-book will know that we already have 2 chapters on conceptual and research aspects of wellbeing (see <http://www.lifewidebook.co.uk/contents.html> ). A third will shortly be published, in which I posit some differences in perception according to gender, age, creativity and culture.

If you haven't yet visited our ValuesExchange site, log on to the link above. You can register for free by simply adding your name, email address and a password of your choice to the registration page. You will then be able to access our surveys, browse through responses and add any comments you may have. For more information, or if you have an idea for a new theme, please contact either norman ([normanjjackson@btinternet.com](mailto:normanjjackson@btinternet.com)) or me ([jjenny@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:jjenny@blueyonder.co.uk)) .



## Lifewide Learning, Education & Personal Development e-Book

Our examination of different dimensions of lifewide learning continues with publication of two e-book chapters exploring the concept of learning ecologies and its relevance to lifewide learning, education and personal development. A further autobiographical chapter provides an inspiring story of young person who has discovered his purpose in life.

Chapters are free to download at: <http://www.lifewideebook.co.uk/>

We welcome contributions from the community. If you would like to contribute to the e-book please contact the commissioning editor Norman Jackson [lifewider1@btinternet.com](mailto:lifewider1@btinternet.com).

### CHAPTER C4 Learning Ecology Narratives *Norman J Jackson*

#### SUMMARY

An individual's learning ecology comprises their processes and set of contexts, relationships and interactions that provide them with opportunities and resources for learning, development and achievement. Organised educational settings create their own ecologies for learning into which learners have to fit themselves but outside these settings self-created learning ecologies are an essential component of the way we learn and develop in work, family and other social settings. They are the means by which we connect and integrate our experiences and the learning and meaning we gain from our experiences across the contexts and situations that constitute our current lives. They are also the means by which we connect the learning we have gained from experiences in the past to the present. Learning ecologies are therefore of significant conceptual and practical value to the practice of lifewide learning and education.

Learning has always been an ecological process, and it is therefore surprising that the concept has received scant attention in worlds of educational policy and practice. This chapter concludes by addressing the issue of how universities might encourage learners to create their own learning ecologies and how they might recognise learning, development and achievement gained through these processes.

### CHAPTER B3 Discovering My Purpose *Robert Tomlinson*

#### SUMMARY

Bobby Tomlinson is a young man with a mission. At the time of writing he was about to undertake training in Micronesia to become a Christian missionary. He spoke to Professor Norman Jackson, founder of the Lifewide Education Community, before starting this training and in this interview-based autobiographical account he describes his lifelong lifewide journey to discover what he believes to be his purpose in life. Frequently referring to his own learning experiences, his conclusions are predicated upon his upbringing in a Christian environment, and experiences gained from voluntary working with people from less privileged backgrounds and cultures in Africa, Asia and Europe.

## COMING SOON

### CHAPTER B4 The Body in Illness *Susan Sapsed and David Mathew*

#### SUMMARY

Illness and trauma are part of everyday life and when serious can have significant impacts on our lives and the people closest to us. It is therefore necessary to consider such events and their consequences in the contexts of our lifewide experiences through which we learn and develop, however painful and uncomfortable they might be. The question that we are interested in is: can reflection help to heal and enable us to move on after failed surgery? We present the case of an accident that occurred while the lead author was on holiday, and the subsequent problems that were encountered. Throughout the paper an account of the patient's time in recuperative care is alternately presented and then examined in both a manner of reflection and through the lens of psychoanalytic theory. We explore the question of whether reflection, in addition to being used as a tool to present material, and to enhance personal, lifewide, learning, might also have a curative role of its own. This paper presents the symbiosis between illness and the psychoanalytic concepts of psychic retreats and containers. We discuss mourning and the debilitation of slow recovery in an unhelpful medical environment. Ultimately, the long and painful experience results in deeper personal awareness and acceptance of our ever-changing identities.



# LEARNING LIVES CONFERENCE

## Encouraging, Supporting and Recognising 'Lifewide' Learning in Universities

**Wednesday 26th March 2014**  
**Clare Management Centre, Birkbeck, University of London**



### This is the first conference of the Lifewide Education Community. It aims to

- Provide a forum for the exchange of knowledge and understanding about lifewide learning and personal development in higher education
- Raise awareness of the outcomes of the European Commission's Foresight work on the 'Future of Learning' 2030 and facilitate discussion about how educational institutions and society more generally might encourage, support, value and recognise individuals' lifewide learning, development and achievements
- Consider the practicalities, challenges and benefits of encouraging, supporting and recognising lifewide learning in Universities
- Inform and influence the thinking and practice of Award scheme leaders, teachers, senior educational managers, politicians and policy makers

**'personalisation, collaboration and informal learning will be at the core of learning in the future. The central learning paradigm is characterised by lifelong and lifewide learning and shaped by the ubiquity of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)'**

*European Commission Foresight Report 'Future of Learning: Preparing for Change' (2011)*

The big question is how do we prepare and enable EU citizens to inhabit this future world in ways that are relevant, meaningful, interesting and fulfilling.

Lifewide Education's 'Learning Lives Conference' will address this question from the perspective of UK higher education and draw attention to the significance of learning *within* life as well as *throughout* life. Its purpose is to encourage discussion about how lifewide learning, development and achievement is already being encouraged, supported and recognised by universities so that learners are better prepared for the future of their learning.

The conference is designed to attract those who believe that there is an opportunity to improve learners' future lives by adopting a lifewide approach to their education who are interested in sharing their perspectives in ways that will enable higher education to make progress with the challenge of future learning.

**The conference will provide an opportunity for members of the Lifewide Education Community to showcase their work in a book that will be available at the conference. If you would like to contribute please complete the proposal form on the conference webpage.**

#### Confirmed Speakers

Dr Christine Redecker  
 Professor Marcia Baxter Magolda  
 Professor Ronald Barnett  
 Harriet Barnes  
 Professor Norman Jackson

**TO BOOK A PLACE PLEASE VISIT  
 THE CONFERENCE WEBSITE  
<http://www.learninglives.co.uk>**



<http://www.lifewidemagazine.co.uk/>

## LIFEWIDE MAGAZINE STATISTICS

How do readers use our magazine webpages? Thanks to our weekly StatCounter.com reports, we are able to track how many people are loading a page, whether it is their first or a return visit, and the day of their visit. Here are the figures for the first three weeks after publication of the Summer 2013 issue:

		Page download	1 visit	First visit	Returning visit
<b>2-8 Sept</b>	Total	245	184	155	29
	Daily average	35	26	22	4
<b>9-15 Sept</b>	Total	66	55	46	9
	Daily average	9	8	7	1
<b>16-22 Sept</b>	Total	36	31	25	6
	Daily average	5	4	4	1

Clearly, there was a great deal of activity in the week we published, and visits gradually reduced in all categories as time went on. By the final week of October, they had fallen to the following levels:

		Page download	1 visit	First visit	Returning visit
<b>28 Oct-3 Nov</b>	Total	5	5	5	0
	Daily average	1	1	1	0

This reminds us of the importance of keeping potential readers aware of the magazine. We see a rise in the number of downloads and visits, for example, in the periods when members of the core team are attending events at home or abroad and publicising Lifewide. We are seeing an increase in our international visitors, and the countries we are reaching, as far apart as Finland and New Zealand, Denmark and South Africa..

The statistics also enable us to see which days are most popular for visitors for each activity. Here are the figures for page-loads in the first three weeks after publication:

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
<b>2-8 Sept</b>	0	0	102	80	37	16	10
<b>9-15 Sept</b>	18	10	9	11	5	2	11
<b>16-22 Sept</b>	11	2	7	4	11	1	0

They suggest that just after publication, mid-week to the weekend see most visitors, but no real pattern emerges. By the two-month mark, Tuesdays appear popular. We cannot, though tell from the raw data whether these are the same people visiting, whether they are members of the core team, or other interested parties, but we can drill down to track the location of visitors.

If you have any suggestions for how we can reach even more readers, we would be pleased to hear from you. Just email me at [jjenny@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:jjenny@blueyonder.co.uk).

## Team Member News

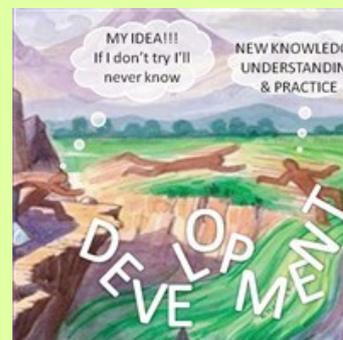


We send our well wishes to **Vicki Mann** who is now on maternity leave from the University of Nottingham. Vicky is one of the founding members of Lifewide Education and through her work for AGCAS she has kept us informed of developments in University Skills Awards.

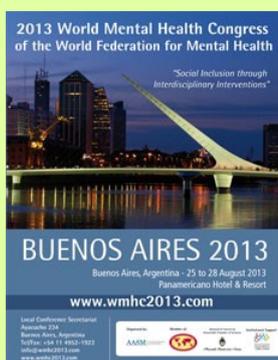
We are delighted that **Sarah Jeffries-Watts** has agreed to join our team. Sarah has been a member of Lifewide since we started. She manages the University of Birmingham's Personal Skills Award (PSA), and is a member of the AGCAS Skills Award Task Group. Sarah's experience and insights will be invaluable to the team.

**Norman Jackson** travelled to Australia to see the work of the Dunn Lewis Youth Development Foundation that is concerned with young people's personal, social and vocational wellbeing. The Foundation was established by two parents who lost children in the Bali bombings and the money raised, together with Government grants has funded a new Centre for young people <http://www.dunnlewisfoundation.org.au/>.

Norman also travelled to China to give the keynote address at Macao Polytechnic Institution's international conference on Cultivating Students' Creativity in Higher Education. Closer to home he was also delighted to give one of the keynote presentations at the annual conference of the Staff and Educational Developers (SEDA) on the theme of Creativity in Educational Development.

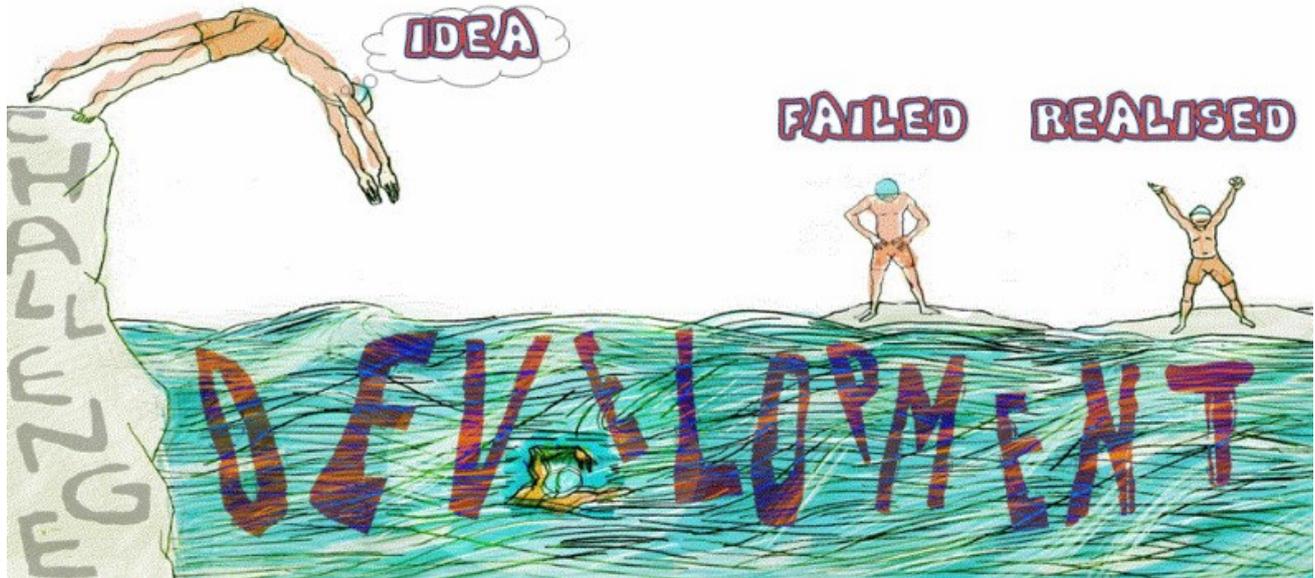


**Russ Law** has been visiting Qatar and Thailand to carry out NPQH work with groups of middle and senior leaders in international schools run along British lines. One interesting feature has been the fact that a desire to combine rigorous attention to progress and achievement includes creativity and a broad, balanced curriculum in the educational philosophies of the best of these teachers and leaders. These people really appreciate the comparative freedoms they have to do things their own way, without the crushing levels of prescription and enforcement of political frameworks. And they do get great results!



**Jenny Willis'** travels to Argentina and Canada gave her an opportunity to continue our research into perceptions of wellbeing. She led a workshop on this theme at the World Federation for Mental Health congress in Buenos Aires, and in November as a staff development workshop at the Ministry of Finance, Ontario. She gathered further survey data at these events which is enabling us to make some hypotheses on cultural differences of the meaning and practice of wellbeing.

## Invitation to join 'Creativity in Development Narrative Inquiry'



During the last 12 months, and especially since we acquired our Values Exchange website, LWE has been involved in facilitating professional learning by gathering views through surveys and synthesising and presenting the results. This is a role and service that we would like to extend and our latest adventure in professional learning has been to set up a website to enable people who are interested in gaining a better understanding of their own creativity and how it features in their developmental processes, to contribute to a narrative inquiry. By this I mean to tell a story about their own development and share their understandings of their creativity in this process.

The process is open to anyone who is interested and willing to devote the time and effort to creating a narrative. Narratives can be about any aspect of development in any aspect of their lives - work, education, family, hobbies, sport, community, travel, illness or any other aspect of their lives. It is envisaged that development processes for personal development will last for between 3 to 12 months to enable development to be recorded and recognised.

How, why, where and when am I creative within my developmental process?

What tools might I use to examine and explain personal creativity?

Contributions will be published in an E-Book hosted by the website. Further details can be found at: <http://www.creativityindevelopment.co.uk/>

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## ***Learning Lives Conference E-Book***

### **Lifewide Learning in Universities & Colleges**

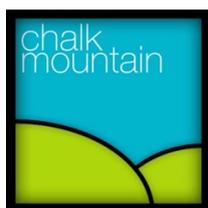
Over the last decade there has been considerable development in universities of ways and means to support student learning and development outside as well as inside the formal academic curriculum. This is an important educational phenomenon which has yet to receive the public recognition it deserves so the purpose of the conference and the E-book is to draw attention to what one well known higher education commentator has called - a transformative concept in higher education.

The purpose of the conference e-book is to celebrate the many different ways in which universities are encouraging, supporting and recognising lifewide learning. It will be the first book published in this field and will enable people who are involved in leading, managing and supporting student development through co- or extra-curricular skill-based awards or other activities to gain insights into educational practices across the sector.

Invitations were extended to all universities and higher education colleges to provide a 3000-6000 word descriptive account of schemes and related research activities that recognise informal learning and personal development gained from experiences outside the academic curriculum. The response has been good and we have sixteen contributions that we will showcase in the next issue of the Magazine.

***There may still be time to submit a proposal. If you would like to discuss your proposal please contact Professor Norman Jackson Commissioning Editor [lifewider1@btinternet.com](mailto:lifewider1@btinternet.com)***

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## **LIFEWIDE MAGAZINE**

**Issue 9, March 2014**

**CONFERENCE ISSUE**

### **Lifewide Learning in Universities and Colleges**

What are we doing in higher education to encourage, support and recognise development in all the contexts of a student's life?

This is the conference issue and contributions from people who are involved in lifewide education in universities and colleges are particularly welcome.

Please send your ideas to the Editor: [jjenny@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:jjenny@blueyonder.co.uk)

**Deadline for receipt of submissions: 7 February 2014**