

CHAPTER A2

'Explorativity': implications for lifewide education and lifelong-lifewide learning and personal development

Russ Law

SUMMARY

Explorativity, a concept coined and developed by the author, is a habitual means of ensuring one's lifelong learning in an informal or formal way. By exploring, he argues, we discover openings and opportunities which might otherwise be denied to us. Whilst some might be dead ends, there will be others which can be life changing. Being open to explorativity results in an attitude or approach that is likely to improve or enhance situations, states of mind, relationships, environments or lifestyles. An explorative person can bring about developments in themselves (personal changes) that make their own lives more satisfying. They see innovation and development as normal and unthreatening features of life - and are even able to see the positive potential of unavoidable change, or at least to be able to deal better with its impact.

Having explained the genesis of the explorativity concept, the author demonstrates how it is aligned to the principles of lifewide learning and with several currently accepted and desirable approaches to formal education. We are all familiar with *homo sapiens* (wise or knowing man). The author encourages us, those we teach, and those who govern education and society, to find and use the potential of our human status as *homo explorator*.

BIOGRAPHY



Russ Law was head of a large British international school for many years, where part of his work was the training of future teachers. Since returning to the UK, he has been working as an independent consultant and as a trainer/facilitator/assessor and accredited coach in programmes such as Teaching Leaders, Leadership Pathways, and the National Qualification for Headteachers. To date, he has successfully coached more than a hundred individual people for various aims. A former Associate of SCEPTRe at the University of Surrey, he is a keen supporter of those who seek to apply creativity and collaborative enquiry to their own and others' development, and who promote the process of lifewide and lifelong learning. He is a founder member of the Lifewide Education Community Interest Company.



INDIVIDUAL POTENTIAL IN AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

Having spent my working life mainly in the field of education, I have often had conversations about the purposes of schooling, what is learnt during and after school, and the vision of a school to guide its everyday activity. It is not uncommon to hear about worthwhile aims involving “every child achieving their full potential”. This phrase itself has potential to occupy us in debate about how we can predict a person’s potential, and how to judge if it is fulfilled.

Some people simplify the concept of achievement as some generally accepted pinnacle of success, of the fame and fortune type, in the same way that the Three Little Pigs and many other characters from fable went to seek their fortunes. In the current economic climate, and for many people across the globe who do not occupy wealthy zones in any global economic climate, this is sadly ironic.

Traditionally, young people are offered misguided encouragement just to believe in themselves so that they can achieve anything. When the elder of my two daughters was at primary school, she played the role of a fairy in a class assembly. This fairy had the power to make such dreams come true: with a wave of her magic wand, penguins who believed in themselves were able to fly, and other unlikely fantasies were realised within the animal world. I used to tease her about the dubious nature of this message, accusing her of peddling false hope.

Snapshots at jasonlove.com



Moments later Pongo would awaken to the painful truth.

We recalled this many years later, at her graduation ceremony at York University, when Chancellor Greg Dyke repeated the falsehood that the hundreds of happy young people there could achieve anything they wanted as long as they believed in themselves. It was a magic moment when my daughter and I caught each other’s glance and started giggling, rather stupidly, at this private joke. But alongside our personal indulgence there lurked a worrying question as to just how fulfilled these young people would come to be, after the celebrations were over.

Many children express the ambition of playing professional football or winning a talent competition, or even marrying a celebrity. The statistical likelihood of such outcomes is, of course, low. Surely it would make more sense to encourage more manageable aims, such as to get better and better at something, and to enjoy doing it for purposes other than stardom. Neither would this preclude the few who actually were brilliantly talented or lucky enough from becoming rich and famous.

Educational goals

There is also a huge question about what is going to be useful or indeed essential in the world that pupils will occupy when they are adults, and that many current adults will also experience. Will they need to communicate effectively in one or many languages, or manage the exponentially increasing power of digital technology, or survive in a desolate, post-apocalyptic landscape? Will they need to cope with personal, physical, emotional and intellectual challenges, and show resilience, physical fitness and strength? Will they need to be compassionate, empathetic, and socially and politically engaged? Will they need to do difficult mathematics, fix machines, use medicine and surgery? Will they need to be creative problem-solvers? Should they know about raising children, and making wise decisions about the education of their own offspring? If so, their decisions will be influenced by their own experiences as learners. We may well think that all of the above would be helpful!

So perhaps we shouldn't spend time wondering what each person's potential and particular life goal should be; we may be asking the wrong questions. A more rewarding debate could be about how to provide (and enjoy) the kinds of experiences that allow potential to be revealed, and that permit growth and development regardless of how close one comes to a specified ambition. In the words of that famous seasonal song 'Fairytale of New York', sung by the late Kirsty MacColl and Shane MacGowan of the Pogues, the answer to the lament "I could have been someone" is "Well so could anyone!"

Self-actualisation need not require a competitive selection process, or have sharply defined ends. If one reads the works of Professor Ron Barnett or Professor Norman Jackson, or identifies the zeitgeist of the turn of the millennium, one recognises a strong notion of uncertainty in a world of super-complexity. The implication of this, mixing metaphors, is that one should spread one's bets, and avoid putting too many eggs in one basket. In other words, a broad and varied education is required. Even if we can't cover everything, we can probably allow considerable variety over many years. Later in the chapter, I shall characterise this approach as 'explorative'.

Experiential learning

Focusing on having experiences that enable potential and interests to be revealed takes us into the field of 'experiential learning'. While it seems fair to assert that any experience is bound to teach us something, it is the emphasis on engagement with the reality of an experience, as appreciated in the moment and in reflection afterwards, that starts to draw out the enormous potential of applying such practices productively in a thoughtful, structured and substantial way. At the University of Surrey's Centre of Excellence in Professional Training and Education (SCEPTrEⁱ), Professor Colin Beard led an Experiential Academyⁱⁱ in which participants tried out a variety of activities and models during the day, and then went for a stroll through Guildford together. The walk, described as an 'edventure', required small groups of people, who became a team in the process, to explore areas of Guildford, solving riddles and answering questions, and pausing to apply reflective questioning techniques learned earlier to apprehend their experiences more deeply. Meanwhile, they were challenged to undertake some individual and group activities that they would not normally try, such as recording their edventure in sound and vision, and busking for passers-by before visiting a pub, trying a drink they'd never had before, and having an evening meal together. The next day, they created accounts of their experiences using technology and human ingenuity. This all took place over two summer days in a pleasant location, and not on some kind of survival course. But at the end most



participants claimed to have discovered aspects of themselves (and of others), that were actually life-changing, and that they would never forget, not least because they would apply their learning and new knowledge in the future. The walk used experiential learning techniques in the context of an 'explorative' activity.

The participants in the adventure were all adults. Later in the chapter, I offer a light analysis of some currently favoured aspects of this holistic type of learning *in schools*, showing which areas seem best to overlap with my theme of being explorative. A key point in my argument is that what is good at school can be good throughout life. If one didn't support that view, at least in a general sense, then it would be hard to be enthusiastic about lifewide, lifelong learning. Charles Handy has independently endorsed the idea of cyclic learning throughout life. His quotation below encapsulates why learning matters so much. It both encourages us to go on learning, and challenges us to think about the consequences if we don't. This is an excellent introductory thought for the following section of this chapter:

I have argued that life, for most people, is a process of discovery - of who we are, what we can do, and, ultimately, why we exist and what we believe. It is a circular process, because when we discover what we are capable of and work out why we exist, it changes the way we see ourselves, which can send us off in new directions, discovering new capabilities and new reasons for our existence. This spiralling journey is the true meaning of lifelong learning, and it remains, for those who pursue it, an endlessly fascinating experience, one which enriches not only the individual but all those around. Those who have tired of the journey, have tired of life. They come across as dull and boring, and can soon infect their friends and colleagues with their apathy.

EXPLORATIVITY

The theme of this chapter is the concept of 'explorativity', which I define as:

An attitude, approach or orientation that is likely to improve or enhance situations, states of mind, relationships, environments or lifestyles, providing a sense of fulfilment. In essence it involves a willingness to engage with and experience the new and unfamiliar, and an awareness of the ways in which such deliberate acts enrich one's life.

Given that this disposition or orientation influences the decisions we make about what to do and how we do it when we are under its influence, it's an important concept for lifewide learning and personal development. It affects us from moment to moment and has the potential to shape our actions and behaviours - and consequently our intended and our unintended learning and development (learning *en passant*, Reischmann 2004). It is also my contention that explorativity can be a habitual means of ensuring one's lifelong learning in an informal or formal way, and that its principles are well aligned with several currently accepted and desirable approaches to formal education.

After an unremarkable but rewarding day when I lived in Saudi Arabia, I coined the term 'explorative' to describe the dynamics of the experience. My wife and I had cycled - not the usual mode of transport for an expat couple in the city - to a new bookshop, where we found some travel guides that were to prove vital in our more ambitious travel plans. In the next few days, I kept finding



examples of people and situations that illustrated the proposition that one's life could be enhanced by explorativity, and diminished by its absence. I wanted to put these thoughts down on the page, and to organise them somehow so that they could be shared with others, and ended up writing a short book with the following premises.

By developing the attributes of an explorative person, we can achieve certain worthwhile objectives:

- To bring about developments in ourselves (personal changes) that make our own lives more satisfying
- To see innovation and development as normal and unthreatening features of life - even to be able to see the positive potential of unavoidable change, or at least to be able to deal better with its impact
- To become a more interesting person.

There are other reasons, too, for explorativity:

- The capacity for explorativity is one of the features that distinguishes *homo sapiens* from the potato (couch or other variety). Closely allied to the capacity for imagining and for language, it is what has been mainly responsible for making us what we are: powerful, diverse and accomplished occupants of the planet, who have spread over its surface and survived in many challenging environments, finding and making systems and artefacts, traditions and cultures that excite and sustain.
- Our brainpower is apparently underused. We are told that we routinely apply less than one fifth of its working capacity. This may or may not be so, but it cannot be denied that we sometimes fail to do our brains the favour of treating them well, with food, water, exercise and variety. Unchallenging but tiring tasks, or challenging and stressful ones, leave us incapable of enjoying what more our brains can offer. But by being intelligently explorative we can tap into the exciting resources that are there at our disposal.

What does an explorative person look like?

If we identify some of the qualities and attributes of an explorative individual, then we can begin to see more clearly how an explorative approach can enhance our own lives and circumstances. Explorative people (EPs) will have some of the following qualities.

1 EPs are alert to opportunities and ready for different situations. Rather than rejecting innovation in favour of the comforts of the familiar, an EP stays on the lookout for ways of embracing innovations. EPs are interested in what is going on around them, in both close and distant environments.

2 EPs are good at making links, and they like to communicate. They are not so arrogant (or frightened?) as to think that they can or need to do it all themselves. All those other minds, all that other knowledge, all those other stimuli...

EPs read, research and listen, and are keen to join in dialogues. They are able to take a step into the unfamiliar, and to see the wood as well as the trees. An EP will make that call, ask that question, look down that road, chase that ambition...

3 EPs know that it is better to do something, even if the direct usefulness of a particular action is unknown. Their attitude is often: "Do something - anything!" Instead of feeling paralysed,



they make something happen.

4 EPs are perceptive of people. They can spot and value the 'action drivers'. They recognise the charismatic people who make things happen. They gravitate towards the uninhibited and are ready to line up alongside the bold. An EP welcomes change-makers and does not fear them; he or she probably is one, at some level or other. They see bandwagons coming, and they may leap into the driver's seat.

5 Students who are EPs like to keep their options open. They may have special interests and talents, but they will resist limiting their focus to only one. They are likely to seek further study or higher education of some kind, but will see this as entry to a field of flexible opportunity rather than as a single, fixed career pathway. Their approach will be to get in among others like them (and unlike them) and worry about the details later.

6 Young EPs are likely to find more than just financial benefits in temporary jobs. They will enjoy the rich variety of contacts with different people and situations. They are likely to want to travel before settling down - if indeed they do settle down.

7 EPs are ready to take a chance: they will say *carpe diem* in the sense of making the most of an opportunity; and they are also prepared to take risks. These risks need not be life-threatening! EPs are not all intrepid explorers, but they will embark personally on some 'voyages of discovery'.

8 EPs are committed to making a beginning. They believe the start is more important than a predetermined destination, or "to travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive", as Robert Louis Stevenson wrote. EPs do not fret over the question "What if nothing happens and I reach a dead end?" They know that venturing does not guarantee a pot of gold, but they usually think 'nothing ventured, nothing gained'.

9 EPs are ready to risk embarrassment on the basis that no one is likely to care more about what they sound and look like (or to be more critical) than themselves. They respect people who have a go more than those who skulk on the sidelines. They prefer the risk of regretting doing something to that of regretting *not* doing something. They do not spend time unnecessarily in self-reproach.

10 EPs do demanding things for no apparent reason other than to do them. They may climb a hill just because it is there, or go camping despite the necessity to pitch a tent and carry equipment to remote locations.

11 EPs believe in serendipity - but they don't ever rely on it. They know that it is out there, but do not consider that it has any obligation to come their way. They have a knack of creating their own luck - they give things the chance to happen. They may never make a great scientific discovery, but they are aware that many an invention has been achieved partly by chance.

12 EPs are prepared to rekindle dormant talents. They are willing to reach back into their youth and take up afresh something not previously developed.

13 EPs are also ready to become new learners. They believe that dogs, young or old, can be



taught new tricks, and that Granny's egg-sucking technique might still be improved.

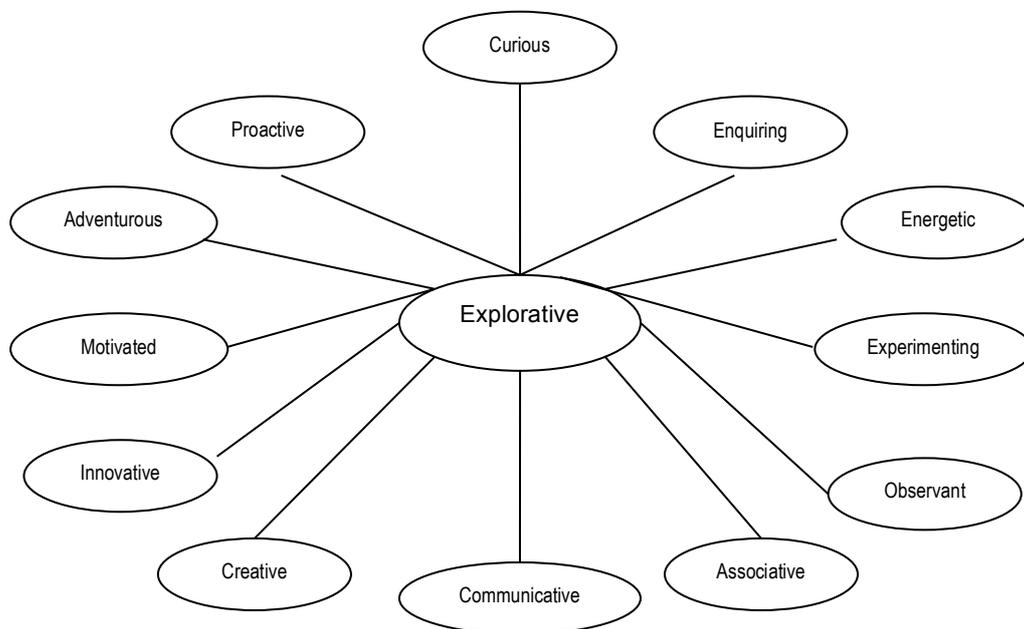
14 An EP enjoys some time alone, but a lot of time in the company of others. An EP has varying sets of friends and acquaintances, and is happy to move from circle to circle without becoming fixed in one clique.

15 EPs are great listeners. They make people feel motivated to talk to them because of the interest they show.

16 EPs are proactive. When faced with reasons or excuses for not doing something, they do it anyway. On a dull, cold, rainy day they will put on their coats and go out.

The concept of explorativity remains a broad one. Figure 1 may help to indicate where it lies.

Figure 1 Some of the dimensions of being explorative



For easier understanding, ways to be explorative can be organised into a menu of choices.

1 Physical mobilisation

There is a very broad range of possibilities for explorativity through physical action. At one extreme are terrifying challenges, like setting out to discover the source of the Nile, a new trade route to the Indies, a passage from North America to Asia, or the possibility of landing on Mars and returning alive! At the other end of the spectrum come simpler tasks like getting up from in front of the TV or computer screen, cooking a meal or walking down to the corner shop.

Even in these more modest examples, there are explorative opportunities that can serve to engage one's potential - by using intellect to decide on a recipe and prepare a meal, or by allowing one to enter a less familiar and less controlled environment (outside), where chance encounters may occur, or new ideas come to mind from what one sees and hears, smells, tastes or feels.



Moving up a notch or two, for those fortunate enough to be sound in wind and limb (not to be taken for granted) there are the benefits of more robust physical exercise. In addition to the stimulus of a change of scenery, as in a brisk walk or a gentle jog, there are those of an increased oxygen supply to the brain, of helpful chemical reactions in the body, and thus of a more relaxed and yet productive basis for personal effectiveness. Naturally generated endorphins are a healthy drug, and there is even a credible and growing body of opinion that the effects of good exercise are as great as those of antidepressants for those suffering from certain forms of mild depressive conditions - and the side-effects are less of a concern.

On a larger scale, but still within the bounds of ordinary people, there are other possibilities. Nearly thirty years ago, as I sat in the staffroom of the school where I taught and considered my next forty years as a teacher, a feeling of desperation began to creep into me. I was still relatively young, and I felt that the future was closing down into a narrow and unadventurous channel. A substitute teacher mentioned that he knew someone who had applied for a teaching job abroad, and said that he also intended to work in some interesting or at least different location.

Although the fact that this was a prime example of explorativity escaped me at the time, the conversation was to be a defining one in my life. After some great years in the north of England came many further years of professional and personal challenge, opportunity and fulfilment in the Middle East. A change of location can open up the doors of explorativity, or be a demonstration of it. The important point is that large-scale or small-scale physical action can allow for productive explorativity both of one's own personal potential and of the wider environment.

2 Explorativity within

It is not always practicable to up and move. Nor can everyone start jogging round the area like a marathon contender. But physical mobilisation is not the only course of action. This is why it is important to engage in occasional, serious and focused spells of self-examination. Many busy people, even those who work in areas full of other people, lack a proportionate level of what Professor Howard Gardner terms "intrapersonal intelligence". They can be so busy sorting out major issues, petty problems and the things that are going on in other people's heads, relationships and lives, that they neglect what goes on (or doesn't go on) in their own.

It is not recommended that one turn into a navel-gazing, self-obsessed introvert; but each of us deserves the benefit of a few minutes of our own valuable time! So it can be useful to ask oneself certain key questions, and to take time - perhaps a period of days or weeks - in answering them. If there are trusty friends or relatives to help, then so much the better, but they are not essential to the process. For example, the relevant questions might include:

- What is really important to me?
- What might I regret *not* doing before the opportunity is gone?
- What things would I like to do if I only had the time/energy/focus?
- What new talents could I try to develop?
- Have I got a skill or ability that is lying unused?
- Did I once start something and then give it up because of the circumstances? Can I give it another go?
- Am I discouraged from doing something because I am not very good at it?

In answering the above, one takes a step towards the application of explorativity for what people call



personal growth, lifelong learning, continuing professional development and self-actualisation. If everyone stopped listening to music because they could never rival the genius of Mozart or Ella Fitzgerald, or gave up tennis because they would never get to Wimbledon, then life would be dull in the extreme. One does not have to be a great poet to write a poem, a concert musician to pick out a tune on an instrument, or a literary giant to write a letter.

There are two areas of focus in potential outcomes from the above, and they could be seen as the active and the passive - eg listening to music or making it; watching sport or playing it, reading a letter or writing one. But even the apparently passive angles can be critical, focused, structured, energetic - active. *Critical* listening, reading, viewing and appreciation are all active processes.

3 Only connect

Earlier I mentioned communication or language as being one of the defining features of humanity. While most people would probably recognise this, it is easy for us to neglect this mysterious and special facility that we have. We do so to our detriment. One of the most self-affirming phenomena in society is to relate to others. A good way of overcoming the blues is to be taken out of oneself - to be in company that occupies our attention.

There are more benefits in communicative connections. These are the ones that lead to the discovery of mutual interests, new information, new ideas and stimuli. Take that staffroom chat about jobs abroad that I referred to earlier, for example. There have been similar episodes in my life, such as the one in which I casually enquired how someone had come to be in their particular line of work, and then found myself on a pathway that they initiated and that led me into the same field via a series of conversations that I would never have foreseen.

But the most obvious potential benefit of explorative communication is that it makes people less isolated; it can remove mistrust and misunderstanding; it allows life to be more sociable and interesting. When at the supermarket, do you stand in silence at the checkout, or do you brighten your day, and probably the checkout operator's too, by exchanging brief pleasantries?

4 Explorative synthesis

While the above subheadings suggest discrete zones of explorativity, there is often an overlap. Some of the most productive areas of human activity are those that make connections between people and ideas, concepts and processes. One of the best jobs I ever heard of was invented in a science fiction story by A E van Vogt, called 'The Voyage of the Space Beagle', said to have inspired the film 'Alien' many years later. (You may also notice the reference to Darwin's explorations - but I digress, as may be typical of explorative activity.) The job was that of 'nexialist', who had some understanding of various fields of science and technology, and who had to bring together the disparate elements and people needed for cosmos-saving projects.

Several of the gifted musicians at a school at which I worked had the ability not only to play brilliantly, to enjoy serious music and to teach the subject as an academic discipline, but also to foster a general attitude among students, staff and friends that music held something for everyone. All genres were worthy of a hearing, and even modest live performance was respected. By a process of cajoling and encouragement, bands and ensembles were formed in which adults and children - beginners, *faux débutants* and the highly accomplished - sat together and made music. For the participants, and even for the varied audiences, the results were astonishing. What a self-



actualising experience for those who had been coerced into making our own, humble contributions!

Similarly, the reasons for joining the local flower-arranging class or jogging club are not only to become better flower-arrangers or faster joggers. Conversation and what used to be called fellowship are also potential benefits. Explorative connections can often lead to a synthesis of communication, interest and activity that takes everyone into unexpected areas of individual fulfilment and shared achievement.

5 The Internet

Following the theme of conversation and the value of shared interests, one has to recognise the enormous impact and worth of online research and communication. Virtual communities, unbounded by physical geography, are now recognised as important forums for discussing, sharing and publicising common interests and information. While they do have some hazardous elements (lack of regulation, unverified input, anonymity and plagiarism, for example), they are a powerful and potentially useful social instrument.

Although I earlier raised the matter of getting up from the screen and moving about a bit (still to be recommended), one has to appreciate the liberating potential of the Internet for both the mobile and the less mobile person. Indeed, the very term surfing suggests the speculative, *explorative* nature of much Internet use. It can take one in unplanned directions, make connections, aid communication, provide a medium for intellectual and artistic activity, and open up unpredictable possibilities.

6 Too much explorativity

Earlier I mentioned that explorativity was not always creative. Nor is it always guaranteed to be productive. It is true that the highly explorative person will often find himself or herself in situations that feel uncomfortable. This could, in an extreme case like that of the intrepid adventurer, lead to life-threatening risks. On a lesser scale of hazard, there is the possibility of embarrassment, inconvenience and the unproductive investment of time.

There is clearly the need for each of us to gauge the degree of explorativity with which we are comfortable - and then to consider seriously the potential of pushing the boundaries a little further. There are many who accept that what forms character is not that which one would choose or normally dare to do, but rather that which one is obliged to do and to experience, and thence to be affected by. Sometimes the interim pain will lead to a greater gain.

In the interests of social responsibility, though, it is only right for me to advise against excess. No one should go so far as to risk their own or others' skin for the sake of excitement, or to be so insensitive as not to learn from experience. The world does not need a majority of extreme practitioners. As a learned colleague of mine used to say, quoting Joshua: "We also need the hewers of wood and the drawers of water".

Further visualisation

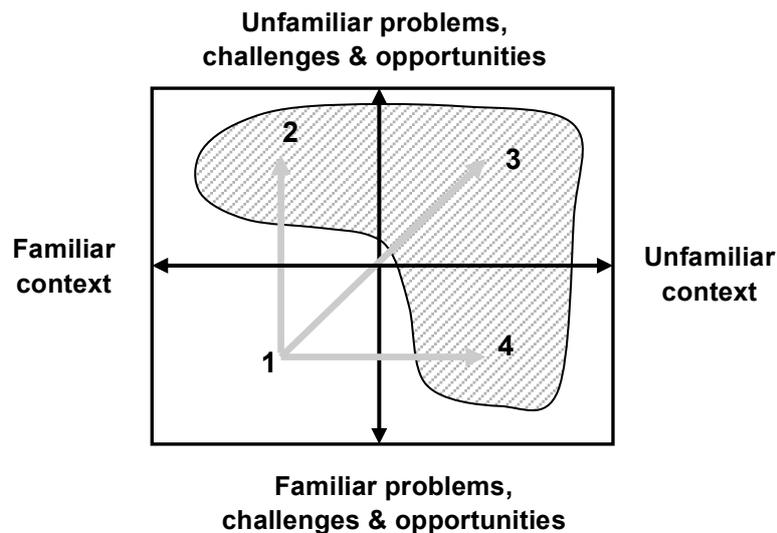
One of the most useful conceptual tools we have for analysing situations and our responses to dealing with them or creating new situations is the framework developed by John Stephenson (1998) to explain capability, and adapted by Jackson (2011) to the field of creative enterprise. Here we



consider its value in the context of explorativity.

Situations can be categorised according to whether the context is familiar or unfamiliar and whether the problem (challenge or opportunity) is familiar or unfamiliar (Figure 2). Much of our life is spent in familiar situations where we don't have to pay too much attention to what we are doing and we can reproduce our responses without really thinking deeply about our actions (field 1, Figure 2). We don't have to be explorative here but we can choose to be - simply by making the familiar unfamiliar like going for a bike ride if it is not something we normally do.

Figure 2 Relationship between context, capability and creativity (adapted from Stephenson 1998:5 by Jackson 2011). The shaded area represents situations where we have to be explorative.



Moving to the other domains in Figure 2 we can appreciate that if we are confronted with a problem, challenge or opportunity that is new to us (fields 2 & 3 in Figure 2), and/or we enter a context that is unfamiliar (fields 3 & 4 in Figure 2) we have to develop new contextual understandings and/or invent and try out new practices and ways of thinking and behaving. Regardless of whether we have created the situation or we have been put into it we have to behave in an explorative (open, flexible, enquiring, responsive, adaptive, inventive) way in order to deal with it.

From the perspective of being explorative, we can use this situational framework developed by Stephenson to encourage ourselves to think about the situations we encounter and reflect on whether we are restricting ourselves to contexts and challenges that are familiar and comfortable, or are involving our self in unfamiliar problems, challenges, opportunities and contexts that will require us to be explorative, creative and resourceful. If we are teachers, we might also use this framework in our teaching to help us reflect on the creative potential of the situations we design and implement within our courses or classrooms.

How to be explorative

Some people do it naturally. Some never will. Others can learn. One can try using a Personal Explorativity Kit. This is simply a checklist of procedures and approaches to carry with you. The first part is a list of Contexts of Explorativity; those places in which you can consider being explorative:



- Your own head, heart, soul
- Your working life
- Your leisure and recreational life
- Your relationships
- Your physical environments
- The Internet

Next, check if you might benefit from carrying out any of the following Explorative Actions:

- Go somewhere
- Ask a question
- Research something
- Make a telephone call or send a message
- Learn something
- Practise something
- Change something
- Make, compose, perform, prepare or build something
- Take a chance

“Logic will not change an emotion, but action will.” (Unknown source)

Explorativity in schools

Most of the useful things I have learned in life, despite having had the privilege of a comparatively liberal and even privileged education in state and private institutions in the UK, have been learned outside school. When I finally got round to writing my little book on explorativity, it was a process of self-actualisation and self-directed learning for me. I was encouraged by the provocative input of others, including friends, but there was a circularity about a process that was essentially self-illustrative: I was being explorative myself.

But what a waste of opportunities whilst at school! All those tedious hours spent rote-learning; all the times when I had interesting ideas that I’d have liked to look into or try out; and how the handful of chances to be creative and collaborative and enquiring stand out like rare jewels against a dull background in my recollections. I know I’m not alone.

Perhaps now, decades later, we have the chance to do better. So let’s look at the connections between explorativity as a way of being and doing things, and the scope of some sample curricular aims and approaches.

Professor Guy Claxton, creator of programmes including ‘Building Learning Power’, and author of ‘What’s the Point of School?’, provides a list of learning dispositions, which he shared at a conference of Teaching Leaders in 2010. Note the explorative elements right from the start:

- 1 *Inquisitive: generally shows a questioning and positive attitude to learning*
- 2 *Adventurous: is willing to risk and ‘have a go’ when facing a new challenge*
- 3 *Persistent: stays determined and positive in the face of difficulty or mistakes*
- 4 *Focused: concentrates, ignores distractions, and quickly becomes engrossed*
- 5 *Imaginative: easily comes up with creative ideas and possibilities*



- 6 *Connecting: looks for links and relationships, likes to 'hook up' things*
- 7 *Crafting: is keen to work hard on improving products and developing skills*
- 8 *Capitalising: makes good use of resources, tools and materials to support his/her learning*
- 9 *Methodical: is well organised and thinks things through carefully*
- 10 *Self-evaluative: makes honest and accurate judgements for himself/herself about 'how it's going'*
- 11 *Self-aware: knows his/her own strengths, styles and interests as a learner*
- 12 *Transferring: shows evidence of looking for other applications in lessons for the future*
- 13 *Independent: articulates and defends his/her own thoughts and ideas in discussion*
- 14 *Leading: shows initiative and is willing to take a lead in group learning and problem-solving*
- 15 *Open-minded: asks for, accepts and makes good use of feedback, advice and support*
- 16 *Empathic: is good at understanding others, and offering helpful feedback and suggestions*

Claxton promotes these enlightened approaches in schools, and points out:

The BLP approach is now used in thousands of schools and local authorities around the UK, as well as in Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Chile and Argentina.

(Look out for 'Building the Learning Powered School', published in 2012.)

Meanwhile, 'Dialogic Teaching' has five underlying principles, as explained by Ann O'Hara, NACE Challenge Award National Adviser, and author of 'Leading Assessment in your School'. Dialogic teaching is:

- 1 *Purposeful: teachers plan dialogic teaching with particular learning targets/objectives in mind*
- 2 *Collective: teachers/adults and children address learning tasks together, as a class or group*
- 3 *Reciprocal: teachers/adults and children listen to each other, share ideas and consider alternative viewpoints*
- 4 *Supportive: children articulate their ideas freely and help one another to reach common understanding to support learning*
- 5 *Cumulative: ideas are chained into coherent lines of enquiry*

Points 2, 3 and 5 in particular echo explorative approaches of communicating/acting together, listening, sharing and enquiring.

The newly formed School 21 in east London has its own adaptation of Howard Gardner's '5 Minds', in the form of 'Five Minds for the 21st Century'. The ethos and curriculum of the school are founded on this framework:

Respectful Mind - At School 21 we have strong values. Children will learn how to work together, be kind to others, treat everyone with respect, help others who need their support.

Disciplined Mind - As children develop we want them to work hard at learning the basics in English and Maths. We also want them to get into good learning habits so that they realise that



trying hard every day leads to success.

Reflective Mind - Every child will be taught how to think about their work, learning what they can do well and what they need to improve.

Creative Mind - Children are incredibly creative and whether it's in art, music, science or projects about their community we want to give every child the chance to experiment, explore and discover.

Connecting Mind - From an early age we want children to be able to make sense out of the huge amount of information they receive every day.

Again, we see the explorative themes of collaborative, reflective discovery and enquiry about inner and outer worlds.

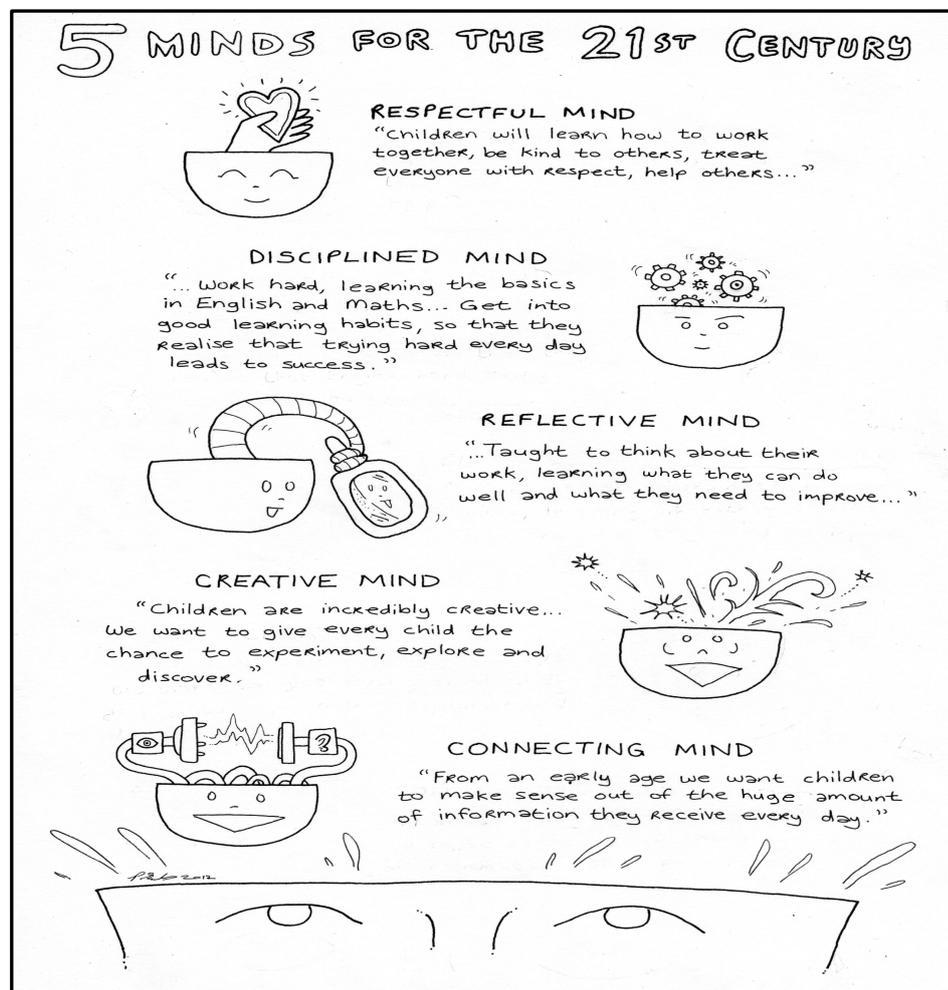


Illustration by Patrick Sanders of Lifewide Education Community artist

The International Primary Curriculum (IPC) offers a rigorous framework for explorative educational experience. It starts with three guiding questions:

What kind of world will our children live and work in?

What kinds of children are likely to succeed in the world?

What kinds of learning will our children need and how should they learn it?



Its subjects include Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Information Technology, Design Technology, History, Geography, Music, Physical Education, Art and Society, and its personal goals refer to

those individual qualities and dispositions we believe children will find essential in the 21st Century. They help to develop those qualities that will enable children to be at ease with the continually changing context of their lives. There are personal goals for enquiry, resilience, morality, communication, thoughtfulness, cooperation, respect and adaptability.

Recently celebrated in the UK press, the new RSA Academy in London offers a broad and relevant curriculum credited with having turned around a previously struggling school by using the International Baccalaureate Programme. As the organisation describes itself:

The International Baccalaureate® (IB) is a non-profit educational foundation, motivated by its mission, focused on the student. Our three programmes for students aged 3 to 19 help develop the intellectual, personal, emotional and social skills to live, learn and work in a rapidly globalising world.

The Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) states:

ACARA's work in developing the Australian Curriculum is guided by the 2008 Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians. The Melbourne Declaration commits "to supporting all young Australians to become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens", and to promoting equity and excellence in education.

In Hong Kong, the Education Bureau explains its curriculum in terms of learning experiences for whole person development:

Emphasis on development of generic elements for lifelong learning

... Key Learning Areas for a broad and balanced curriculum

Open and flexible framework for different organisations/courses rather than 'teaching syllabus'

The Singapore government lists eminently desirable aims for education:

The person who is schooled in the Singapore Education system embodies the Desired Outcomes of Education. He has a good sense of self-awareness, a sound moral compass, and the necessary skills and knowledge to take on challenges of the future. He is responsible to his family, community and nation. He appreciates the beauty of the world around him, possesses a healthy mind and body, and has a zest for life. In sum, he is

- a **confident person** who has a strong sense of right and wrong, is adaptable and resilient, knows himself, is discerning in judgment, thinks independently and critically, and communicates effectively;*
- a **self-directed learner** who takes responsibility for his own learning, who questions, reflects and perseveres in the pursuit of learning;*
- an **active contributor** who is able to work effectively in teams, exercises initiative, takes calculated risks, is innovative and strives for excellence; and,*
- a **concerned citizen** who is rooted to Singapore, has a strong civic consciousness, is informed, and takes an active role in bettering the lives of others around him.*

India addresses social complexity and personal attributes to engage with it:

Seeking guidance from the Constitutional vision of India as a secular, egalitarian and



pluralistic society, founded on the values of social justice and equality, certain broad aims of education have been identified in this document. These include independence of thought and action, sensitivity to others' well-being and feelings, learning to respond to new situations in a flexible and creative manner, predisposition towards participation in democratic processes, and the ability to work towards and contribute to economic processes and social change.

The Scottish Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) addresses in its framework the implications of lifelong learning supported by explorative attributes during the journey in the modern world:

It promotes the ability to learn and to reflect on their own learning, skills for life that will help young people go onto further study, to secure work and to navigate successfully through life. Ultimately, the aim is to make our education system fit for the modern world and improve young people's achievements, attainment and life chances; through enabling all young people to become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors.

The English National Curriculum is officially described thus:

The National Curriculum is a framework used by all maintained schools to ensure that teaching and learning is balanced and consistent. It sets out:

- the subjects taught*
 - the knowledge, skills and understanding required in each subject*
 - standards or attainment targets in each subject - teachers can use these to measure your child's progress and plan the next steps in their learning*
 - how your child's progress is assessed and reported*
- Within the framework of the National Curriculum, schools are free to plan and organise teaching and learning in the way that best meets the needs of their pupils.*

Many schools use the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA) Schemes of Work to plan their curriculum. These help to translate the National Curriculum's objectives into teaching and learning activities.

Readers will detect the tension between the freedoms “within the framework” and the constraints of assessment - a topic debated by many, including the Chartered Institute of Educational Assessors.

An explorative education

We could go on and on looking at the aims of curricular frameworks throughout the world. We can weigh the arguments for intrinsic or extrinsic education, or for economic, cultural or political emphasis. Meanwhile, though, it seems blindingly obvious that, as Ken Robinson points out, all education must be personal, whatever else it is besides. Clearly, in many cases, we are talking the same explorative language about lifewide, lifelong learning, even if there may be challenges in reconciling these aims with established systems and approaches.

We have considered how difficult it is to predict with confidence the potential of any given person. Almost by definition, potential is that which is not highly evident. We have looked at examples of effective learning, and the rewarding nature of explorative approaches. I believe that an explorative education would be a good education because it would be a holistic one that truly enabled potential



to be discovered and realised. It would require a variety of style, focus and opportunity, to cater for the diverse capacities of different people, and people who change over time. It would recognise multiple intelligences, even if the term itself were not used: linguistic, musical, logical-mathematical, bodily-kinaesthetic, personal and interpersonal; many would add spiritual.

In an explorative education, experimentation, research, and creativity would feature prominently, as in the approach of London school leader Peter Rhodes, using Concept Oriented Reading Instruction, expounded by Emily Swan. It might use one or more of many frameworks, such as the International Primary Curriculum, the International Baccalaureate, or home-grown versions.

Over its lifelong course, an explorative curriculum would therefore ensure a varied range of experiences, to ensure trying out and finding out about life, the universe and oneself. This is all very well, but we encounter a crucial problem: no matter how rich, relevant, inspiring and indeed explorative the curriculum is, certain conditions must be in place in order for it to be productive, fulfilling and useful. These conditions must be those that *permit the curriculum to do its work, and allow learners to do theirs*. They are those that foster the positive attitudes and confident approaches that usefully accompany explorativity in learners. But the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has found that the life chances of children in the West are fixed by the time they are three, such is the restriction to social mobility caused by the sharing by children of their own parents' economic and social circumstances. How can they be expected to be truly explorative with this inbuilt disadvantage?

Among the undesirable consequences of social inequity we have its impact on the happiness of learners. Unhappy learners are not likely to display the confidence to benefit from being explorative; they are less able to learn effectively at all. In the UK specifically, Susie Orbach argues in an article for the RSA:

If the government's wellbeing agenda is to amount to anything, we need first to challenge the idea that happiness depends on individual attainment.

Where Sure Start provided support to all in the crucial early years of life, not only underpinning the emotional life of the child but also engaging the weary, worried and under-resourced parent, we are now seeing the dismantling of a democratically oriented social provision.

We need early interventions in the social, emotional, psychological lives of children, to foster their well-being and the empathy that will in turn support their explorative development, as well as providing greater social equity. Political and governmental attitudes and policies are vital here.

I started this chapter by considering how schools undertake to release the potential of young people, in order to provide a better future for themselves and others. Notions of ambition, aspiration and self-actualisation were considered. I described in some detail the nature of the concept of explorativity. Finally, we have thought about the approaches, roles and duties of governments and society in the way in which they determine the conditions and foundations for the curriculum and of education itself. *Those in power need to be explorative*, and not trapped in the traditions, political ideologies and habits of the past; they need to be prepared to do things differently, to try out bold and liberating opportunities. Whether we are thinking about learners, teachers or politicians, it is interesting to note that these ideas can all be related to the development of the motivation of an individual to move forward. As Stephen Covey has recently put it, "*motivation is a fire within*", with more than an echo of



the concept of explorativity, adding:

“You won't be remembered for the things you were going to do, only for the things you actually did. If you don't start a journey, you will always be in the same place. But if you get going, who knows what routes will open up for you?”

So the duty of those who govern education or personally educate others is to set each learner off on their journey. If governments, teachers and school leaders feel a genuine sense of accountability, they may have somewhere in their professional being the germ of a scenario in which they meet with a pupil after a period of, say, ten, twenty or thirty years, to find out how their lives are progressing on the basis of the foundations laid, and the inspirations given at school. In adumbration of the essence of the Appreciative Inquiry or ‘4Ds’ approach to coaching and development, whereby clients are invited to discover, dream and design in pursuit of their destiny, Mark Twain offered useful words of encouragement:

Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.

The English National Curriculum Review offers what appears to be an opportunity:

The new National Curriculum will be developed in line with the principles of freedom, responsibility and fairness - to raise standards for all children.

Schools should be given greater freedom over the curriculum. The National Curriculum should set out only the essential knowledge (facts, concepts, principles and fundamental operations) that all children should acquire, and leave schools to design a wider school curriculum that best meets the needs of their pupils and to decide how to teach this most effectively.

How fervently one hopes that educators will not be straitjacketed by the prescriptive pressures of Ofsted-friendly teaching, or by league-table-attractive curricular provision, as they aspire to explore the potential of the above-mentioned freedom.

As a final word, as if to illustrate the unpredictability of the world and the ways in which, by exploring it, one encounters new information and affirmations of ideas, I need to share what has just happened. Having reached the end of my chapter, and having checked it all through and painstakingly prepared the bibliography, I find my attention drawn to a series of TED-Ed talks, including one by Francis Gilbert. Listening to it, it feels as if I have somehow commissioned him to sum up some of the key ideas of this chapter in a more interesting and telling way! In *Escaping the Educational Matrix*, he addresses the purposes of education, including Aristotle's *eudaimonia*, or ‘human flourishing’, independent learning, creativity, motivation, happiness, imagination and morality. He considers the multiple identities that people have and that learners and teachers must adopt. And crucially he draws attention to the oppressive effects of regulatory discourses on the ways in which both learners and teachers see their very beings as successful or failing, worthy or worthless, according to the judgements of Ofsted and assessments and the language that they use. I invite readers to listen for themselves, and to look into the research and literature to which he alludes, by Dennis Atkinson and others. I know I shall.



We have encountered *homo sapiens* (wise or knowing man), *homo habilis* (handy man), and *homo faber* (man the creator). Some of us have heard of *homo narrator* (man of words, or man the storyteller) and others. Perhaps you, Reader, are one or more of the above. I would like to encourage each of us, those we teach, and those who govern education and society for us, to find and use the potential of our human status as *homo explorator*.

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End Notes

ⁱ <http://sceptresurrey.co.uk/>

ⁱⁱ <http://experientialacademy.pbworks.com/w/page/19392808/FrontPage> there are short video clips of some of the activities that were undertaken

