

# Learning for a Complex World

A lifewide concept of learning,  
education and personal development

Edited by  
Norman J Jackson



# Chapter 9

## Lifewide learning habits of students

### Jenny Willis and Norman Jackson

#### Synopsis

This Chapter examines evidence from students' self-reports of their perceptions of how and where they gain learning and development while they are at university. Two sources of information are used: surveys of students' perceptions of their learning in three domains: the formal curriculum, the co-curriculum and their extra-curricular activities, and essays submitted by students to a series of open competitions which encouraged them to reveal important learning and personal development gained from life experiences.

These data demonstrate the diversity of spaces and places from which students claim development and enable identification of the particular situations from which they believe significant development occurs. While it is clear that the students who responded to these surveys and competitions are engaged in a process of self-determined personal development, there is a tendency to undervalue the informal learning and development gained in co- and extra-curricular contexts. The development of greater self-awareness, through a structured and facilitated process would seem to be a worthwhile educational goal.

#### Introduction

Previous chapters explained the concept and explored the dimensions of lifewide learning in order to justify why the idea has educational value and potential. But what evidence is there that students are engaged in lifewide learning? More importantly, what evidence is there that students are deliberately seeking and finding 'deeply satisfying and personally challenging situations that inspire, engage and develop themselves' (Proposition 1 for an imaginative curriculum that would prepare learners for the complexity of their future lives – see Chapter 6). We might also consider students' self-reported

development to the ideas of self authorship described in Chapter 5 by Baxter Magolda.

Our focus for enquiry into students' lifewide learning habits might be framed around a question like: what evidence is there that students are seeking or creating for themselves experiences that enable them to develop the dispositions, qualities, thinking and decision-making abilities, and practical capabilities they need to be successful and fulfilled in whatever lives they choose to lead?

This chapter draws on two sources of information:

- the results of three online questionnaire surveys conducted between 2009–10 aimed at evaluating the nature of the experiences students utilise to develop themselves and the significance for personal development of these experiences
- four essay competitions offered between 2008–11 inviting students to describe their experiences through which they gain personal development.

Together these sources of information reveal and celebrate the diverse and rich nature of students' experiences and the self-reported significance of these experiences to their personal development.

## **Lifewide learning orientations**

From the data we have accumulated in our research studies we conclude that individuals' lifewide learning can be categorised into one of three orientations.

*Career/vocational/employability orientation:* where activities focus primarily on personal development for employment, an intended career or vocation. This orientation may also involve an entrepreneurial focus for people who intend to set up their own business.

the balance of activities I have developed outside of the academic and professional world have not only enhanced my skills to work as a clinical psychologist, they have also provided me with opportunities to learn how to manage myself in new and diverse situations.

(professional doctorate student)

When I work as an Associate, I can integrate what I have learnt with clients' businesses and individual requirements and reflect on the knowledge and understanding I have acquired through my professional experiences. I

believe in the development of professional capability alongside academic capability, which is why I have chosen to maximise my exposure to stimuli for learning through different channels.

(MA law student)

*Self-actualisation orientation*: where experiences are pursued mainly for personal growth, interest, passion and self-fulfilment.

I knew when I started the course that I wanted to do more than was on offer so I chose to study French as well. I found the course very tough but I maintained my commitment to it throughout the ten weeks duration. I was bottom of the class throughout, and out of 10 practice tests only finished above bottom once! However, I am not someone who gives up easily and spent 3 days before the exam studying French from morning until late at night, and in the end it paid off, I got a 2:1 [a good mark] in the exam ... It did teach me that with hard work, commitment, lack of sleep and pure stubbornness you can get what you want.

(Level 1 business student)

The self-actualisation orientation may include a strong explorative disposition in which new experiences are sought simply because of a willingness to try new things.

Ever since starting University almost 4 years ago, I tried to fill my time with extra-curricular activities. I did not have any specific reason to do it, I just liked doing those 'extra' things and learning something new.

(MSc business student)

I have also tried archery, ice skating, trampolining, netball, fencing, ballroom dancing and salsa. I'm a member of the badminton club. On Saturdays I volunteer at the UniSport Kids Sports Club where I help monitor children as they have fun in the gym. I have been elected as the Malaysian Ambassador of the SE England for the London 2012 Games. I occasionally contribute to the university student newspaper (2 articles so far) and I am a member of the newly set up Volunteering Society. I actively participate in Student Union activities such as 'Give it a Go', 'Do More' and I'm a member of the 'International Committee'. I have learned to carve pumpkins, create my own Christmas decorations, visited Shakespeare's houses, Windsor Castle and Bath thanks to the Students' Union.

(Level 1 business student)

Or a combination of these orientations.

## Questionnaire surveys

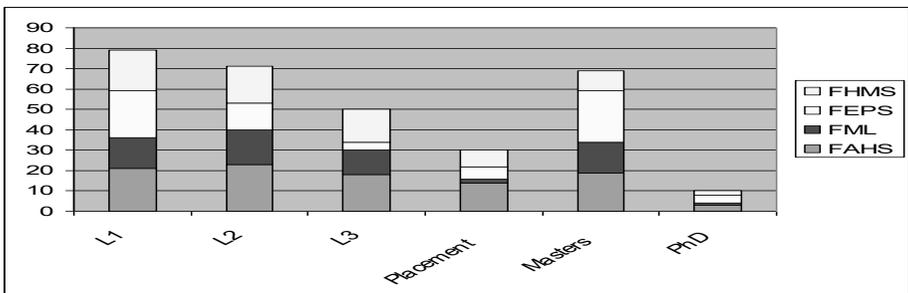
An initial questionnaire was used in 2009 to examine the lifewide learning habits of nurses (Jackson *et al.* 2010). From this pilot study a more substantial questionnaire was developed and administered in late 2009.<sup>1</sup> It comprised a set of questions relating to:

- learning and development within students' programmes
- experiences while at university and the significance of individual experiences to personal development
- perceptions of learning and development gained outside of the study programme.

Respondents rated each dimension on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being very little perceived development and 5 very significant perceived development. Qualitative data were also collected to explain ratings.

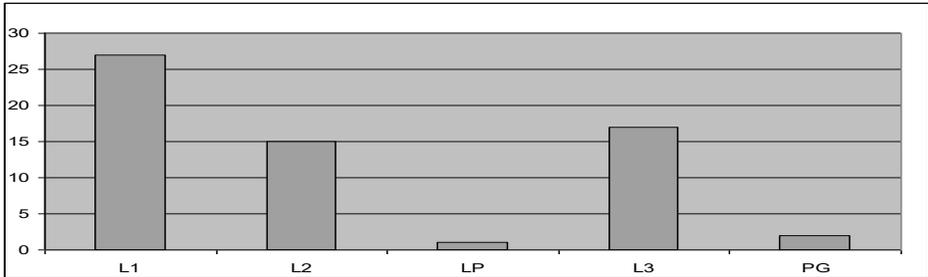
*Survey 1* had 309 respondents representing all four faculties (Faculty of Arts and Human Sciences – FAHS, n = 98; Engineering and Physical Sciences – FEPS, n = 75; Health and Medical Sciences – FHMS, n = 74; and Management and Law – FML, n = 62). They included students at all levels of study (Figure 9.1). A full report of this study can be found online (Willis 2010a).

**Figure 9.1** Survey 1: student respondents by faculty and level



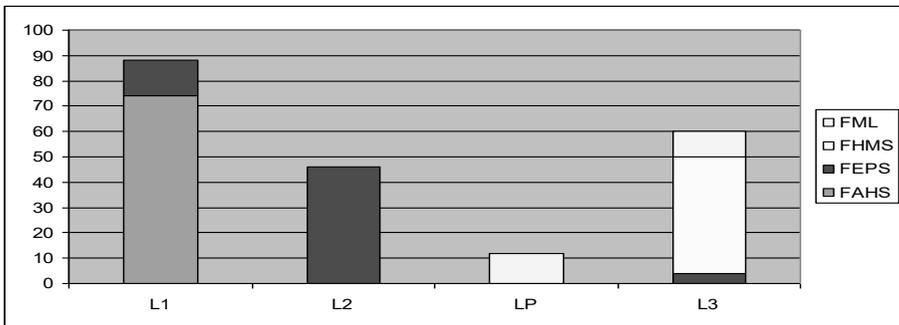
*Survey 2* utilised the same questionnaire but added supplementary questions relating to students' creative development. It was administered to students in creative arts subjects – Dance and Culture, Film, Theatre and Music, and students from Guildford School of Acting (GSA). Sixty-two students completed this survey. A full report of this survey is available online (Willis 2010b).

**Figure 9.2** Survey 2: creative arts students by level of study



Survey 3 was undertaken at the end of 2010 in order to provide comparative data for non-creative arts students. It used the same questionnaire as previously, with minor adjustments, and was open to Surrey undergraduates in all non-creative arts subjects. There were 206 respondents, distributed across the faculties, as illustrated in Figure 9.3.

**Figure 9.3** Survey 3 : student respondents by faculty and level



## Study and learning habits

Respondents were asked in all three surveys how much time they spent each week on study-related activities. Table 9.1 shows that between 4 per cent and 11 per cent of respondents spend less than 10 hours a week on these, whilst between 19 per cent and 23 per cent spend in excess of 30 hours weekly on activities related to their degree. The norm for the majority in all three surveys is between 11 and 30 hours a week.

**Table 9.1** Respondents' weekly study hours (%)

	<10 hrs	11–20 hrs	21–30 hrs	>30 hrs
Survey 1	5	17	56	22
Survey 2	11	35	34	19
Survey 3	4	39	33	23

The first section of the questionnaire focused on activities directly related to the programme of study while the second and third sections of the questionnaire related to co- and extra-curricular activity and personal development. Student responses are summarised in Tables 9.2 and 9.3. These tables show the proportions of students in each survey reporting that an aspect of development was significant or very significant (4 or 5 on the scale used); S1–3 are the three questionnaire surveys.

Table 9.2 also categorises the dimensions of learning and experience across the academic, co- and extra-curricular domains, according to whether they represent career/vocational/employability relevance (speckled cells); personal interest, passion and growth (diagonal stripes); or a mixture of career-specific and more general interests (vertical stripes). The fact that all three forms of shading occur in both domains of activity indicates that students believe that all aspects of learning and development are occurring across their lives.

### **Learning and development through the academic curriculum**

The scores for personal development through the programme of study (Figure 9.4) are mostly high, as would be expected from formal education requiring engagement in learning-oriented activities, with assessment and feedback providing students with 'evidence' of their development. The three groups of students surveyed agree on the most significant (self-management and enquiry skills) and least significant (learning a foreign language) dimensions of their personal development.

Creative arts students (S2) attribute greater importance to creativity, adaptability, team work, listening and verbal skills than do other students. Conversely, subject knowledge appears to be slightly less important to creative arts students.

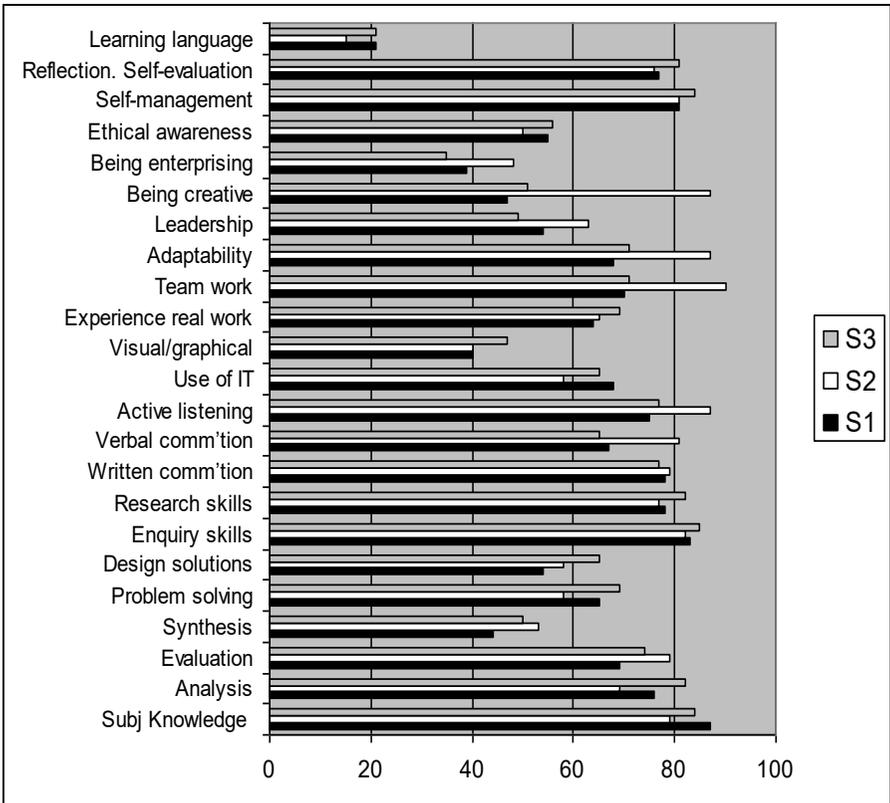
**Table 9.2** Perceived development through curricular and co/extra-curricular activities. Percentages show proportion of students rating this aspect significant or very significant for their personal development.

<b>Curricular Dimensions</b>	<b>S1 309</b>	<b>S2 62</b>	<b>S3 206</b>	<b>Co- and Extra- curricular Dimensions</b>	<b>S1 309</b>	<b>S2 62</b>	<b>S3 206</b>
Subject knowledge	87	79	84	Find/apply for job	61	23	27
Analysis	76	69	82	Interview prep		16	46
Evaluation	69	79	74	Being interviewed	52	18	22
Synthesis	44	53	50	Learning in work context		21	25
Problem solving	65	58	69	Applying classroom learning		23	25
Design solutions	54	58	65	Gaining work experience	55	31	32
Enquiry skills	83	82	85	Understand how business works		18	17
Research skills	78	77	82	Being managed		15	18
Written communication	78	79	77	Professional skills	52	32	53
Verbal communication	67	81	65	Written communication	53	35	30
Active listening	75	87	77	Verbal communication	69	37	34
Use of IT	68	58	65	Graphical/visual communication		19	15
Visual/graphical	40	40	47	Listening skills	71	40	33
Experience real work	64	65	69	Assessing situations	51	31	27
Team work	70	90	71	Find out for action	65	32	28
Adaptability	68	87	71	Make decision with little information		29	25
Leadership	54	63	49	Evaluate/reflect on performance	54	34	26
Being creative	47	87	51	How to improve performance	63	37	28
Being enterprising	39	48	35	How to use IT skills	59	21	25
Ethical awareness	55	50	56	Work with colleagues	68	48	40
Self-management	81	81	84	Interact with others	76	50	45
Reflection, self-evaluation	77	76	81	Interact with clients	50	42	22
Learning language	21	15	21	Socialise with other cultures	69	29	31
				Manage others		16	20
				Manage self	74	37	38
				Manage emotions	61	34	28
				Behave ethically	56	32	33
				Negotiate with others	50	27	24
				Managing challenging responsibilities		15	
				Being creative	55	17	51
				Confidence in own abilities	40	35	70

<b>Key</b>		
Career/vocational specific relevance		
Personal interest, passion and growth		
A mixture of career-specific and more general interests		

**Figure 9.4** Importance of study programme in students' development



Note: Percentages represent the proportion of students rating this aspect as being significant or very significant for their personal development.

Respondents' narrative comments show insight into their development. Many feel they are learning to deal with pressure, often citing study skills and time management as instrumental to their growth.

Deadlines etc. encourage time organisational skills meaning that as a person I am learning to be prepared and calm (not having to panic about not having things done).

One person describes this process as being helped 'to learn how to learn'. Other key themes relate to management and leadership, as illustrated by this respondent:

There are lots of opportunities for group work, developing team work skills and communication with peers which will be vital on graduation. Also, the nature of my course means I study case studies to which I have to apply theory, helping me with problem solving skills and analysis.

Creative arts students talk more of their affective development, growth in self-confidence and independence. For instance:

I feel that I am being taught to be a better all round performer but I am being challenged on a personal basis and so am growing as an adult and gaining knowledge of myself and of how life works.

My programme encourages me to be more creative than I previously felt free to/thought wise to be. The course is making me more confident in my personal abilities and also as a person.

Learning is therefore perceived as being stimulated by a mixture of practical experience and opportunities to develop personal qualities and capabilities. Variations in group responses can be seen in Figure 9.5.

### **Learning and development through co- and extra-curriculum**

Table 9.3 presents the findings of all four surveys. Dimensions have been shaded according to whether they represent career/vocational relevance (speckled cells); personal interest, passion and growth (diagonal stripes); or a mixture of career-specific and more general interests (vertical stripes). Although there is a mix of all three developmental orientations, a majority of the dimensions represented relate to personal interest and growth. For some students their co- or extra-curricular activities may be unrelated; for example the high significance accorded to new cultural learning is unlikely to be directly related to a programme of study. The table includes the ratings given by student healthcare professionals in the pilot survey (S4). Some dimensions were not included in all the surveys, hence a few cells in the table are left blank.

Some activities can be directly related to their programme of study; for example the high percentage of survey 4 respondents (94 per cent) who have a part-time job that is related to their intended career in the healthcare professions. For instance, a level 1 nurse student commented.

I have been a member of St John Ambulance for the last 9 years and originally started nursing in 1999. Left for personal reasons and regretted it.

I jumped at the opportunity to go back and do something that I have always loved doing, working with people!

**Table 9.3** Perceived development through co-/extra-curricular activities facilitated by the university but not credit-bearing

<b>Co- and Extra-curricular Activities</b>	<b>S1 309</b>	<b>S2 62</b>	<b>S3 206</b>	<b>S4 41</b>
Looking after yourself	80	90	82	88
Being a parent	8	0	3	46
Caring for someone	21	13	18	67
Job related to career		37	29	94
Participating professional training		29	31	
Creating or running a business	7	3	6	8
Volunteering	33	35	31	54
Significant travel experience	40	34	25	
Living in another country	31	21	28	37
Meeting/interacting with other culture	65	55	67	
Coping with personal illness	24	18	36	58
Organising something	52	47	58	60
Fund raising	17	26	17	38
Marathon / challenging experience	14	6	16	20
Duke of Edinburgh Award	4	3	6	7
Learning another language	24	15	26	23
Learning a skill e.g. to drive	24	37	32	42
Experience performing public		69	25	
Learning/playing a sport	31	15	32	28
Learning/playing musical instrument	49	56	17	
Being part of a drama group	21	18	5	38
Other creative enterprises	18	32	21	
Member of a student society		45	41	
Mentoring or coaching others	23	32	32	64
Skills-based activities organised by the Students' Union	33	32	25	4
Participating in careers events	22	11	20	
Participating in SPLASH events (student study skills organisation)	16	8	16	
Other skills-based activities	20	32	24	

We are led to hypothesise that students pursuing certain professions, such as healthcare and creative arts, are more likely to have co- and extra-curricular interests which are closely related to the field of study. Such students are pursuing a career or vocational orientation in their lifewide learning.

Other differences emerge in Table 9.3. The healthcare respondents are more likely to have parenting responsibilities, reflecting the larger proportion of mature learners in this group. They appear to have greater responsibilities as carers, raising the question, was their choice of career influenced by this experience? Similarly, they are more involved in mentoring, an activity which calls for self-confidence and experience, something which may be less highly developed in the other groups. Some of the healthcare respondents' comments confirm these hypotheses:

I felt quite a strong calling on my life towards maternity care. I've spent some time in South America and seen the difficulties in developing countries. I'd love to spend time abroad caring for people and working with the church.

Wanted to become a nurse upon leaving school – was persuaded against, became computer programmer – square peg in round hole, got redundancy, opportunity to train as a nurse and use life experience as well.

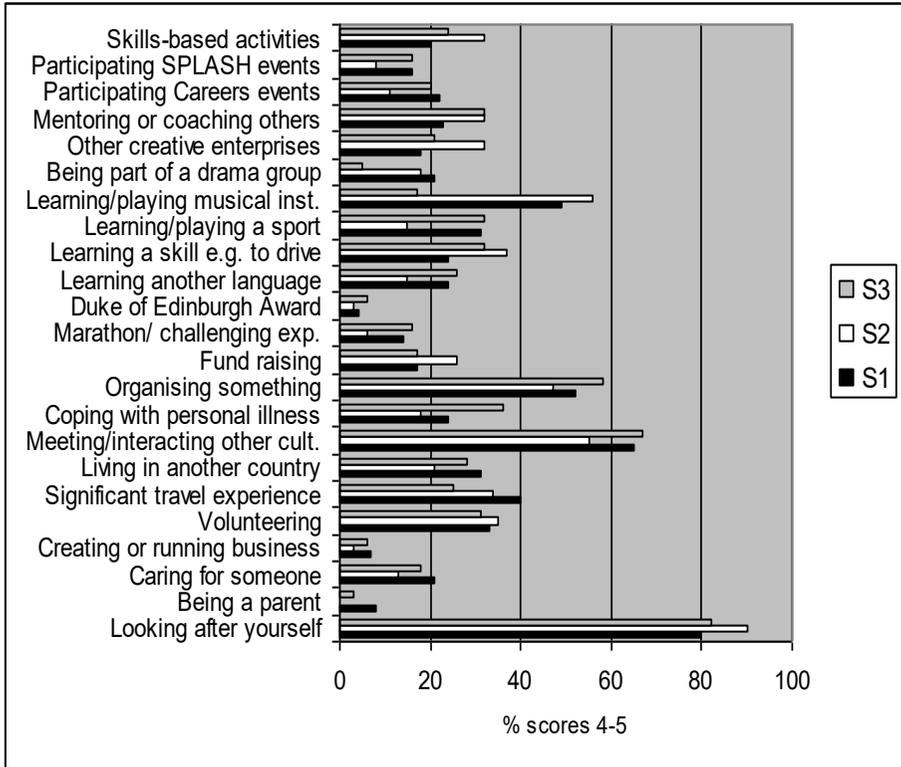
Figure 9.5 shows the percentage of students in each survey who scored a dimension of their co- or extra-curricular experiences as being significant or very significant to their development. It is immediately apparent that the aspect of most developmental significance to all three groups is having to look after themselves. This is consistent with their scores in domain 3 (Table 9.2).

Meeting/interacting with other cultures and organising something are next in importance to all groups. Unsurprisingly, performing in public is highly significant to creative artists, but not to the other groups. The dimensions of least significance (being a parent and running a business) are consistent with the young age of most respondents and do not necessarily represent lifelong values.

When narrative explanations of learning and personal development are examined, we find that co- and extra-curricular activities fall into categories such as:

- *volunteering* – mentoring schoolchildren or other students, charity work, legal support work, tutoring
- *study* – reading, attending lectures, using library and internet, being a course representative, participating in language courses
- *work experience* – part-time and temporary full-time job(s) and internships.

**Figure 9.5** Participation in and learning from different co- and extra-curricular activities



Respondents provide insights into what and how they have learnt:

During my second year I volunteered at a local secondary school as a languages assistant. As well as developing my public speaking skills and gaining self-confidence, I improved my time management skills, I used my initiative, and I learnt to adapt my speech and behaviour to different situations, when communicating with people of different age groups and roles within the school.

I am currently Court Mentor and am learning a great deal from this role including building relationships in a professional manner, being open minded, and in understanding different people's personalities and views. I also have a part-time job in a retail branch which is increasing my ability to learn about technology and sell products to customers. It is helping me

learn different ways to increase customer satisfaction, which will be a vital skill once out of study.

(Level 3 engineering student)

I have done some professional sessional work with bands, and have been constantly writing, recording and performing for years. I have also worked in children's entertainment which involves dealing with many different people and performing under pressure.

(Level 2 music student)

Yet the breadth of co- and extra-curricular experience and the depth of students' qualitative comments contrast starkly with the relatively low scores given to the significance of personal development in this domain, when compared to development through the programme of study (Table 9.2, above). With the sole exception of 'looking after yourself', scores are considerably lower than those for dimensions of learning in the formal curriculum. An objective examination of qualitative evidence (supported by interview data) confirms extensive personal growth in this domain, so why do respondents fail to recognise it when rating these dimensions? One explanation is that this is due to the informal nature of the learning and development in the co- and extra-curricular domains, where desired outcomes are not explicitly specified or predetermined, and formative feedback may be absent. Given the importance of informal learning in the world outside higher education, we would argue that there is a need to raise students' awareness and to provide support to enable them to recognise and value their development in these domains.

But some students do appreciate the extensive personal development they are gaining through what is sometimes an astounding range of experiences: this level 1 engineering student is particularly astute in his appreciation of the importance of his own engagement in activities beyond the academic curriculum.

Everything I have learned so far has helped me broaden my horizons. From philosophy to music theory and martial arts, it all helps shape us. I am who I am today because of the things I have done. What I will do in the future will depend on the things that I have done and not the things that I haven't done. Therefore it is all relevant. (...) I have practised guitar, karate, I have been part of a team in basketball in my home country and I have studied music theory, philosophy, German, Spanish, ancient Greek, history and sociology.

## Student narratives of learning

The second method used to gain insights into the nature of students' lifewide development was through a series of essay competitions which encouraged students to reveal important learning and personal development gained from life experiences. Four competitions were organised between 2008 and 2011, together these competitions yielded 184 narratives.

### *Orientations in students' lifewide learning enterprise*

Taking the 2010 lifewide learning essay competition as an example, the orientation of each narrative was identified. Table 9.4 reveals that in the 30 undergraduate and 18 postgraduate (master's and doctoral) submissions, the orientation in undergraduate essays veered towards self-actualisation (37 per cent of the subset), a combination of orientations (30 per cent) and exploration (23 per cent), whereas the postgraduate essays were predominantly career-oriented (44 per cent) or had a combined orientation (33 per cent). These general patterns probably reflect differences in age and priorities and can be explained in terms of a greater need among postgraduate students to secure entry into the job market.

**Table 9.4** Orientation of student narratives in the 2010 lifewide learning essay competition

	Orientation	UG N=30	UG%	PG N=18	PG%
1	Career	3	10	8	44.4
2	Self-actualisation	11	36.7	2	11.1
3	Explorative	7	23.3	2	11.1
4	Combination	9	30	6	33.3

## In search of an imaginative curriculum

The first eight chapters of this book highlighted the opportunities for learning and development that a lifewide concept of learning and education affords. Chapter 6 proposed a set of principles for an imaginative curriculum that would help and enable students develop the experience, knowledge, capabilities, personal qualities and dispositions necessary for surviving and prospering in their future world. The evidence we have outlined for students gaining significant development from activities outside the formal curriculum suggests to us that they themselves are embracing the idea of a more complete education by consciously or unconsciously seeking or creating experiences that are in tune with these propositions. In the following section we illustrate, through a small selection of students' narratives (12 in total), some of the ways in which

they are utilising their lifewide experiences to develop themselves. While example stories are organised under a single proposition, most can be related to several propositions.

**Proposition 1** gives learners the freedom and empowers them to make choices so that they can find deeply satisfying and personally challenging situations that inspire, engage and enable them to develop themselves. *All the stories in this section can be related to this proposition.*

**Story A:** One influential experience lasted mere seconds, but the impact it had upon me then, and will go on to have in the future is endless. The experience that changed everything happened in an average clothes shop in an average town on an average day. It was on that day, in a dim lit, overheated changing room that I realised that the average UK shop no longer made trousers that were big enough to fit my waist.

Up until this point my life had revolved around absent nutritional morals and an unhealthy inactive lifestyle. Everything I was ... was my own doing. This was one of the hardest things about my journey ... to accept my own personal responsibility. ... After this realisation I knew that I had to turn my past lifestyle around in order to create a better future for myself, both in terms of health and opportunity that my weight may have denied me ... a year and a half of sacrifice, development of will and determination saw me drop my weight healthily from seventeen and a half stone to ten, with a reduction in waist size of just under 20 inches.

After I had lost my weight, I set the goal, that by 2009 I would become a Personal Trainer, so that I could give something back to people who were in similar situations to myself. I had grown up overweight. I had little interest in sport and had always underachieved in P.E. sessions throughout secondary school ... It has been over a year now since I qualified as a Level 3 Personal trainer, and I have continued my learning further and further, getting more and more qualified so that I can offer my clients not only advice from my own experience, but also based upon firm academic study ... On top of my university studies I have 10 regular clients who I spend an hour with each and every week, helping them get closer to their goals. The most satisfying thing is that I can have an impact on their journeys, I can get them into good habits and I can accelerate their efforts with my subject knowledge.

I developed so much as a person during my initial weight loss phase, I was able to focus on targets and achieve goals no matter what the barriers. I developed will and determination, and the ability to never give up. All these have helped me during my studies at the University and during my commercial business experiences. As a personal trainer I have learnt so much more though, most of which was completely unexpected. I have learnt what passion is, and how infectious it can be. If you are passionate about your subject, the people you teach too will be passionate about what they are learning, and as a result achieve more. I have built my confidence, so that it is almost unrecognisable compared to a number of years ago.

(Lifewide learning essay competition 2010)

For some students, deep satisfaction comes through engaging in their own spiritual development.

**Story B:** It is said that when one is going on a spiritual journey, then the progress happens in leaps when he/she comes in contact with someone like RJ. Another thing that I recently did is the 'artofliving' basic course and I liked it because of the things I got to learn. It is an exciting place to be at as there are so many things that are taught in the course with the lightest use of words and in an effortless fashion. They teach some simple but profound value points like:

- Responsibility increases power: so take up more responsibility in life
- Live in the present moment
- Give 100% to whatever you do
- Opposite values are complimentary
- Present moment is inevitable
- Don't see intention behind other people's mistakes
- Expectations reduces joy
- Don't be a football of other people's opinion
- Accept people and situations as they are

I must say that there is no other place where I could have had such knowledge delivered in such a way that it becomes an inherent part of my character. It is because of the teachings in the artofliving family that I have become more confident and capable of taking risk. It has of course helped me in concentrating in my studies and helped me improve my relationships. Also the teacher who I met during the course has taken this personal responsibility of helping me take

more and more responsibility in life and to live every moment 100%. She has really given me hope when I had no one else to look for. I know we will remain good friends for life.

(Lifewide Learning Award submission 2011)

**Proposition 2** enables learners to appreciate the significance of being able to deal with situations and see situations as the focus for their personal and social development.

**Story C:** In October, I was selected as one of 21 from all over Europe to attend a Gospel Choir conductor's week-long, all-expenses-paid workshop in Poland. This was an incredible opportunity and for me personally, a life-changing experience. It was inspiring to meet people from so many different cultures and backgrounds, and some with language barriers, but being brought together by the wonderful connection of Gospel music. I was so inspired by this week and longed for others to experience what I had, that when I arrived back at University, I started up a Gospel Choir. Since October last year, this choir has been growing rapidly. We now have a steady 30 attending rehearsals every Monday evening. We've developed so much as a group through performances and recordings, like a local church's carol service and the University's iGala as part of the International Festival. It has been an honour to hold the role of conductor and president of the Gospel Choir and see the passion for it spread ... The church that I attend has loved hearing about the Gospel Choir and how it developed from an idea into a reality, and we are currently in the planning stages of beginning a Youth Gospel Choir in some local schools. So many international students have been attracted to the Gospel Choir. A few have said that they love coming along because it's such a great way of meeting and getting to know others. Others have said that it is the thing they look forward to the most in the week and miss it when on holiday! The Gospel Choir has been nominated by the students as the Best New Society for the Annual Student Awards.

(Lifewide learning essay competition 2010)

**A sequel one year later:** This year, I have tried not to simply study robotically, (which perhaps was my approach to studies last year) but really delve into my learning and simultaneously broaden my lifewide experiences through and beyond it. It is so important to believe in yourself, especially as a musician and composer. What a privilege it is to be brushing shoulders

with such a wealth of gifted musicians! Last year, I thought of myself unworthy to collaborate with these people that I looked up to. I felt a sense that I didn't belong here. However, this year I've realized that I am on a journey of self-discovery.

I met a rapper last year in a strange and uncomfortable environment; we had both agreed to assist an unknown music student in his experiment. I was blown away by this young rapper's talents and fresh, uncorrupted lyrics. For years, I had been praying for a rapper to write with ... and now, I was face-to-face with the answer to my prayers. When he asked me to collaborate with him, how could I have said no? 'First say yes, and work out how to do it later', right? So that's what I did.

This friendship has been so great; we went to London together to meet with one of his producers, and it was such an eye-opener for me to really see what a producer's life was like in the *real* world. They have both come to gospel choir rehearsals to get an idea of the sound for our track and we are now in the process of writing for the choir, him and hopefully an orchestra. Although it is a really ambitious idea, I am thoroughly enjoying the experience and am developing the necessary skills not only through my studies but also through the process of transcribing, arranging and teaching new songs to the choir; something I *never* imagined I'd be capable of doing.

(Lifewide learning essay competition 2011)

**Proposition 3** prepares learners for and gives them experiences of adventuring in uncertain and unfamiliar situations where the contexts and challenges are not known, accepting the risks involved.

**Story D:** Knowing that the union helps fund clubs and societies made me feel like the university was my oyster. I decided to form my own Skydiving club with the hopes that it could be as successful as the other clubs out there. I had never done any skydiving in my life and I thought it would be fun to do. During December I sent an email to my department asking if people were interested in the idea. Within five minutes of having sent the message I had around 30 replies. I took the details of everyone and sent it to the union. I made at least 100 calls to dropzones all over England, France and Spain. The best place to do it ended up being in Salisbury. The dropzone was inside a big army base ... that trained both soldiers and civilians. Being the military, they had the best equipment and a very

competent staff. After talking to the manager, he agreed to charge us the cheaper military rates on the grounds that we were a student sports club. To us this meant that jumps could be as cheap as £10 each.

The first trip was very intense for me. Jumping out of a plane is not a natural thing to do and I was afraid from the moment I woke up. On Saturday we did all the training that was required. Six hours of theory and an exam at the end of the day. On Sunday we geared up and got on the plane. I was shaking and felt sick. My first jump was going to be at 3500 feet and I couldn't stop looking at my altimeter. Those were the longest five minutes of my life and every moment I wanted to get off the plane. I looked around and every other person sitting next to me seemed relaxed. At that point I slowed down my breathing and said to myself 'these people are probably just as scared to jump as me, they just hide it better'. Those words didn't make me feel any better.

When they opened the door I felt true terror. The surge of cold air made me shiver even more. The loudness of the engine made me feel frantic and that door was the embodiment of every fear I had ever experienced in my life.

When it was my turn, the jumpmaster shouted:

AT THE DOOR!!

LOOK UP!!!

GO!!!!!!

When I jumped my brain immediately shut down. They call it sensory overload. Your brain is functioning normally but there is so much to take in that it loses the ability to record new information. After jumping the next thing I remember is being debriefed about the jump on the ground. After many more jumps, all that fear has turned into pure adrenaline. I no longer have sensory overload. I'm addicted to the sky and I am happy that the other members of the club are too.

(Lifewide learning essay competition 2010)

**Proposition 4** supports learners when they participate in situations that require them to be resilient and that enable them to appreciate their own transformation through the transitions they make. Such situations may be very demanding physically, intellectually and emotionally, and they do not always result in success or achievement.

**Story E:** L was getting ready for school with one of her other nannies. She became unconscious, something switched out her light, purloined her sparkle, and she was rushed to hospital. It could have been a number of things, her epilepsy, the shunt in her brain, maybe her breakfast went down the wrong way, who knows? Standing in that hospital room, I wanted to run, get out of her life because it hurt too much. I didn't want to face it anymore. But I stayed. Like the water in the ocean; it can't choose its direction, it just gets pulled by the tide in the same direction as the other waves.

We couldn't believe she made it through the weekend ... [she] was a fighter. Seeing her the way she was, not always crying and even managing to crack a smile through those struggled breaths humbled me and gave me strength ... None of us thought twice about the tiresome, endless journeys back and forth to see our precious girl. Nights there weren't easy. The worry through all of the brain surgeries, the endless waiting for her to wake up, the tears on our cheeks, were taking their toll on us all. ... At every opportunity we could steal, every precious moment was spent telling her how much we loved her, and how amazing she was. Always feeling though that the words just weren't enough, no matter how much they were repeated, no matter how many kisses and cuddles accompanied them, it just wasn't enough.

Finally the day came. I heard the dreaded word 'palliative'. There was nothing more we could do. She was going to die ... on 7th October L passed away. ...

L did not ever experience the pleasure of conversation, of walking, running, reading a good book, looking at a beautiful view, choosing her own clothes, making her own food, yet her happiness was overwhelming ... The pure emotion displayed by this amazing young girl has taught me to appreciate everything in life and in the world. I drive along a country lane, appreciate the trees, the music on the radio, the ability to sing along, to be able to climb out of the car myself, everything; the small things which we don't often appreciate being blessed with. When things go wrong, like losing my mobile phone, having no money, putting on a few pounds, struggling with an essay, needing new brakes, tyres and exhaust all in one go ... I take a step back and remember how lucky I am. These small hiccups are only a tiny part of the big world in which we live. Remembering to remember the important things is a skill L has taught me

that I hope I will never lose. I realise the importance of appreciating those who you love, telling them so, and making the most of the time and memories you share. I try to pass on this perspective to others, and teach them some of the amazing lessons that L has taught me.

... This is the most intense learning experience I have ever been involved in. Never have I been more immersed in any situation. I believe in any situation, you learn if there is some sort of love involved. If you love the subject you are studying, or the area in which you are writing an essay, or even the environment you are learning in, then you will succeed in learning. Saturated, tangled, absorbed, engrossed; you don't have a choice, the tide takes over you and pulls you in until you are truly immersed.

(Immersive experience story competition 2008)

**Proposition 5** enables learners to experience, feel and appreciate themselves as knower, maker, player, narrator, enquirer, creator and integrator of all that they know and can do, and enables them to think and act in complex situations. *All the stories used in this book illustrate one or more dimensions of this proposition.*

**Story F:** I am in my final year of Law with International Studies and it was always expected that I should go into practice once university finished. Before university, I already had an interest in short story writing and comic script writing but it was only after taking a CSV course in journalism that I decided to pursue writing as a career rather than a hobby, albeit freelance. This freelance ambition has gradually turned into a passion for multimedia journalism which should result in the start of a NCTJ journalism qualification next year.

One of my first opportunities was volunteering as a web based news writer which involved sourcing existing entertainment news stories with a rock, alternative theme from websites and then re writing the story for the relevant audience. Through this given list of websites, I was able to improve my skills involved in spotting a newsworthy story and in meeting the needs of a specific audience. Unfortunately, I was not developing my own writing style as I did not create the initial storyline ... I started applying for the position of voluntary writer with online magazines who were willing to employ new writers. So, I learnt the process of sub-editing and entertainment feature writing ... I was very excited about securing a

placement with Life Fm, Brent's local radio station ... As a result, I developed an aptitude for conducting interviews, a vital skill in journalism, Furthermore, I enjoyed interacting with and working with a diverse range of individuals, all passionate about their profession.

My next experience of writing came in the form of my legal affairs internship at the European Healthcare Fraud and Corruption Network, Brussels. One of my tasks was to track EU legal developments and then create a legal/policy based report using these findings. As well as improving my legal knowledge of the EU health care sector, this activity developed my ability to write concisely and I learnt how to implement a policy based opinion based on EHFCN's values and beliefs within sections of the existing news story therefore giving the story a different twist. In hindsight, my law degree also benefited from this placement as I was able to use this information to write my current dissertation on EU health care. The best achievement from this opportunity was that I was able to build a strong portfolio of articles that allowed me to get a paid freelance monthly job writing informative fashion articles with a UK marketing company. EHFCN also made me realise that after I graduate I wanted to pursue journalism as my main career. As a result of my writing opportunities, I have become more interested in current affairs and am able to integrate this skill into my debates in my Politics seminars.

Although I have been successful in my 'online' writing, I still had aspirations to get involved in opportunities that allowed me to create and develop my own story that had particular significance in reality rather than just appealing to an editor's wishes. Thus, I was overjoyed to be chosen as the Amateur Swimming Association's Media Liaison Volunteer where my current task is to conduct interviews with young disabled volunteers interested in participating in the Paralympics and then write articles which are featured on the ASA's website and their magazine The Swimming Times. I have learnt to adapt my interview technique to a situation as I have discovered you need to make young people confident about talking to you as well as liaising with media professionals to document these Olympic inspired moments ... Perhaps, I will make that leap from being a writer to a journalist and learn that magic does not happen only when the pen touches paper.

(Lifewide learning essay competition 2011)

**Proposition 6** encourages learners to be creative, enterprising and resourceful in order to accomplish the things that they and others value.

**Story G:** Perhaps my most prominent hobby during my time at Surrey has been Australian Rules Football – AFL. I took up the sport less than two years ago through an Australian friend, who was coach of a London club side ... After being battered and bruised after my first game or two, I started to learn the rules and train more seriously and managed to make the Premiership play-off finals with my club ... in my second season, confirming us as the second-best team in the country. Playing in a league full of Australians who have played AFL all their lives motivated me to train hard and take the sport seriously (to avoid injury if nothing else!). I was rewarded with a call up to the Great Britain squad ... and was delighted and honoured to be named in the squad for last year's International Cup in Australia. During this period I also organised a charity game for the Great Britain side against an Australian side in my home-town of Sevenoaks, Kent. I organised the event alone, organising a range of generous sponsors; a venue; licensing; food and drink; first aid; printed t-shirts; designing, writing and printing programmes; selling around 250 tickets; and raising several thousand pounds for charity. Needless to say, the effort required for this was huge, as was the learning curve. To have organised such an event on such a scale was very challenging but a real pleasure to behold.

(Lifewide learning essay competition 2009)

**Story H:** It was in summer of 2009, when a friend from Singapore visited me in London and introduced me to a piece of technology that he thought was 'sale-able'. After carefully researching the industry, I realised that by slightly tweaking the product we could address a big market gap, which could potentially make us thousands of pounds. Once the product was ready, we faced challenges with paying UK manufacturers' high cost, so leveraging upon my personal network I helped establish manufacturing contracts with companies in India. The point to note is that initially it was just a lab experiment and my friend wanted to do something with it! Just by fully utilising my skills, network and resources I connected the dots around the world by bringing in other Angel Investors and established a company jointly operating out of Delhi, Seattle, London, Istanbul and Singapore. Initially this was something I was pursuing out of interest, but once it turned into a success I faced with real challenges pertaining to time as I was already working ten hours a day on my Industrial Placement. But using my

effective time management and prioritisation skills, I found enough time on weekends and evenings to run this business ... when my peers were partying and enjoying sunny weekends in summer of 2010, I was hopping flights to establish a global contract between investors. It was unbelievably challenging to be on an industrial placement and at the same time trying to hold conferences on skype with people based in different countries to make imminent decisions. Most importantly, I have gained firsthand experience of the kind of risks my future clients might face while operating in a globally competitive marketplace and all the legalities that are involved with setting up an international business. But personally, it is quite satisfying and I am proud to admit that with the profit ... I could pay off a portion of mortgage on my parents' home in New Delhi.

(Lifewide learning essay competition 2011)

**Proposition 7** enables learners to develop and practise the repertoire of communication and literacy skills they need to be effective in a modern, culturally diverse and pluralistic world.

**Story 1:** I went to Quito, Ecuador as part of a volunteer programme organised by the international organisation EIL (Experiment in International Living), in which I lived with an Ecuadorian family, learnt Spanish, and worked as a volunteer on projects. Being away from family, friends, and everything familiar enables you become truly immersed into a different country and a different culture ... I've never had so many consecutive emotional highs and lows as I did in my three months in Quito.

After a month of Spanish lessons, I had 2 months of work. I chose to split my time between teaching English to children in a pre-school in Las Casas, a poor district of Quito, and working in Albergue La Dolorosa, a shelter for children whose families are unable to care for them. Having never done anything like this before, I didn't know exactly what I was expected to do ... My poor Spanish was constantly a barrier between what I was, and what I wanted to be.

My Ecuadorian 'mother' R was a very strong woman. Being a single mother and career woman in a country that is still very chauvinistic and where women can't walk a few yards without the standard catcalls and whistles, she needed to be. She was sharp and I was quite scared of her. In my first weeks, I'd come home from Spanish lessons and she would ask me about my day, my life at home, etc. She was trying to help me,

but I'd never spoken another language before and I was struggling with it. She would get frustrated whenever I didn't understand her, and attempt to say it in English in a really loud voice that always felt like she was shouting at me. I would generally let something like that wash over me, but in Ecuador I was very vulnerable and sensitive, and I was often close to tears whilst attempting to speak to her. I dealt with this by basically retreating from her, and trying not to care. I didn't see her as my mother or her apartment as my home. I stayed long hours at work and travelled whenever possible at the weekends with other volunteers, and had some fantastic experiences with them. They would talk about their good relationships with their host families, and I envied them. I questioned my relationship with my actual mother, and decided to make a more conscious effort when I got home. I should have made more of an effort with my Ecuadorian mother too, as the host family is all part of the experience.

This was the lowest point of my time in Quito ... It was absolutely a complete disaster. I've never been in a situation like that before, and I remember thinking at the time that I couldn't believe that this was actually happening. But it had to happen, as it was a revelation of sorts. Once I had let everything out that had been building up in my head, I was able to look on the situation as an observer and see how it really was ...

After nearly three months the city was beginning to feel like home. My Spanish was at its best ... I loved my journey to work in the morning when I could buy fruit on the street, converse with people in Spanish ... One really memorable thing for me was buying curtains for the playroom. As I was dealing with the shop assistant in the drapery store, various customers would come over and try and help us figure out exactly what I wanted. When I had the material bought, the shop assistant took me down the street to a dressmaker, where another conversation of what exactly I was looking for ensued, again with the input of the other customers in the queue, and some pen and paper. It really was such a buzz being able to get by in a country in a way that I had never envisaged when I first arrived.

(Immersive experience competition 2008)

**Story J:** But it was during a 'R.A.G. Raid' that I can say my life changed. A 'R.A.G. Raid', for those people who don't understand the lingo, is basically, members of R.A.G. taking to the town centre with buckets for any spare change people were willing to donate to the charity we were

representing for the day. Towards the end of the day I was approached by two people, a man and a woman, saying they represented a company called 'Home Fundraising'. They both seemed very confident and charismatic and were asking me how I would feel going door-to-door fundraising for charities. Originally sceptical, (it being my third year with important exams pending) I decided to really push myself to see if it was something I would enjoy and it turned out to be the best decision I ever made.

The job entailed a group of us travelling to a destination decided previously (our region was anywhere between Oxford and Brighton) and knocking door-to-door and talking to people from 3pm till 9pm about our charity, trying to get people to sign up to donate as much as they could each month. My few months working at Home Fundraising really made me grow as a person. Fundamentally, [it] taught me the importance of a basic human virtue ... charity. I think a reason for this was my being assigned to the charity Cancer Research UK.

I'll never forget on my first day, knocking on a door and starting from my memorised script about how cancer affects 1 in 3 of us and thinking it was going well, and getting half way through when the woman I was talking to burst into tears and told me she had recently lost her husband to cancer. In a similar vein, at another door, I spoke to a woman holding a baby and as I begin to recite statistics concerning leukaemia and the improving chance of survival, the woman interrupts to tell me her baby has recently been diagnosed ... talking to so many people each day either being personally affected or knowing someone who is affected was such a humbling, eye-opening experience that changed my immediate view on the importance of charity work.

... my time working there literally changed my life. For a law student whose aim in life was to work for a law firm in London and earn a lot of money, talking to people who had lost husbands and children really hit home to me the real importance in life of family and happiness in what you do. After my time spent sharing stories with people on the street I suddenly found it hard to relate to the importance of dividends in Company Law lectures or how to sue people best in Family Law. It completely changed the trajectory of my life and now I am on course to becoming a police officer. This is a goal awakened in me by my time talking to people from all walks of life and feeling as though I really want to communicate and help people every day for the rest of my life. All in all my love affair with charity work and meeting

and talking to people has changed my life completely, from one that would have been concerned with profit and money, to one concerned with helping people and talking to communities.

(Lifewide learning essay competition 2011)

**Proposition 8** enables learners to develop relationships that facilitate collaboration, learning and personal development.

**Story K:** I was given the opportunity to be entrepreneurial and work with a team to come up with a business idea and try to put it into action and make a profit from it. Our team chose Battle of the Bands and we set about organising it. The first mistake I made was that I organised the bands, a venue, radio airplay and a date, within 3 days which I now realise was far too fast and didn't give me enough time to really plan anything. The second mistake I made was that I did it all without the team, which meant I forgot one of the main points of the task ... 'The team make a profit'. Inevitably my group failed ... I did learn valuable lessons such as team work really does mean TEAMWORK and contract negotiation is extremely fun, and that I will most likely run my own business when I leave university ...

(Lifewide learning essay competition 2009)

**Story L:** The choice of volunteering within an infant school came from a desire to help people. My previous work experience had left me behind tills, washing dishes or feeding the elderly. The latter began to show me just how wonderful it is to make a difference in people's lives.

I began as a teaching assistant but soon began to realise how much of a difference can be made in a child's life by the adults who guide them. After just a few weeks I found I lacked the confidence to initially raise ideas within my working team. This I considered to be one of my greatest weaknesses. The need to present my ideas to eight other people in my team terrified me. In one instance after nervously presenting my ideas for a harvest assembly, the teacher I worked with inspired confidence in me just by saying what a good idea he thought it was. My creativity began to exert itself in the research for new stories for the children to enact during their assembly and creating props left me smeared in paint and with a smile on my face. I believe my initial nervousness came from feeling that I was just a student. I had never been in a circumstance where research and ideas I had written down could transform from words on a page to a

wonderful show before me that the children could perform for their parents. From that point on I began to consciously contribute during meetings and was no longer held back by the thought that my lack of work experience in education would detract from my ability to make worthwhile contributions to the school.

The ability to form interpersonal relationships with all members of staff came easily to me. I enjoyed working with everyone and found myself being able to differentiate my communicative behaviour between my adult team members and the children within the class. I began to unravel the intricate workings of a child's mind and the fantastic perspectives they can bring to their own learning. This enabled me to teach concepts ever so more effectively, a skill that academic research could not have aided me in. Seeing the children grasp a mathematical concept I had taught them and then perform it independently, was magical. Observations I made of techniques to mediate difficult behaviour, enforcement of school rules, the reward systems available to children and the many ways in which different teachers taught their class left me with an extremely rich perspective. Not only was I learning the crucial skills that many students learn as part of a teaching degree but I was able to evaluate and integrate different teachers' styles to form a style of my very own.

Despite volunteering I treated every job with the utmost importance and attempted to excel myself in what ever I was asked to do. I believe my willingness to do whatever was asked of me and the efficiency and enthusiasm I brought to my work was the reason the school offered me paid work in my fourth month with them. From this I was given my own class for an hour and a half once a week in which I had the opportunity to help them develop their writing ... The difficulties in managing a class independently, preparing much needed resources and planning techniques to engage the children were all experiences working as a classroom assistant would never have placed upon me. The submersion in yet another new environment began to further enrich my knowledge.

My future now seems clearer as I begin preparation for my graduate teaching programme to commence later this year. It's so important that such an overwhelming experience is not feared but approached with determination. As each new experience gradually becomes our familiar, shallow end of the pool, we must push forward towards the deep. For knowledge can never be finite and I believe submersion into new working

experiences is the best way to learn.

(Immersive experience competition 2008)

**Proposition 9** encourages learners to behave ethically and with social responsibility.

**Story M:** I have a brother who is severely visually impaired and categorised as a blind person. As well as being blind his left hand is partly paralysed so that he can not use it. ... I decided to accept the responsibility to take care of my brother in order for him to come to the UK and develop his English skills and follow his dream of pursuing higher education. It was a big responsibility because I had to cook for both of us everyday and clean everything, as he cannot do many of the things that would be done by the average individual. I had to sort out his belongings, take him to places where he needed to be and fill out all his forms. I also had to support him in many other areas of his life. Prior to my brother moving in I thought that caring for him would occupy my time and stop me from my studies and that I would fall behind everyone else on the course. However, I now realise that whilst caring for my brother a whole new horizon opened up in front of me. I discovered that there is much more to this life; this life is not just about me. My personality and character grew so much during this period because of the difficulties I went through and the contacts that I had to make in order to help him. The word 'service' found a very deep new meaning and value in my mind and heart.

(Lifewide learning essay competition 2009)

**Proposition 10** encourages and enables learners to be wilful, self-directed, self-regulating, self-aware and reflexive so that they develop a keen sense of themselves as designers/authors and developers of their own lives, appreciating their learning and developmental needs as they emerge. *All the stories told in this book demonstrate very well how this proposition is given meaning through the lifewide experiences of students.*

### **Being/becoming authors of their own lives**

Baxter Magolda (Chapter 5) draws attention to the importance in personal development of 'the growth of epistemological, intrapersonal and interpersonal complexity' (Baxter Magolda 2004:41). Students enter university at all stages in their epistemological, intrapersonal and interpersonal development. Their programme of study or postgraduate research programme enables them to continue to develop in each of

these dimensions but we tend to underestimate the considerable development gained through other experiences outside their formal education.

The first point that can be made is that the propositions for an imaginative curriculum, developed in Chapter 6 and used to organise the student narratives in this chapter, provide indications of the sorts of experiences and engagements that are likely to lead to the situations in which the epistemological, intrapersonal and interpersonal development necessary for self-authorship is more likely to occur. By relating the example narratives to these propositions we are saying that students are engaging with situations that hold the potential for these complex forms of development to emerge.

The questionnaire surveys provide an insight into the range of experiences students are involved in, and an indication of the significance individuals give to different forms of development arising from such experiences. But it is the stories students tell about their experiences and the development arising from such experiences that provide deeper insights into the purposes and meanings individuals attribute to such experiences.

An evaluation of the extent to which an individual demonstrates the dispositions and personal agency of self-authorship is not possible through the data we have gathered. However, Baxter Magolda (2004) identifies three assumptions relating to the perception and use of knowledge necessary for self-authorship which can be used to evaluate students' narratives. These assumptions are: 1) knowledge is complex and socially constructed, 2) self is central to knowledge construction 3) authority and expertise are shared in the mutual co-construction of knowledge among peers.

It is possible to find examples in most of the narratives submitted to the essay competitions of students engaging with knowledge in ways that demonstrate they appreciate it as a complex, highly situated and contextualised, individually and socially constructed, and emergent phenomenon. It is also apparent in the narratives that students view themselves as the developers and users of the knowledge they develop often with others. Here are a few illustrations taken from the extracts above.

- Student (A) developed knowledge to inform his practice as a personal trainer through formal study (for a qualification) and through his work with clients. 'I have learnt so much more though, most of which was completely unexpected.'
- A music student (B) who set up a highly successful Gospel Choir – a collaborative, uncertain knowledge-rich process in itself requiring the considerable development of relational and technical knowledge – formed a new partnership with a rapper through which knowledge and relationships are shared and new musical works are created.
- Student (C) took on the organisation of a new sky-diving society and made over 100 telephone calls to 'dropzones' all over England, France and Spain in order to create a knowledge base to determine the cheapest and best place to jump.
- Student (D) gained some profound insights into her own appreciation of life as a result of the relationship with a disabled child she developed through her role as a care worker.
- A law student (E) engaged in a sustained process of developing the knowledge he needs to be a journalist through volunteering as a web based news writer, as a voluntary writer with online magazines willing to employ new writers, conducting interviews with local radio station and through a legal affairs internship at the European Healthcare Fraud and Corruption Network, Brussels.
- Student (F) developed from scratch, presumably through a combination of observing, reading, discussing and coaching, the knowledge and skill to play Australian Rules Football at a high level. He also organised a significant fund-raising event.
- An engineering student (G) researched the market for a piece of technology before using his network of contacts developed through living in Singapore and through his placement to set up a technology-based business.
- A student on a gap year living and working in Ecuador (H), learning Spanish and working as a volunteer, developed the knowledge, much of it through her host family, that enabled her to adapt to a culture that is very different to her own.

- A law student (I) raising money for a cancer charity, knocking on doors and talking to people and trying to get them to sign up to donate as much as they could each month, found that time spent sharing stories with people on the street completely changed the trajectory of his life.
- Student (J) learnt from the failure of a collaborative enterprise that developing knowledge by yourself to achieve a goal is not going to result in a successful collaborative enterprise.
- Observations made by student (K) of the techniques used by teachers to mediate difficult behaviour, enforce school rules, reward children and the many ways in which different teachers taught their class, gave her 'an extremely rich perspective' with which to inform her own practice as a teacher.

## Final thoughts

The data from questionnaire surveys and essay competitions reveal that significant numbers of students (albeit in self-selected samples) involve themselves in experiences beyond and additional to the formal curriculum while they are studying for their degree. Furthermore, the diversity of the forms of development gained through activities outside their programme that students recognise as being significant to their own development, is striking.

The overall inference that can be made from these surveys is that students develop themselves while they are at university through their engagement with their programme of study and through many other experiences outside the formal curriculum. Unfortunately, most of this development is unrecognised and unaccredited. Students themselves recognise this, and when asked whether they would like to receive university recognition for their informal learning and personal development over 60 per cent of students (survey 1) stated they would appreciate the opportunity for some form of recognition.

Learning and personal development are recognised by students as occurring in three curricular domains – the academic, co-curricular and extra-curricular. However, there appears to be a disconnection between subjective ratings of learning in the informal co- and extra-curricular domains and respondents' narrative evidence of the value of such experiences to their development. This results in considerably lower scores for perceived learning in these

domains than in the programme of study context. The qualitative evidence might suggest that learning is occurring, but that it is undervalued by respondents. This may be due to academic cultural expectations that learning is packaged around explicit predetermined outcomes, with teachers' feedback or assessment essential to the validation of what counts as learning and achievement. If learners themselves fail to appreciate their learning and development, and are not able articulate this, they will sell themselves short when competing in the employment market, and, more importantly, they fail to recognise their true personal worth.

One way of addressing this issue would be for institutions to explicitly pay more attention to the learning and development gained through co- and extra-curricular experiences and to create the means to validate and honour these forms of learning and development.

Participating in this award has taught me how the learning I am doing today goes together with the learning I did yesterday, and how new knowledge comes from previous knowledge. I have seen how the things I engage with help me to develop, and I am enjoying growing and learning much more than before now that I can see the value of it. I have learnt to recognise an opportunity and take the chance. These insights make me feel certain that I will continue working on my personal and professional development even after I have completed the award.

(Lifewide Learning Award submission, March 2011)

Chapters 11 to 13 describe how one university has attempted to create a learning partnership framework (see Baxter Magolda, Chapter 5) to enable learners to think about and represent their informal learning and personal development and to receive recognition for this learning.

Student narratives of their lifewide learning reveal different orientations reflecting different priorities and dispositions. We suggest that individuals' orientations to lifewide learning might take one of three general forms – career/vocation/employability; self-actualisation; or a combination of these orientations, according to their self-determined priorities and wilfulness. There is a suggestion that in some areas, like health and creative arts, students are using the opportunities in their wider lives to gain experience and capability that is more focused on their career intentions/aspirations. A number of stories indicate that personal insights gained through particular experiences

become life-changing. As a result perspectives, purposes and orientations change.

Our belief is that students enter university at all stages in their epistemological, intrapersonal and interpersonal development, and that while they are involved in a programme of study or research they are, through their whole life experience, continuing to develop along these developmental trajectories. Students' narratives of their experiences reveal how they as individuals are engaged in 'the growth of epistemological, intrapersonal and interpersonal complexity' (Baxter Magolda 2004:41 and Chapter 5) and further evidence of this involvement in self-authorship will be presented in Chapters 10 to 13.

### **Endnotes**

1 This questionnaire is provided on the additional resources page at <http://lifewideeducation.co.uk>