



Lifewide Learning Research & Development Group

**Towards a Better Understanding
of Our Own Learning Lives**

WEEKS -1 TO + 1

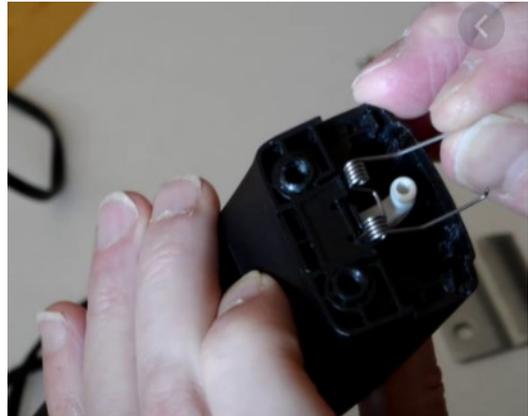
**Vignettes of Experiences
Involving Emergent Learning**

Vignette #1: Needing to Fix Something

Domain: Home/garden

Narrative: 'It's stopped working', my wife reported holding out the cordless branch cutter.... I recognise this as both a piece of information and a request... But these things are often designed to be unfixable, I think to myself, 'no user serviceable parts' and all that. Plus my experience of school (a very long time ago, but still somewhere buried within me and capable of being re-awakened by almost any encounter like this) was that me and practical stuff were not very compatible. In fact I'm tempted to say that my early formal education taught me a lot about what I could not do. However... I got the screwdrivers out and took the dead garden tool to bits, marvelling as I did so about how many, and how many different size screws were holding it together.

With a bit of wiggling it came apart, and I found myself looking at a collection of mostly unrecognisable and mostly inaccessible bits. Will I ever get it back together again? So, with nothing to lose, I lifted the switches out, cleaned these and put them back together and – it worked. Hoorah, and the opportunity to re-remind myself of two lessons 'my skills and competencies might not be strong in this area, but 'it's always worth having a go.' It does not always go this way, but when it does it's another small step in correcting some faulty learning from way back!



Reflections: Thinking about this experience a little more, I suspect it's partly about the challenge of 'having a go', partly about needing to try to mend stuff (itself down to a mix of a childhood where not everything was plentiful and a newer desire to avoid continuously buying new stuff as the answer when things go wrong). Plus I'm reminded that I'm not sure that I do know quite what to do when I start something like this, it's more about being willing to have a go and at the end, having done it, knowing that I could do it and having a better idea of what to do next time.

Keeping track of 'stuff' is important from bitter experience - so I did keep all the screws in relation to the holes they came out of. So some transfer of learning definitely went on. And a bit of reinforcement provided by a successful outcome, which helps me to remind myself that my earlier view - that practical stuff is something I can't do - is replaced by a more nuanced perspective, namely that - with some thinking, planning and perhaps a bit more time than others - I can actually succeed at practical stuff!

Vignette #2 Be prepared for something going wrong

Scenario:

I was pleased to be among a handful of people invited to deliver a series of online facilitation sessions for people working towards the National Professional Qualification for Headship. There was a fast-paced orientation session for us, as the platform, Blackboard, was an unfamiliar one to many of us still grappling with Zoom, TEAMS etc.

I knew how important it was to learn by experience and to be explorative and so I put my virtual hand up to try to do some of the tricks that BB offers. I had some success, but remained largely confused and tense on account of what seemed to be to be a plethora of tabs, buttons, links, functions and tricks, many of which led down routes involving several alternative branch-lines and which proved difficult to retrace. Furthermore, a few technical glitches occurred with the system, which seemed a cruel extra intervention of fate.

When the session ended, I wondered if I'd made a mistake, and if I was now merely an old dog, incapable of learning new tricks.

Reflection:

I was diligent in applying some strategies and insights born of many years in teaching and learning. These reminded me that it was important to keep trying, and to habituate the things that worked, while noting the problem areas. It was also important to collaborate with others, including several people with whom I'd be co-facilitating.

Actions and outcomes (so far):

I arranged a one-to-one practice with a colleague who loves to help people with IT, and who would be co-facilitating with me. We then arranged to turn up early for my first live session, by which time I'd done some more practice, written notes to self, and got hyped up for the challenge. On the day, I "arrived" very early and set up. However, my colleague didn't, which left no time for final tinkering. I found that I couldn't access the same (correct) system as him, and our technical support said I needed to log in from a different platform. As the first attendees arrived, I was struggling to remember my password for that other platform. There were seconds to spare by the time I got in. By the end of the day, I was sweating, exhausted and wiser.

What I (re-)learned:

Something will always go wrong, so expect it. There will often be someone around to help. There aren't many effective short-cuts to learning. Learning is hard. Learning, especially with others, is satisfying. Mutually supportive communication is hugely important. I can still do new tricks, and will be performing these over the next few weeks.

Vignette #3 Learning by Observing Others

Narrative: After years of anticipation, in November 2020, work at last began on a large extension project to our house. All rooms affected, which is the majority, have had to be 'cleared' – more like, contents packed up into boxes which are moved out of the way of potential work. We are living on site, it is lockdown, hence I am able to observe all that happens. This has been an interesting learning experience, one that will continue for many months to come.

I have watched as a team of Albanian labourers set about hacking shrubs, demolishing a crumbling garage, drilling up concrete then preparing the clay soil for foundations. The conditions remind me of the Somme and WW1, a period I have researched extensively, and I find myself revisiting events in my mind. As the men work, I listen to their chatter and try to identify words: I hear traces of Russian and Italian, and want to know more about this fascinating tongue.

I get an insight into their culture, too. Everything appears to be shared, and they extend this lack of boundaries to our possessions: if they see a brush lying around, they feel free to use it, when they accidentally destroy a fence panel, they feel entitled to use our exposed neighbour's property as a thoroughway. At one o'clock, they congregate in one area of the garden to share a meal, and for a solid hour, their laughter and chatter replace the sound of machinery.



The organisation of this project has been another source of learning. Months of to-ing and fro-ing with the council planning office, negotiations over what, to a lay person, seem minor changes, but to them require yet another payment before a decision can be taken ... I learn that we have to move the main drainage pipes, as we can no longer have access to these from a building, albeit an out-house. I researched and prepared a contract with our neighbours, who were also affected, then liaised with Thames Water as the requisite work was carried out and inspected.

The project has been impressively plotted by the builder, with a spreadsheet that is updated weekly: I did not appreciate this side of their work before. In order to settle their weekly bills, and pushed into it by the limited hours of banking during lockdown, I had to relent and start internet banking. This entailed learning how to operate the system, but also taught me how unreasonable my prejudice was: I am greatly impressed with the security and ease of this on-line service.

Sadly, I have also had some negative learning experiences as a result of our extension. The worst is how intolerant and malicious some people can be. We have lived in this house for twenty years, over which time one or another neighbour has always been causing noise, congestion and disturbance due to building work, all of which I have accepted without complaint. Not so one of our close neighbours who

have engaged in public dispute over the delivery of building materials (!) and complained to the council and builder countless times since the work began.

Reflection: Why have I written this as an example of everyday learning? Partly because it is just that, an ordinary event in our lives which millions of people will be experiencing. I chose it to demonstrate that learning can and does occur in such mundane circumstances, sometimes despite ourselves, sometimes by design. I learnt, for instance, simply by observing the labourers, much as children learn by example. But further learning was also prompted out of interest: I want to know more about the Albanian language and culture. This is all informal, self-directed learning, but I was also forced to engage in other forms as a matter of necessity. I had to learn how to use on-line banking and how to write a contractual undertaking for my neighbour. Learning has been cognitive and emotional, intended and unanticipated – indeed, it has included all dimensions proposed in Norman’s model.

When I sat down to write a vignette, I didn’t know where to start. I hope this narrative will encourage others who may be in the same position. You will be surprised how much learning is there once you start to probe things!

Vignette #4: Learning to achieve something at work

Experience: I'm on the mail list for the Qatar Foundation's (QF) global education think tank WISE events and publications. In early December I was informed of a new initiative called the Learning Ecosystems Living Lab (LELL). I decided to participate in the launch event, an online panel discussion Dec 10th. Each member of the panel was given 10mins to speak and what David Atchoarena, Director UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), had to say resonated with my own ideas and beliefs. I made a few supportive comments and posed some questions in the chat box but at some point, while he was speaking, I decided to contact him.

After the session I googled UIL and found his address and emailed him explaining the work that I had been doing with Lifewide Education. He responded positively within an hour and put me in touch with Deputy Director who is also Director of Lifelong Learning policy at UIL.

A few days later on Dec 16th I had an hour long discussion with him and a researcher involved in UNESCO's Learning City project. I could tell by their reactions to what I was saying that they were interested in the ideas and practices I was sharing and it was clear that they wanted to continue the conversation beyond the meeting. So I offered to produce a White Paper showing how the ideas and practices of lifewide learning and learning ecologies might be used to enrich the concept of lifelong learning and support the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The positive feedback I had been given motivated me to spend some of my Christmas preparing a White Paper on the theme of "Enriching and Vivifying the Concept of Lifelong Learning through lifewide learning and ecologies for learning & practice". It took over a week of fairly intensive work. I had to familiarise myself with UNESCO's policy positions and their 'Future's of Education initiative'. I downloaded and read UIL's reports citing passages that I thought were particularly relevant and then tried to show the relevance of the ideas of lifewide learning and education and learning ecologies. My aim was to develop a compelling narrative that would make sense to the UIL team. Through the process of reading and writing I gained new understandings about Lifewide's strategic position and value and how lifewide learning and education could be related to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals especially SD#4 'lifelong learning opportunities for all'. My new understandings are expressed in the White Paper and these were incorporated into Lifewide Educations Vision & Strategy statement. I

invited a few people to read and comment on it and received a little positive feedback but I was confident that the ideas were useful to UIL. I emailed the paper to the Deputy Director on Jan 1st.

In making this effort I realise that what I was doing was more than learning about something. In addition to learning about UIL's work and UNESCO's policy positions, I was developing a new position for Lifewide

Education's advocacy role and also, most importantly, trying to develop a collaborative working relationship with Dr Raul Cotera and UIL. That I was successful in this endeavour is shown in the email he sent me on Jan 11th.

From: "Valdes Cotera, Raul"
To: "norman.jackson"
Cc: "UIL-DirectorOffice"
Sent: Monday, 11 Jan, 21 At 18:52
Subject: FW: Lifewide learning

Dear Norman,

Thank you for taking the time to draft this white paper providing such an interesting perspective on the concept of lifelong and lifewide learning!

We were discussing how these ideas could be brought to the attention of a large interested audience and thought that it would be great to have a contribution to the UIL blog from you on the topic. The blog is available here: <https://thelifelonglearningblog.uil.unesco.org/> and includes contributions from UIL staff as well as international experts in the field of education. You can find the specifications for articles here: <https://thelifelonglearningblog.uil.unesco.org/about-this-blog/> If you are interested, we would be very pleased to receive and circulate your contribution in this way.

Also, UIL has established a series of webinars during the last year, which has been very well received. We plan to continue these webinars on a regular basis and I think it would be enriching to have you a speaker in a webinar. The themes and schedule are yet to be determined, but if it sounds good to you, we will get back to you with a concrete proposal.

As mentioned during our call, we are currently conducting a comprehensive research on higher education and lifelong learning. I believe that your holistic understanding of learning processes and environments will bring a very interesting new angle to the project. We will still need to discuss in the team how this could possibly be integrated within our current research framework, which may be clearer once we have completed the analysis of our global survey and can see the gaps that need to be filled. This process may still take up to two months.

Thank you again for sharing this interesting work!

Best wishes,

Raúl

Reflection/interpretation: My learning was driven by an attempt *to achieve several things*. There was no planning, just an intuitive response to try to keep moving in a particular direction. Firstly, I wanted to develop the strategic position of Lifewide Education in order to show that the ideas we had developed had value in the context of evolving thinking about the role of lifewide learning in the dominant policy idea of lifelong learning. This new thinking fed into our new vision and strategy statement. Secondly, I wanted to show that we were delivering on the role we had set ourselves to be an advocate for lifewide learning and to influence the thinking of decision/policy makers. I needed to learn in order to achieve these things, I also needed to act in ways that were informed by how I have acted in the past in order to achieve similar objectives. I am clearly in an unfolding situation but in achieving this short-term goal I have created new opportunities to keep working towards these goals over a longer time-scale.

Continuity of learning: I had been invited to write a blog for the UNESCO website which I submitted on 18/01/21. But now that I have learnt and achieved these things I can make a rough plan for future learning. Firstly, I can share the White Paper with a range of individuals I know and invite their comments. In this way I can gain perspectives other than my own and refine my ideas and propositions in the light of these. Secondly, we (Lifewide Education) can provide an opportunity for the discussion of the ideas in the paper through an online seminar. Thirdly, we could form an issue of Lifewide Magazine (our most important vehicle for sharing ideas) around the White Paper and invite other people to write articles to offer their own perspectives. Fourthly, I have already approached the editor of the Springer International Handbook of Lifelong Learning to see if the chapter I have been invited to write could be formed around the ideas in the White Paper. All of these ideas will extend the value of my effort to learn and all will develop my understandings further.

Ecologies for learning and practice at work (a theoretical perspective)

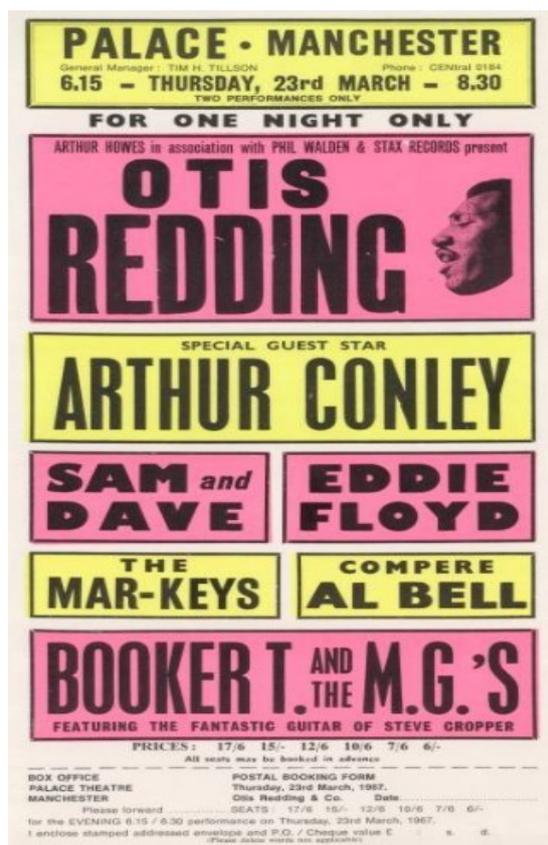
I am interested in the idea of ecologies for learning and practice and I can view my experience from an ecological perspective. What I constructed was an ecology of practice for the purpose of learning. It involved a lot of actions that were undertaken in order to learn but it also included actions that were trying to achieve other things – like forming relationships for particular purposes.

The initial ecology I created was to learn about the Learning Ecosystems Living Lab (LELL). Through the experience of participating in an online panel discussion I spotted an affordance (the possibility of engaging UIL Director David Atchoarena). I tried to make the connection and from this effort a number of events unfolded the most important of which was an interaction, via Teams, with the UIL Deputy Director. The feedback I received from this interaction gave me the confidence to create the White Paper – this contained my main effort to learn and to relate my ideas to the thinking of UNESCO policies. The discussion with the D.D. was key to building a relationship and my effort to produce the white paper revealed to UIL that I wanted this relationship to continue. His response indicates to me that UIL also see value in extending this relationship. Through these interactions that were facilitated by technology, learning and relationship development emerged for both participants.

Vignette #5 Identity Work

Experience: I have an ongoing email conversation with one of my school mates and a lot of the chat is in the forms of youtube links to music we listened to in the mid 1960's. As 15/16 year old we loved listening to soul music played by artists on the Atlantic STAX record label. We bought and shared albums by artists such as Otis Redding, Sam Cooke, Sam and Dave and many more... These chats evoked many pleasurable memories of growing up. My friend asked me a question about when we had gone to see Otis Redding live and it got me searching for information on the gig we had seen. I found a poster but no recording of the event but I did find a recording of the show at another venue filmed 3 weeks after we had seen him.

Once I got started on this nostalgic trip I couldn't stop and I have just been listening to some wonderful stories told by Steve Cropper who was the guitarist in the STAX band. Youtube is a fantastic resource for not only music but for discovering stories behind the music.



Joe Chambers interviewing Steve Cropper for Musicians Hall of Fame

Listening to the music and watching the performers was a fantastic experience and its burned into my memory but learning about how the musicians felt about each other, how they came to be in the band and how they felt about the experience on their European tour took me to another level of understanding. I also discovered a fantastic article in the independent which fills in some of the

details. <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/features/stax-the-heart-of-soul-434649.html>

Reflection: I've been distracted for about 20mins while I put this vignette together but I think its typical of the way in which my knowledge and understanding gets extended in the course of a typical day along-side other things I'm doing. Perhaps this falls into the category of biographical learning. Part of this story it is about revisiting my past – who I once was which is somewhere inside me. Its "identity work" and this type of knowledge is an important part of my emotional wellbeing. While I have been writing I had lots of memories about that gig in Manchester and the (few) times when I skipped school to listen to soul music with my friends which I guess is related to becoming who I am.

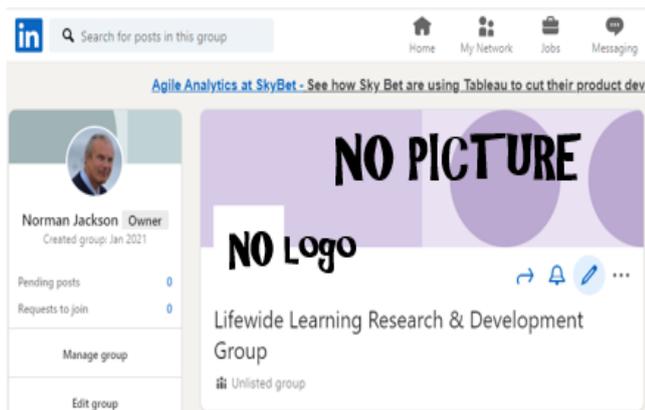
Vignette #6 Getting Stuck

Sometimes after trying everything we can think of to learn we are still stuck. I find this particularly so with technology. I learnt along time ago from my son that when you get stuck with technology 'ask google' and for the most part it works as long as you ask the right question... and that often involves a lot of trial and error until you find the right words.

I consider myself reasonably proficient with using a computer and social media but this last two days I've had a couple of problems that I have yet to learn how to solve. It reminds me that sometimes (quite often actually) we may not know how to learn something.

1 My wife has just bought a new laptop.. actually one I advised her to buy which means I feel responsible for its working! She needs to use it for work conversations and yesterday she came to use the ear buds for the first time. There was no sound only loud static. She was not amused and soon proved to me that it wasn't the headset by plugging in mine. As far as she was concerned the laptop was broken. Mistakenly, I glibly said 'no problem', went to settings and discovered that everything that should be enabled was enabled. There followed the best part of a couple of hours asking google and dell what I had to do.. I followed up quite a few things but nothing has worked yet. I will keep trying and my secret weapon (my son) will be home tomorrow so if all else fails he's my next port of call.

2 As if this was not enough, I have spent another couple of hours this morning messing around trying to upload a header image and logo to the new linked in group I've set up. I have done it several times before and it is quite straightforward. There are plenty of instructions but these all relate to something that is working and not something that refuses to work. I have cleared my browsing history and used a search engine other than google all to no avail.



Reflection: I'm familiar with this type of struggle when it comes to technology. Something doesn't work and we have to work out (learn) how to fix it. Learning to use technology often involves just trying to use it...it's a trial and error process that is speeded up if someone shows us what to do. But when things go wrong, and the information I have accessed doesn't help me solve the problem – I feel incompetent, angry with myself (and the service provider) and frustrated. The feeling of being stuck brings out a lot of negative emotions and is bad for my wellbeing! Worse still there is an opportunity cost. I am way behind doing the things I intended and my emotional state is not conducive to work. I suppose this is also where resilience and persistence kick in. If these things haven't worked where can I find out or get help from? Perhaps that's tomorrow's lesson. I'm going to go for a walk to try get rid of some of my angst.

Postscript #1 15/01/20

I went back to my problem several times during the next 24 hours. Although my problem was fairly trivial I was annoyed with myself for not being able to solve it. I like my websites and pages to have an identity and this was irritating me. I was also annoyed with the fact that the information provided

by Linked In did not help me and there was a complete lack of any other support on Linked In. I am not sure how long I would have gone on googling for solutions but I eventually came across a post <https://www.linkedin-makeover.com/2015/02/26/linkedin-qa-how-to-add-a-logo-to-your-linkedin-profile-page/> and I knew when I read it, that it provided the answer. The reason I couldn't upload my company logo and create a header was because my company name was not in the title of the page. So I changed the name of the page to include the company name and low and behold my logo and header uploaded. Then I changed the title back to my original title without the company name.



Postscript #2 #19/01

A few days later I had another go at fixing the audio on my wife's computer. After spending a bit of time searching youtube I found a clip 'How to Fix Sound or Audio Problems on Windows 10' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ncO8vekrfao> I noticed it had over 6 million views so reckoned it must be providing good advice. I dutifully followed the instructions and 4 mins into the video, having updated the driver I had sound working in the headphones. I realise that all I learnt was how to fix a particular problem by simply following a set of instructions.

Vignette #7 What Counts as Learning?

I know that most if not all of my learning is building on stuff I already know and can do so there is a question of what actually counts as new learning. I pondered this question as I prepared the evening meal for the family. I had decided on Fish Pie. I have made Fish Pie before with fish and a topping of mash potato as the main ingredients but usually used a pre-prepared white sauce. I couldn't find a white sauce in the supermarket so I had to make one from scratch. I find it hard to believe myself that I hadn't made one before, so I decided to look up, 'how to make a fish pie sauce' on YouTube. I found a video clip and followed the instructions and the result was delicious.



Reflection: They say necessity is the mother of invention but its also the mother of learning. I make a lot of family meals so I know the basics for cooking a meal, so I was adding to what I already knew and could do. I didn't see the situation as an opportunity for learning rather, it was doing what I had to do. I had watched my wife and daughters make sources so I had a rough idea and I could probably have had a go at making a sauce, but I found it really helpful to watch someone making the sauce that I wanted to make at the point I wanted to make it. I guess you might call it 'just in time' learning. I recognise that I used the resources on YouTube to help me make something in the kitchen and I had all the tools and ingredients necessary so my environment was set up to help me do the job. Through the process of making I know I have committed the simple procedure to memory and so I guess I can claim I have learnt something - even though it's quite trivial. More importantly perhaps, I'm confident to try making other sources.

Vignette #8 We learn the same things over and over again

I was invited to write a post for a high profile blog so I put quite a lot of effort in to constructing and polishing it. I was pleased with the result. But guided by past experiences I decided to ask someone else who didn't know what I was writing about to read it, to check that it made sense to people who were not familiar with what I was writing about.

As I was thinking this, who should walk past me but my 22 year old daughter. I told her I would make her a cup of tea if she would read it and give me some feedback. After she had read it, I asked her if she understood it. She said, "it's okay but who is it written for?" Of course this is the crunch question, so I launched into an explanation which also took in why I thought that what I had written was relevant to everyone. She stopped me and said, "well say what you have just told me." I recognised that what she said was true. What I had just said in two sentences captured the essence of the 700 word post – so I thanked her and amended and improved my post.



Reflection: Of course I know that we should always try and gain feedback on our work to check that others can see the meaning that we see in it - but I have to admit that I don't always do this even when its easy to do so. This incident showed me the value of designing feed back into what we do. I can think of many instances like this where we learn the same thing over and over again and it is a necessary part of learning and acting. I guess through such acts involving members of the family we can act as a role model. The incident also shows how life in the home environment (because we are all working at home) can feed into our working life.

Vignette #9: Learning in planning/facilitating social learning

The context is this research project for which these vignettes are being produced. It begins with a vision – an imagined idea and a rough idea how it might work. It continues with presenting the idea to others and persuading others to be involved (since this is intended as a social learning process) and it continues with designing the process in detail and developing the tools (eg guidance and exemplars) and the technological infrastructure to support the social learning process. Then you have to find and persuade people who have not been part of the design process to participate. And once the process has started you have to facilitate – encourage, provoke, support, guide – do whatever is necessary to try to make it work. Then, stuff emerges from the process, you have to help synthesise and curate it, for only then will you know what you have explored. And all this has to be done within the time frames you have set for the project. The net effect is to provide many affordances or opportunities for learning. Every stage of the process, every communication and other form of interaction and every artefact that is produced contains within it the potential to use existing learning and to extend or adapt that learning in the current situation and circumstances. The whole process and practice might be conceived as ‘learning to do it all over again for the particular situation and set of circumstances.’ Although we might pull out examples of new learning in any part of this process, for me the most important learning is the metalearning, ‘the execution of the whole and what emerged from the whole.’ In an ecological sense this is the way that everything has been woven together to achieve the result. It’s the metalearning that provides the platform for the overall advancement of understanding and achievement.



Reflection: Looking back on the work I have done I can see that I have designed a process and I’m confident, through the example vignettes that have been produced that, it will provide insights into lifewide learning if participants engage in the way it is intended. This is however my biggest doubt and concern and I know we will have to work hard to get a critical level of engagement. I am confident that the new resources that have been produced – the guidance and conversational space will support the process. I’m also confident that my co-facilitator is in tune with my thinking. Learning is embedded in the whole design – it is the first time we have tried to create a research process like this, although elements of it have been used in other processes before. Time will tell whether it achieves what I hope it will achieve.

Vignette #10 Learning that insidiously contributes to our evolving identity

Narrative

In the current lockdown, we have little opportunity to experience out of the ordinary events so I hope readers will not be put off if I write about what I hope is, for most, a rare event: a funeral celebration I attended today for a cousin of my husband.



I say out of the ordinary, but tragically, the man lying in the coffin today was in the self-same parlour four weeks ago, performing the Hindu rituals for his aged mother. Who could have predicted that we would all be back to say farewell to him just weeks later? Now, rather than sporting a white dhoti, here he lay fully dressed.

I had expected to learn more about his early days growing up in Sri Lanka before coming to study chemical engineering in the UK, and so I did. His surviving siblings had lovingly recorded videos from their respective homes in Canada and Australia; childhood friends and those from his student days in England recalled highlights from their shared times; a series of photos accompanied by music significant to his wife and children needed no words to tell the story of this generous man, who had devoted his life not to engineering but to caring for the elderly. These were all relayed via Zoom across the continents. (I had learnt, just a month ago, how effective this platform is in uniting family when the pandemic keeps them cruelly apart.)

Yes, I learnt these things, but the greatest lesson I took from today's events was human resilience in the face of disaster. The deceased's two sons, aged 7 and 14, innocently played paper, stone, scissors as we waited for the ceremony to begin. Later, the younger boy could be heard laughing beside his father's open coffin, ignorant of the pain around him. How we might wish to return to such days of insouciance! Only last month, I had been reminded of the difference between how I, a westerner, had been cushioned from death and never seen a body before the age of 53, and the ease felt by this Hindu community in the presence of the death of a loved one. There was no fear, only love as each stage of the rituals required cleansing, touching and kissing the body before the coffin was closed.

The greatest examples of fortitude were shown today by the elder son and his mother. I need to explain that this was a mixed marriage, and to an outsider, the boys appear as white as their mother. They have not been brought up to speak Tamil and although they are used to attending Hindu events, the meaning behind rituals would be foreign to them. According to tradition, the eldest son, just as his father had done last month, led the rituals. This he did with immense dignity and humility, carefully following the instructions of the iyer (priest), who gently explained the meaning of each action: placing the butter around the body was because death causes rigidity, making cremation difficult; the chanting was to release his father's spirit... the words enlightened us all, this being an Indian variant on the Sri Lankan ceremonies we are used to.

Later, his mother spoke to the viewers on Zoom, holding her sons close and standing beside the open coffin for one last time. Not once did she falter throughout the long hours. She was demonstrating humankind's amazing ability to cling to life and live each day to the full, however bitter our loss – and allowing the memory of the lost one to live on through their own deeds.

Comment:

I wanted to write this as an example of the sort of learning that can often go unacknowledged. It was informal and very personal, yet surely it is just such experiences that make life so meaningful for us? Is this not the form of learning that insidiously contributes to our evolving identity?

Vignette #11 Learning from reminiscence

This second lockdown is hitting many of us harder than the first one did. Sometimes it's the small things. During the first lockdown the golf courses in our town were closed and therefore open to public. I have never before been on a golf course, so at the age of 42 this was the first time I explored this type of space. They are huge! At least the one outside of town closest to our home. But I had a problem, during my initial walk there were welcoming signs to the public that also provided some rules. Rule one stated: please stay off the greens. I looked around helplessly. Are you joking? Everything here is green! How do I know what a greens green is? So like the small child in the video clip—shared earlier in our group—I engaged in learning by imitation. Watching other walkers. The places they went to and didn't.

Well versed in reflexive practice and observation, I began to notice that there are differences in the grass. One very obvious, the grass significantly longer, but I also noticed that the short grass had two different lengths. There were also funny patches on the grass, and little flags, I am still not sure what they are about as they were irrelevant to walking and cycling beyond: 'stay off them' and cognitive load was a major issue during the first lockdown. I have learned to consciously decide against more input when I am close to overload. The ADHD brain can be a bit volatile when it comes to this. There was so much to explore on that walk. I noticed big patches of native bluebells slowly pressing through the ground and took note to visit them again. The variety and old age of many of the deciduous trees (If you can't remember the word, there is a mnemonic. It sounds a bit like decision, and these trees decide when to have leaves and when not. Other than pine trees.) was a surprise and delight, a small creek meandered through the vast space and I meandered with it, finding delight in small bridges dotted across. I liked to wander and watch in the early morning without people about, or take my Mountainbike along the 'rough'. This one I learned from my partner who was enlisted as a teacher to check that my learning by observation and imitation led to the right conclusion. It was in fact permissible to use the bike on the rough. The golf course confirmed on their Facebook page.

Reflection

This vignette is about learning from reminiscence. During the lockdown I have begun to send my gran and my partner's mum photos and photo-stories of all our adventures to ward off their loneliness. Inevitably this activity made me reminisce about the experiences and learning that was part of the last years, which somehow snug in unnoticed. Some research indicates the positive effects of reminiscence on mental health. Shellman (2020) suggests that reminiscence will have a significant role to play in coping with the experiences post-pandemic. Additionally the first task about creating the map made me think about the process of reminiscence as I had to recall the domains of significance and contemplate why these are significant at the moment.

Vignette # 12 Learning from reflections on my current lifestyle

Scenario:

My work is very irregular in that there are some heavy, boring days and some very light days, as well as the occasional stressful days requiring significant preparation followed by live online interactions using unfamiliar media and content (see my previous reflection). These require an assertive, explorative approach.

Noticing chance opportunities:

Today, there was the serendipitous coincidence of a stressful – well, challenging, at least – all-day session and some highly relevant content, part of which concerned stress management.

I've always tended to avoid fads and fashions, including publications by people who become famous for offering amazing solutions – but I'm not cynical about this. So, when we came to the section on building resilience and reducing stress, I gave Covey my full attention, as did all those participating.

Using the chance:

Having decided consciously to be explorative in my collaboration with my co-facilitator, I'd already established the scope to offer personal perspectives on the content, and to try different ways of engaging the participants – whole-group, chat box, breakout groups, listening to exposition, plus elaboration and exemplification by the facilitator.

When we came to Covey I realised I could make an inventory of opportunities that I could take, or that I do take or don't/can't take to manage the stresses of just getting on with life as positively as possible despite the pandemic, as well as dealing with new challenges.

The five areas of activities from Covey were:

Physical – Mental – Social/Emotional – Spiritual – Creative

Examples of using these included: Exercise and sleep – Set time for reflective learning and strategic work – Family or other social activities – Uplifting experiences – Hobbies, such as playing an instrument. What was hinted at was "being explorative".

I realised that I had many items in place, and indeed was very fortunate, but there was still the chance to take a more explorative approach to some of them. For example, exercise has been good, and sleep getting better. But my guitar has been standing around, unstrummed and unpicked, for weeks. I haven't been enjoying much art. My work timings have been wrong. Then, on cue, a local magazine arrived, asking for volunteer readers for the vision impaired!

Intentions:

So, starting soon: performing, recording, learning, empowering... I feel more upbeat already!

Vignette #13 Back to University

Domain: further learning

Narrative: After obtaining a BA(Hons) in Fine Art a couple of years ago I had decided that learning never stops. Whether we choose to continue in a formal way or not we are embedded in a learning narrative that wraps our lives. If we choose to learn we unfold our learning bit by bit layer by layer like in the old-fashioned game of pass the parcel where at the end you were confronted with the present. This was either a pleasant surprise or a big disappointment. In my case it was the best present ever. As I studied and learnt and got frustrated and rejoiced or was heavily let down, a new world of wonder opened its gates. I was 52 when this happened and had waited more than 20 years to get back to uni. Life with all its turns and bends had invited me to wait till then and now I have found my next learning opportunity in an iPGCE.

Thrilled as I may be, I am starting all over again with a new university, a new online platform with new navigation tools, new peers and a new tutor and hopefully a renewed mind, open to this next challenge. Not new as just out the box but new as in ready, somewhat fearless and determined.

The reason I signed up was that I am ready for it and wish to learn more, inspired and induced to move along, in search of new and refreshed knowledge that will hopefully set my career in a new direction.

Reflection: At the moment I am in the phase of thrilled chaos. What do I have to do? Where do I post? How do I organize my time? How much of this is enjoyment and how much is sense of duty? How can I use what I am learning readily so I can experiment with it? How does it fit in with work and where is it going to take me? Basically... just a few questions. I know that some questions will go unanswered and I will stumble in more questions. May choice and sagacity guide my path and may I once again connect with the universal wisdom I have found when reaching out.

References: The Spirit of My Past, The Spirit of My Present and the Spirit of My Future. Quote:

Sometimes you will
never know the
value of a moment,
until it becomes a
memory.



Vignette #0: A pre-vignette vignette

Domain/s: Social Media, Professional Learning & Work

Narrative: Its Saturday morning (29th Jan) and I log in to this LinkedIn group to see if there had been any posts on the group pages (there were none the last time I looked). However, this time I see *many* posts and, in particular, ones that include 'Vignette #3' in their title ... Vignette #3? (*SHIT! ... I am already behind in this process*). I go back to the documents that were emailed and, with some relief, realise that I am not as behind as I thought. Apparently, my first task is to prepare a 'Domains of life' map. (*PHEW! ... I can do that*). So, I spend the next few hours creating such a map. I feel better that I am prepared with a comprehensive map for our first synchronous hook up. (*YES! ... I am on track*). Now I am feeling a little too morally superior (joke) as I drink my 3rd coffee and do a final edit. But as I do this edit, I get to wondering if my map does what it is meant to do? Have I done it 'right'? (*HANG ON A 'SEC'! ... I know about this*).

Reflection: I recognise that the feelings I experienced this morning are akin to the feelings that I work hard to avoid my students from experiencing. That is, them knowing that I know they have lives beyond their studies and that sometimes life gets in the way of the timely delivery of formal assessment tasks. I pride myself on being as generous as institutionally possible in this regard.

But even more than this, it is the 'getting it right' part that concerns me. I like to think I design learning activities where there is more than one 'right' way to complete them. And yet here I am worrying about my own 'rightness'. Even while the instructions given are more like 'helpful suggestions', I *still* wanted to 'get it right'! (*OUCH!*).

Learning: While I *know* this is not meant to be a formal scholarly piece of writing, but I can't help remembering an account of Stephen Brookfield learning to swim that I read many years ago (*there was something in it about a pasty white Englishman that still makes me smile*). The main point I took from it though, and that resonates today, is that 'if you wanted to improve your own teaching practice then try putting yourself in your learners' shoes'. I think/hope that I just did! So now I am even more grateful to have an opportunity to learn about learning. I also wonder if sometimes we also have to relearn something have forgotten. (*hmmmm...?*).

Vignette#15:

Title. Attempting 'Virtual Grandparenting'

Domain. Family, a new role

Narrative. In my head there are lots of beliefs about being a grandparent, idealised visions about lots of face-to-face contact, doing stuff together, support and encouragement. Plus, not taking on a role as an alternative parent, of course! But, in a pandemic, with two grandchildren living on another continent, who we have not seen face-to-face for eighteen months.... And last saw the younger one when she was weeks old. Birthdays and Christmas's have come - and gone – and I've become both more proficient in Skype and increasingly conscious of the limitations of the technology. Ever necessary but ever insufficient – for me at least.

Reflection. For me this encapsulates the reduction of contact and loss of 'self in close community' that the pandemic has brought into my life, and the associated sense of loss in terms of my – and others - ability to implement carefully crafted plans. My sense of personal agency has been challenged as never before. Yet at the same time I'm ever seeking to rise to the challenge, in this case of making sense and developing relationships and sharing meaning(s) with a four and a one-year-old with whom I can't have the kinds of contact I cherish. For me that means finding imaginative ways to enter their thinking with a much-reduced range of 'clues' as to the richness of their developing lives, of finding contexts where we can meet, interact, share and grow together. It's helped me appreciate that there is more to Lego than I ever imagined, that children's songs - and associated actions – do seem to work on the small screen, and that recording Mr Men stories for sharing (the books are so small you can see me and the pages of the book on the screen) were both popular – for a while – and worryingly stereotypic. Perhaps most of all though, is the sense of striving for meaningful contact in a new context where – for the first time in my life – I have attracted the label 'elderly'. That's a much wider challenge to my self-belief, but this experience has brought it into sharp relief.

Vignette # 1 - What happens when we are no longer able to learn?

Domain: Work

Narrative: So over the last year I have been working on and off as a Health Care Assistant in a hospital, for those who are unsure what an HCA does, it largely consists of wiping bums, despite this it is generally a fun job! One of the most enjoyable bits is chatting to the patients, wiping someone else's bum in silence is fairly awkward otherwise, each of them has a story, and there is nothing more interesting than getting different insights into people's lives. There are many stories I could share, and many things I have learned, but my most recent shift threw up some interesting questions about what happens when we can no longer learn?

Learning at its most basic it seems to me, is taking the information you are told, retaining it, and applying it to the world around. But patients with dementia are unable to do this middle step, there is no information retention so they can't use the information they have just been given. My patient on this particular shift, was profoundly demented, and had no capacity to retain information from one minute to the next, I was asked which day of the week it was, and where we were, around 30 times in the first hour! Our patient had stopped learning because she was unable to retain and process the information flowing in from the world around her. But she still retained some excellent (hilarious) memories of her childhood, and was undoubtedly entertaining, but there was no ability to retain what her senses were telling her in her present.

Reflections: Many here will be familiar with dementia, and its effects, and I suppose I am still grappling with what it tells us about learning, and how we can take this forward as individuals, and what it has taught me. The aspect of my story that I find most interesting and the learning that emerged from my work situation, is how, despite being unable to retain the information, the questions kept flowing. It made me think that there is deep intrinsic human need to learn, in order to understand the information that is flowing in from the world, from a basic to a complex level. In medicine, patients are sometimes described as 'confused' or 'anxious' when they are suffering from dementia, it is clear that this is in direct relation to them being unable to understand the world they live in and what is happening to them.

We are fortunate to be able to learn, and each day we do so in many tiny intangible ways, and this learning it seems to me is as intrinsic to being human as breathing is. While we are conscious and able to speak, we continue to ask questions to try to understand the world around even if we cannot process and remember the information in we are given to the questions we ask.

Vignette 17 : Another messy struggle with technology that remains a work in progress!

Domain: Hobby/Musical interest

Narrative: My most significant learning experience this week involved another tussle with technology (I seem to have lots of these in my life). For an hour or two over four afternoons, my friend and I tried in vain to find a way of playing our guitars together via the internet. Given that that most people use zoom and skype it sounds like a simple problem but it was anything but simple.

Context: I've been making music with my friend for over 20 years. We've played in the same bands and for the last couple of years we have been working on a musical. He wrote the songs and I wrote the narrative and some of the lyrics. But in the last 12 months, thanks to covid, we have



hardly played together. We have both reached the point where we would like to find a way of using technology to help us play at a distance. We started with Zoom and Facetime but the sound quality was poor. We knew that the problem would be latency (delays between the time we played and the time we heard each others sounds), and it was.

After checking YouTube we found Jam Kazam – free software that is designed to enable musicians to play together. I downloaded the ap and set up an account and my friend did the same. Then we both set about trying to get it work. I attached the audio interface which we had previously used to record music, using branded software and tried to get my computer to recognise it. One piece of audio software did but the other didn't and I could not hear myself through my headphones. Ideas about what to try next only came into my head as I fiddled with settings in the software.

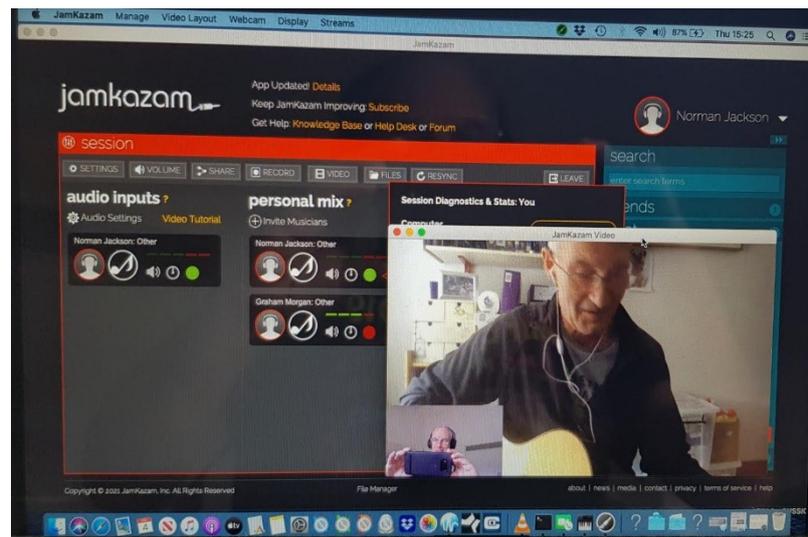
I got fed up and wanted to give up, but my friend wanted to carry on. While we made progress with understanding the new software I could not resolve my problem of not getting a audio signal through my interface. I ran out of ideas and called another friend who is a trained sound engineer and a member of the band. He patiently talked me through all the things I needed to check but after half an hour he concluded that my interface was probably no longer compatible with my computer's operating system. Sadly, I concluded I couldn't solve my problem using the kit I had.



But my techy friend did not give up. The problem was obviously bothering him so he downloaded the manual for the interface and called me the next morning with several suggestions- try this that and the other. Which I did but it still didn't work. I carried on messing around. I watched several videos on YouTube explaining how to use Studio One the recording software for my audio interface, and after more fiddling with settings I eventually managed to see an audio signal but realised it was

coming through my headset mic not the mic bypassing the interface. I was just about give up again when my guitar playing friend phoned me and suggested we go back to square 1 and try using the Jam Kazam software with the built in mics on the lap top so that's what we did. Much to our surprise it we managed to connect through the platform and hear each other through our headphones. But we could from the software monitor that the signal latency was very variable. So we agreed to try linking our computers directly to the router with an ethernet cable. Neither of us had these, my friend had to buy one and I had to scour drawers filled with wires until I found one. Today we tried again but unfortunately my friends modern computer didnt have an ethernet port and he couldn't work out how to connect the ethernetport on his router to his thunderbolt port on his computer. So after four attempts its still a work in progress.

Reflections : Learning can be a messy and frustrating business and there are several lessons in this tussle with technology. Clearly this was a part social, part personal venture driven by the desire to play music with my friend. Fumbling, learning, and partially achieving were distributed between three people and their physical and virtual environments.



While my friend and I were willing to have a go and had a vague idea about what to do, we both lacked the technical knowledge to resolve the problems we encountered. We didn't know what we needed to know and this only became apparent as our tussle unfolded. It's an 'enactivist' view of cognition – how do we know what we need to know until we have tried to do something with the materials in our environment and discovering it didn't work! There is also a story of persistence here – I would have given up but my friend persisted and that carried me a long until I felt I couldn't give up either, "if at first you don't succeed try and try again" until we either succeed or run out of ideas and or steam.

While we did learn some things that were new to us in the hours we spent trying to solve the problem eg how to use the Jam Kazam software and how to reduce the latency between our computers, (in fact I know a lot more about latency speeds now than I did before). At the end of the day we were only partially satisfied with our low cost solution.

I had to involve someone far more knowledgeable and skilful than me in order to diagnose the problem of my audio interface and discover that we could not solve the problem with the kit I had. In spite of his diagnosis he came back this morning with yet another idea relating to a setting in the software from the manual which I just couldn't fathom out. I'd hoped this story would have a happy ending but it doesn't and I guess that is the core lesson – so much of our learning is not neat and tidy with a clear finishing point its often a work in progress, with some partially resolved matters and an indeterminant end point.

Vignette #18: Making and editing a video

Domain: Hobbies, interests

Context: Over the last 16 or 17 years, I have conducted extensive research into my family history. This began after my mother's death, and has given me endless hours of conversation with my father, to provide essential data, but also as a means of validating the lives of our living and dead relatives. To date, I have written up, illustrated and had bound four volumes on different strands of the family. Such research has tapped into my academic skills and stimulated my creativity, but hitherto, I have steered clear of video.

I recently received an email asking for stories of people who had succeeded against the odds, with an invitation to submit a short video. It was too tempting, and my thoughts immediately turned to my paternal grandfather, who after being wounded 4 times in the trenches, including a period of 2 days buried alive, became a regular soldier and was posted to India. By the time he left the army, he had become Regimental Sergeant

Major then joined the police and rose to Chief Superintendent.

This Grand Master of a Masonic Lodge looked very bit the part of middle-class comfort. But, and it was a very big but, as I delved into the archives, I uncovered a totally unexpected and very well concealed skeleton: grandad was illegitimate (a source of stigma in his day). Worse still, he had been born in the

workhouse! How he had managed to emerge from such dire beginnings to achieve what he had was to be my story.



The email asked for a brief video of around 2 minutes. In my eagerness I got straight to work without reading the rules more closely. I wrote a script, selected photos which I made into a PowerPoint show to accompany my narrative, then tried to record things. This was my first stumbling block: if I used the laptop, I couldn't see the slides; if I used my phone, it was almost impossible to synch my words and the video recording. I tried numerous ways, and eventually managed a good-enough video on my phone, which I transferred to my laptop. When I played it, it was over 4 minutes in length. Belatedly, I looked at the on-line rules and to my horror found that no props or images were to be used, just a story spoken to camera. After all my efforts! Still, I had learnt things in the production of this now-aborted video, so I started again.

This time, I realised that reading a script wasn't satisfactory, so I wrote prompts. I rehearsed but kept making errors or pausing too long. After many discarded attempts, I had a video of 'about 2 minutes'. I



went to the submission site and tried repeatedly to upload my masterpiece, to no avail! 'About' 2 minutes was much more precise than it sounded. The maximum size of the video was 125MB – mine was 135. Now came the need for some real learning: how was I going to edit a video? I googled for free software, and found that it committed me to more than I wanted. Then I tried

editing videos on Windows 10. Eureka! We already have the technology in Photos!

So it was that I learnt how to edit a video. My first attempts weren't very good, and I discovered that I had to be careful not to include the audio twice. Nevertheless, I persevered and got the video down to 125 MBs. Back to the submission site. Still it would not upload! After an hour of failures, I had a break then went back – still the site wouldn't accept my file. The deadline for submissions was looming, and I decided that this failure must be a sign – I gave up trying to share the story, but was happy that the process had added to my technical knowledge.

Reflection: this is another story about the frustrations of dealing with technology. My lifewide domains map places technology at the heart of my everyday life. It brings me great joy but also immense frustration when I can't do something that seems so simple and that others can do without turning a hair. In this instance, the learning came about through necessity, it was in order to solve a problem. I also learnt something about myself: sharing the story was less important than that process of learning. There is, of course, a paradox here in that I am now sharing some of my grandfather's story and illustrating it with some of the slide show!

Musings from the balcony – Vignette 2

Domain/s: Home

Narrative: Its Saturday morning (6th Feb) and I am my new office (my balcony). The cats are supervising me (see pic). The balcony overlooks a laneway that runs behind the apartment block and is where an entrance to our underground carpark is. As I work, I hear a raucous coming from the laneway. A large 4WD towing an oversized U-Haul trailer is trying to enter the carpark. Apparently, it is being driven by new neighbours who are moving in today.



If they are successful in entering the underground carpark, then they will need to unpack the trailer and navigate their furniture around a series of corridors in order to get to the lift. But the first issue is getting into the carpark in the first place - the entry involves a tight turn, and it is unlikely that the vehicle will be able to navigate it without causing damage.

So, I do what I actually hate other people doing. I yell over the balcony (in the friendliest voice I could muster). *"Good morning! ...you movin' in?"*

My reason for doing this was to get their attention and suggest that perhaps they should park out the front of the building: where they could access the lift without navigating any corners at all. My good morning is met with a grumble and a dismissive wave and they continue driving down the ramp (with no recourse for turning round). Sigh! I roll my eyes and think of where my car is. But most of all I say to myself, *"some people never learn!"*

Reflection: I'm a little angry that the driver doesn't listen to me. I wonder if he (a) misheard or even didn't hear me at all and simply just waved me off; (b) didn't like taking advice from a woman; (c) was stressed by 'moving day' or (d) had already judged the potential manoeuvres involved and believed he could manage them. Perhaps even (e) a combination of all of the above.

Learning: But this got me thinking about how sometimes we don't listen or perhaps more correctly how we might 'hear', but we don't learn. Why is it that sometimes we don't learn despite others' attempts to 'teach' us? I don't know the answer, but I thought I would pose the question all the same.

Post-script: The 4WD and an empty trailer just left the carpark. I'm interested to see if my car is undamaged. Must go now! ;-)

creative writing for a cross-generational readership and audience as picture books are often for those who can not read yet. The story which is actually about the values of open education and not open education itself is now being illustrated, again in a very collaborative way. I am mentored by Bryan Mathers, a professional artist, and work very closely with a young designer and illustrator, Ody, my youngest son to co-create the illustrations for the book. It has been a steep learning curve but an exciting project so far with loads of opportunities to learn about working in teams, co-creating a picture book, but also about ourselves and others and how we can work harmoniously together.

Reflections: My doctoral study revealed the power of diversity for collaborative learning and development. This project confirmed this in another setting. The team, all open practitioners and researchers, has shared values and brought together a range of experiences and backgrounds. This enriched our thinking and took it into new directions thanks to our flexibility and openness of mind but also as Norman said recently in the recording I watched for this project... we are appreciative, trusting and respectful and this has been key to work effectively together and achieve our collective goal. Having the opportunity also to work with a professional artist and closer with my son Ody has been a privilege and enlightening too. The project is not finished yet but we have already achieved a lot together and I am grateful for everybody's contribution.

To find out more about the project, visit

Nerantzi, C. (2020) GOGN Fellowship project: Co-creating an open picture book about open education, 22 October. GO-GN blog, <http://go-gn.net/research/fellowship-open-picture-book/>

Nerantzi, C. & Mathers, B. (2021) To illustrate or not to illustrate?
Bryan mentoring Chrissi for the open picture book, a GOGN Fellowship project #gognpb, 21 January 2021. GO-GN blog, <http://go-gn.net/research/to-illustrate-or-not-to/>

Pulker, H., Bentley, P., Corti, P., Fransman, G. Roberts, V. and Nerantzi, C. (2020) Why on earth did I join this project? 18 November 2020, GO-GN blog, <http://go-gn.net/research/why-on-earth/>

Roberts, V. Nerantzi, C., Corti, P., Pulker, H., Bentley, P. and Fransman, G. (2020) The seeds in our data basket, reporting findings, no penguins found..., 10 December 2020, GO-GN blog, <http://go-gn.net/research/the-seeds-in-our-data-basket/>

Vignette 21 Lifewide Domain

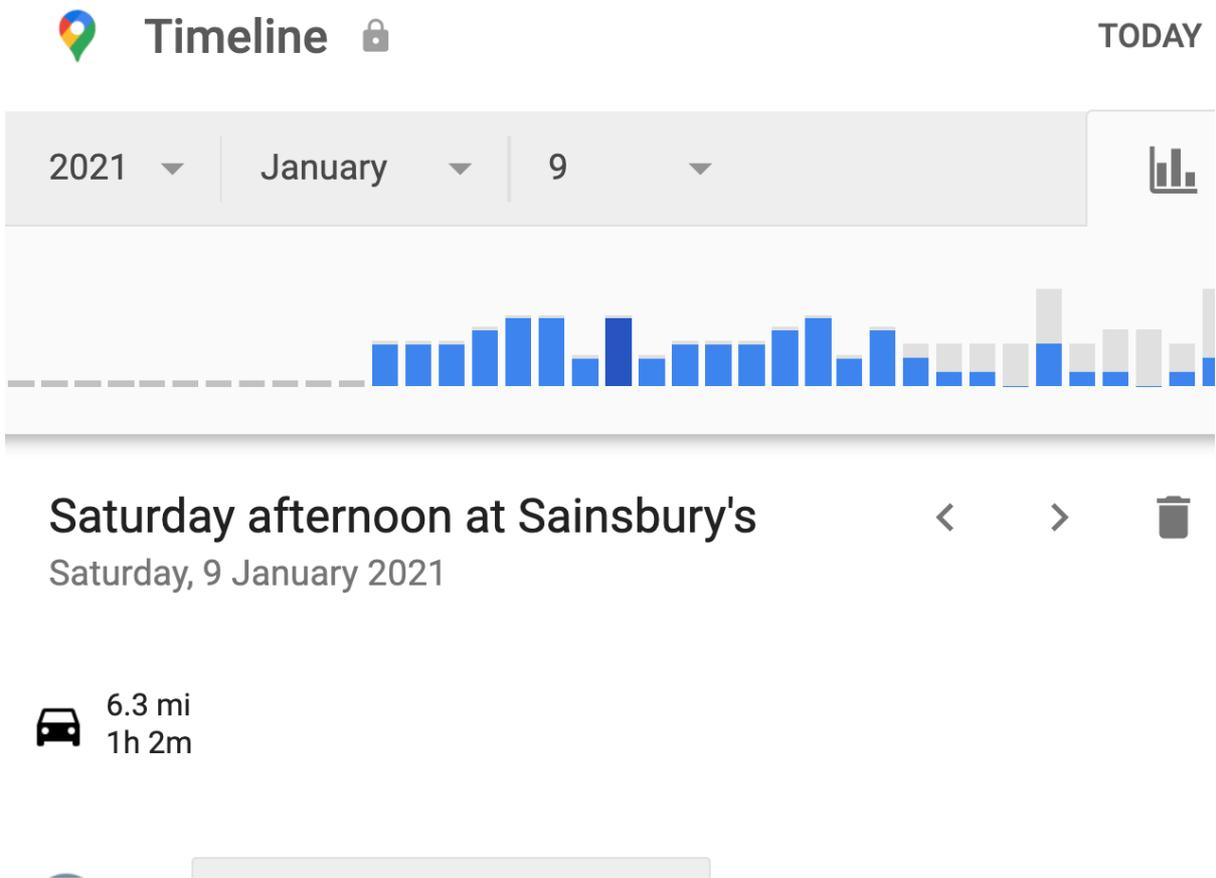
Google Maps Timeline

Figure 1



Your January visits
2 cities 22 places

Figure 2



Currently throughout the UK we are in lockdown. In Scotland we are not allowed to travel more than five miles from our house and unless it is necessary not travel outside our local authority boundaries.

Yesterday, on the 5th February 2021, I received an email from Google Maps Timeline informing me about the places I have been to over the month of January. The email included the number of miles I had walked (6 miles) I had taken and the number of miles in the car (88 miles).

My first thoughts were ... I have certainly walked more than that! I know at times the step counter is not live on my mobile. My second reaction was if I had strayed more than five miles from my boundary, would 'big brother' have arrived at my door? And I have not travelled to 2 cities! I certainly have not travelled to two cities rather I live near the border of two local authorities (figure 1). The places I visited were noted excitingly as various parks, supermarkets ranging from the cheaper ones as in Lidl to the more expensive Waitrose (which is part of the John Lewis group). Sadly I seem to have spent the most time in one afternoon at another supermarket (figure 2).

I had signed up unintentionally, for Google maps timeline. To be honest, I thought I was just signing up for an app that showed my location; so I could look for restaurants that deliver; or special offers, such as buying air fryers than can be delivered. I certainly never expected to receive an email that informed me that *'This Timeline email is an automated summary of places you've been, which may be fewer this month due to the [COVID-19](#) response in your area.'* I began to wonder what else is being recorded on my phone. I have downloaded a test and trace app to inform me if I have been near anyone with Covid -19 but I chose to download that app.

How many of us really read the notes explaining the applications on our phones or on our computers; I certainly do not. So, my intention for next week is to read articles on digital tracing. Of course an intention is different from an action, but at least I have downloaded a couple of articles, so that is a start.

TITLE: Vignette #22 'From Lockdown to Lockin'

Domain: Family, religious faith

Narrative:

I am one of seven children while my husband is the only child but we have one common trait: we love our shared space. Since Lockdown began almost a year ago, my siblings and I have observed social distancing rules strictly (literally, we are an international bunch!). Thanks to Zoom, Viber, Facebook, we have never been closer; I feel I am joining them at breakfast, lunch and dinner very Saturday when we keep the family ritual of praying together. Led by our eldest sibling, we are reminded of Dad and Mum's words, "*The family that prays together, stays together*" based on Matthew 18:20 "*For where two or three come together, in Jesus's name, there He is among them*". Each of us including our partners join in the ritual that is topped and tailed with social chit chats.

However, today is the first Saturday since 17 March 2020 when I felt an emptiness at prayer time. There was a space on the Zoom screen that I knew would not be filled today both facially and vocally; my other siblings shared the same sentiment. Two of my siblings will not be able to join us physically but we prayed that they would join us in spirit. From being locked down due to COVID-19, my two siblings are now locked in their own homes and in their own country with no way of communicating with the outside world not just because of COVID-19 but also due to man made forces which are as lethal as COVID-19. This doesn't mean our relationship has broken down.

Reflection:

As I reflect on the theme of relationships, I realise that as human beings we are wired to connect to one another since birth and as a family my siblings and I have been connected thanks to technology. The Saturday prayer sessions remind me of my identity and the values my parents instilled in us: respect, acceptance, consideration, appreciation, listening, openness, affection, empathy and love towards one another. I realise how these values also strengthen not only my significant relationships (my husband and friends) but also the professional relationships specifically with my colleagues at work, my neighbours and acquaintances including likeminded travellers on the Lifewide Learning Research & Development journey.

These values are so important nowadays when I am remote working and I am aware of how easily I get annoyed when others go off track and start talking about how many loo rolls they bought over the weekend. Perhaps, I need to apply these values to myself first. There's one person who I am closer to than anyone else, a human being who I spend every moment of my life with: myself. I am reminded by Matthew 7:12 "*Do unto others as you would have them do unto you*", which means I practice those values on myself and strengthen the relationship with myself before I can strengthen other relationships. Being connected also means being wired spiritually and as in the case of my two siblings, I have a strong sense that faith in God our Creator's greatness and hope that His interventions will open the channels of communication will lead us to the freedom to pray and reflect as a family as we used to with our parents.

I have discovered that I don't value myself enough to have strong relationships with others. The Bible is my source of solace and the Saturday prayer times strengthen my relationship with my siblings as we discuss the readings and reflect on how we practice the Lord's words.



V1 Identity and Work

Domain – Work, Family, Friends, Virtual World

Monday, February 1: Feeling lots of work pressure like I'm behind and can't get caught up, and I dreamed when I entered a room with a screaming child and looked inside her mouth, I saw a snarling wolf. I awoke with a clear understanding that I needed to move my inside rambling thoughts into a more conscious process. Noticing an internal dialog not related to the present, I stopped and let myself follow my breath in and out until my head space was back in tune with my present moment. This rumble in the jungle inside my head often repeats "lack of" stories and whining about "I can't do this."

Tuesday, February 2: During my annual review, I realized that my chair's decision to not write a letter of support for a university service award I had applied for, was his decision – his statement "I thought it was a conflict of interest to support two faculty from the same department" simmered inside my body for 24 hours only to explode on Wednesday morning as chaotic confusion, hurt feelings (remembering the baby crying dream), and anger.

Wednesday, February 3: Realized I needed to contact a "circle of friends" colleague for support and guidance. After listening to the tale, she asked me pointed questions which surfaced a greater understanding, but she also encouraged me to not reject any emotions, just watch when the moment or feeling changed. Then, crying as I told this tale to my partner, he responded "same thing happened to me" last year, which I did not even know. His calm reflection on the moment released me from the pain and anger. I realized it was time to step back and let go. We went for a drive, bought groceries, I made dinner, during which time I noticed calmness had returned. After dinner, sent a two-sentence email to the chair of the awards committee (copying my chair) acknowledging their support and notified them I would try again next year. No head screaming just noticing how my feelings moved throughout the day with gratefulness to family, friends, and colleagues.

Thursday, February 4: I woke with energy, ready to tackle the day. While I was checking things off the to-do list without hesitation or voices in my head, the phone rings, and it was my mandala mentor Susanne Fincher <http://www.creatingmandalas.com/index.html> calling to ask me to do a workshop in March (which will be a Zoom event). Spirits and energy moving, more work is accomplished, connected with a junior faculty wanting to involve me in another arts and healing project which now seems like a possibility not a burden.

Reflection: Context for learning – paying attention to dreams is an important aspect of my artist self. I try to journal these thoughts collecting images/connections/the flow of the moment, as I go. I pay attention to where the dream may emerge and what connection might be happening in the present moment. I want to honor the many sources of understanding and creativity that occur in my dreams. My motivation for this type of learning emerged during graduate school. I found I had persistence to tackle hard tasks if I allowed myself the 'benefit of the doubt' and adopted a 'I think I can' attitude while telling the nagging whining child in my head to stand down. Not learning to read till later in grade school, having to take exams with extended time, finding math not to be my language, all this puts doubts and thoughts of failure in my mind, but persistence furthers, a can-do attitude helps, and a belief in creative living fostered by a love of the language of art and design keeps me in the moment – still learning, still trying, honoring each emotion (with gentle reminders from supportive friends), being braver about sharing how I feel with my partner, and remembering to breath.

Vignette 24

Domain: Friendship

Title: The Comedy that Connects Us

Narrative

This morning I had my weekly 'yarn' with my wonderful New Zealand friend: Gill. A 'yarn', so I am informed by Kiwi folk, is a chat or catch-up between friends about nothing in particular – importantly, you can only 'yarn' with friends! I usually phone around 8:00 am UK time, which means that Gill, being nine hours ahead, has to endure my voice for pretty much an hour before going to bed. I describe Gill as my NZ Mum! She is a remarkable woman of eighty-nine years, with a wicked sense of humour, so much of our yarning involves lots of laughter, sometimes resulting in fits of giggles. Sadly, Gill has recently had to cope with several small strokes, which has drained her both physically and mentally, but I am delighted to say that her sharp wit has not been dampened.



Today's yarn turned to the topic of her speech therapy. I did say that Gill was remarkable; her stoicism means that she has reduced her weekly half-an-hour speech therapy sessions down from four to one. Now, how does this rather sombre and sobering situation relate to anything funny you may ask? Well, let me recount...

Gill explained that her sessions require 'fierce concentration'. Different images flash on screen, and Gill is required to say out loud what she sees, in a sentence. This exercise is to help her to recall words, so that to be frank, they don't become lost to her. This does sound serious – not funny at all! Well, a picture of a blackbird appeared prompting Gill to describe this feathery creature:

"If I could see, (Gill's eye-sight isn't what it used to be) AND I had a gun – I would shoot it!"

This really made me laugh, picturing the speech therapist shocked that such harsh, indeed violent words, could be uttered by a lovely old lady! Gill felt obliged to explain to her therapist that the far from melodic CAW of crows tormented her morning till dusk in her apartment. I imagine that Sir Paul McCartney has never met, or more importantly heard, a New Zealand Blackbird!

A Summary Reflection:

For me, in simple terms, learning is about making links; the more links we can make – the deeper the learning. Deep, conceptual understanding requires a myriad of connections. If we agree with the seminal thinking of Lev Vygotsky, that learning is a social process, then may I suggest that a shared sense of humour might make the learning experience more social! If comedy has the power to connect us, then perhaps a good laugh may facilitate learning. Gill has almost nine decades of life experiences to share – our yarns are always informative; I am constantly learning from her often funny anecdotes: her words of wisdom; we always laugh and learn together.

When listening to this, I'll always chuckle and think of Gill with her imaginary gun! 'Sorry Paul!'

Paul McCartney & Wings - Blackbird (Acoustic Live) - Rock Show Live Wings Over America Tour 1976

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5mJYYVM-nj4>

Vignette #25 Its what it is

Hi all, I'm a mum to a 4 month baby and 5.5 boy... I will most likely going to be drawing learning from my home experiences and parenting interactions -these will soon involve home schooling; couldn't locate a dreaded emoji 😬-

My choice is not only because this is the most intimate of my here and now experiences but I also feel that it is a very hot topic that a lot of parents hold shame for – it is my passion to share my vulnerability and reflect on what learning i am deriving from it-

This vignette is about some reflections inspired by a phrase I have recently come across “ **how is the problem perfect for you**” ; What a radically powerful phrase that has been! It led to tangible changes and deeper learning in my here and now daily experience-ing.

Let me give some context/background. I have been experiencing a great difficulty in aspects of my/our parenting. There were lots of moments of inner friction and struggle since the first lockdown which were becoming the dominant narrative in our household. This came to its head when even the daily routine tasks were becoming a huge mountain for my son, and- admittedly – myself. I was becoming a company I wasn't enjoying.

My energy to engage in creative play and imaginary role play – in my attempts to try and find ways to be collaborative and spark his curiosity/motivation – were coming to a standstill. I heard this phrase at time of a great personal struggle combined with endured deprivation of sleep. This was it.

The push I needed . Leonard Cohen describes it beautifully in his song “Anthem” when he says “ there is the crack in everything; that s how the light gets in”.

I needed to take radical responsibility, withstand the humility in facing my parenting style and re-consider, re-view, re-evaluate it. Something clearly was not working. Our interactions involved -if not often relied- upon a need to perform a command- follow approach and with very strict -perhaps at times rigid- boundaries. I had many a time become the commander -rather than an ally, a fellow traveller, a respectful listener. What a twist for a trained psychotherapist who has been trained in the person centred approach.

I begun the search and came across the PET training. I enrolled in a course group without further hesitation. We have been meeting for the past three weeks. The transformation in our family household has been phenomenal in a space of these three weeks.

There are other environmental factors influencing this change eg my son's school teacher changed, his support through play therapy as well as the prospect he might be needing extra support for his learning needs. Isn't it interesting I sought the solution outside of me, to start with ? I feel a slight embarrassment that my first go to solution was a play therapist. As if the problem was solely located within my child. What changed ? Me.

The moment I heard this phrase, I was reminded that I have a choice at ALL times ;

That I am not defined by my experiences. In any given moment I can choose to shape my reality. It felt very powerful in the moment and it blasted me open to the prospect of possibilities and hope. I found myself asking questions like “ could I fully

embody this principle in my daily life at the moment ? What would I need to equip myself with in order to do this whilst i am continuously sleep deprived ? A theme I notice that existed in all those daily moments was this: Firstly ,yes I can. The theme was that of letting go and dropping into a deep compassion for myself. Letting go of the need to control. Surrender control and Choose peace over struggle . This short statement gave me profound permission (which is all at times we need) to adjust my circumstances and request from people around me what I need and not need to feel helped sometimes. This learning experience became yet another tangible proof that every moment Of every problem IS indeed a portal. Learning and realisations were accelerated thanks to connections with other parents who struggled similarly, a group of listening ears, reading and enhancing my own understanding about the options i have in responding to his needs differently. Given that there is an awful lot of pressure on me and my youngest at the minute, i have found solace in “the little moments” in my life.... From a mindfulness perspective these are the moments that i re-connect with “presence” rather than a narrative in my own mind.

For eg... his little hands on mine.... His gaze as he s looking at me
The feel of my eldest boy’s curly hair among my fingerprints as im settling him to bed
The smell of a self care nourishing hand-crème as a daily ritual
The sound of baby lullaby in the living room
The rays of sunshine on my face when I am having my morning coffee...and so many more

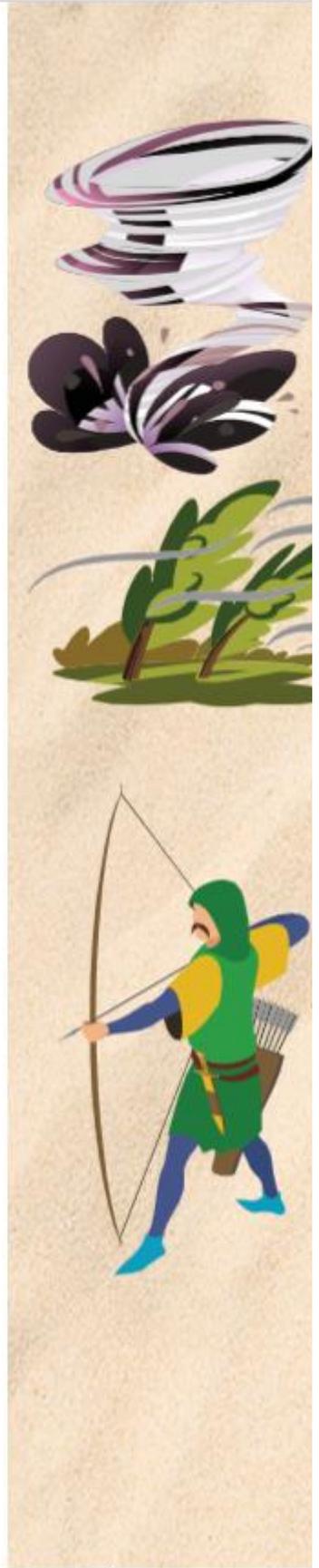
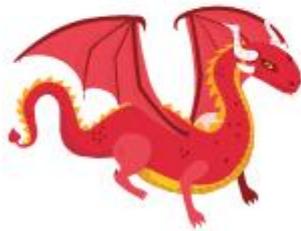
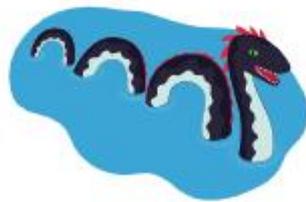
Below i offer some pictures which are capturing some of the feelings experienced through this process.

Ps I am very aware that this vignette is far from compete, tidy or neat... whilst being in physical pain, with a crying baby in the background and preparing for another settling day - it is the most i can do given my circumstances- and it is precisely why i am posting it ,as it is. Another yet surrendering to imperfection. What liberation!

[Free Online Sand Tray by Dr Karen Fried](#)

Click on image to add

1 2 3 4 5 6 7



Vignette 26: Not Quite Learning Yet



Forth and Clyde Canal: A space to walk and participate in an international learning community

Vignette 01

This week was full of interconnected learning incentives (Lernanlässen). The discussion around life domains, and the struggle to create clear margins but also the phrase 'thrilled chaos' that came up in Holly's domain map inspired me to write the following poem:

<https://acdevadventures.blog/2021/02/03/life-domains/>. Incidentally this week also featured the monthly [#SoTLwalk](#) and Natasha Taylor (whose brainchild this walk is) posted the challenge to think about higher education as forced march versus playful adventure which again linked to domains and the changed spaces during the pandemic. And just to top all of this up Time Higher Education features an article that calls for a rethink of physical versus digital campus. So all in all this week continued with the topic of domains and spaces.

Needless to say the continued lockdown kept connectedness and our interactions within and with spaces in my mind, and the image of our physical campus as an anchor, a core to which we all tethered emerged. I feel like a satellite connected by invisible but powerful forces, yet moving within my own space, and so are my colleagues. The invisible threads keep us connect across the globe, in a community bound by our interests, research, activities, professions.

Reflection

When digging deeper I think at the core of this week's learning is the negotiation of identities and professional identities. The spaces we inhabit, and how we move between them. It is also influenced by the dissolving of boundaries in these spaces and people struggling to reinforce boundaries. It makes me wonder how necessary these boundaries are. Do we truly need to disconnect from thinking about work to relax for instance? Do we leave our digital devices offline or even behind on a break or during the weekend, because all the other spaces are now within these devices. From students texting via MS Teams, to colleagues of Twitter reminding us not to forget a deadline. At the moment my thinking and learning from this week is still too disjointed to make heads or tails off.



Home office: A space to participate in an international learning community, work, meet friends, sewing room, craft and art studio

Vignette 27 Learning Anecdotes. Paul Thomas. February 6th 2021

Title: Re-learning the value of my own ideas about integration.

Domain: Work. With overspill into the other three domains – Home, Friends and Children.

Narrative: I have been working for decades on the theory and practice of community-oriented integrated care – integrated working for health and care that comes together in local geographic areas. It is a form of local participatory democracy where collaboration is more dominant than competition. Whenever I led initiatives, they had good results, but the underpinning principles/theory seemed very difficult for others to understand and work with. I had thought that this was simply because they were too unfamiliar and I continued to advocate for the ideas, hoping that they would in time become understood. A series of recent personal stresses plus the state of international politics had led me to consider that the ideas and my pursuing them may be unrealistic even though they seem to me to be exactly what is needed in a post-COVID world. This self-doubt was worsened when a paper I authored describing the approach was rejected by a journal dedicated to exactly these issues – integrated care. So I was thinking seriously about abandoning my efforts. I had come to believe that although they made sense to me they did not make sense to others and I was wasting my time and energy by attempting to disseminate the ideas.

For another reason, I rang a friend who has been a senior policy-maker in areas that touch on integrated working. He mentioned that he had shown my rejected paper to someone from a think-tank who had liked it a lot and wanted to refer to it. This caused a quick change in my understanding of my own situation. I replaced my belief that the ideas are too difficult for others to use with the belief that my own energies are too low to personally pursue an attempt to disseminate them. So I learned a new way to interpret my feelings that is now leading to a different strategy for action – more supporting others to work with the ideas and less moving them forwards myself.

Reflections: I doubt I would have re-learned the potential acceptability of the ideas I stand for to others if the person I was speaking to had not been so experienced as a policy-maker and if he had not had positive feedback from someone from a think-tank dedicated to pursuing these kind of ideas. Even if I had retained a belief in the practicality of the ideas it is likely that I would have considered them to be coming at the wrong time in history or there was no practical way for me to move them forwards. Refocusing attention on my low energy as the obstacle to progress has allowed me to consider a new strategy where I support others to work with the ideas. It has also had a knock-on learning in other parts of my life, recognising that low energy is also reducing my performance in other domains.



Vignette 28 : Learning a new piano piece: Chopin: Etude in E minor

Primary Domains: Homelife, Creative Life (also Mindlife and Connected Life!)

Narrative: I have written previously about how I play the piano that sits in our front room on most days. In these somewhat dark, depressing, dangerous times I find myself drawn increasingly to it during these isolated, lockdown days.

I've always played the piano, but in a busy life and work schedule it hasn't been a priority. I usually play it when I'm tussling with a particularly knotty work-based problem. When I'm stuck, simply fed-up, or just need a break, I'll cross the hallway from my office to the room with the piano and play for 10, 20, maybe 30 minutes. I might choose to run through one or two of the classical pieces I've learned to play reasonably well over the years. Or I might choose a jazz or popular standard that I've picked up by ear, which involves a bit of improvisation in that sense of working relatively loosely within a recognised framework. I never play the same tune in exactly same way: but then, who does?

But now, it's different. Playing the piano is now a solace, a comfort, a means to lose myself deeply in something for a while. So, usually, I just sit on the piano stool, breathe and sit quite still for a few moments, then place my hands over the keys. And I wait to see what happens. I have no idea of what is going to happen before it takes place. Something stirs. Something starts. A note or a chord is played. And off I go. Or off 'it' goes, because I feel I'm not in conscious control of my fingers. I am, of course, but it doesn't feel that way. Sometimes I close my eyes and let my hands wander where they will. Playing the piano has been a constant in my life for over sixty years, and as the notes flow – or not – my mind either focuses, zen-like, on the present moment or connects me to my past, present and future.

But, much as I enjoy playing the piano, I had to admit I was getting a bit bored playing the same old pieces. So I set out to learn some new pieces.

I've always loved Chopin, and the sad Etude in E minor suited my general mood around lockdown, the disaster of Covid and the general feeling of frustration and sadness at what was happening in the world around me. Now, while my piano technique is pretty good, my sight-reading is appalling! A consequence of having a very good ear and memory. Ever since I started learning the piano at a young age, all I had to do was hear the piece that my piano teacher had chosen for me to play and I sort of got it. As a result I've always read music much like a young child learns to read and say words by identifying the phonics. It's rather slow and laborious. But once I can sort of see where it's going, my fingers tend to follow. I've always been supremely jealous of those pianists who could pick up a piece of complicated music for the first time and play it as if they had been playing it for years.

The Chopin looks and sounds simple – as well as being a lovely piece of music. So I thought it ought to be pretty straightforward to learn. The melody is a flowing line of single notes in the right hand, and the accompaniment is a soft, flowing, rhythmical eighth chords to the bar, mainly in groups of four, that modulates gradually up and down.

I already had the melody in my head from hearing it played before, so I thought it would be relatively straightforward. But I struggled, and – at first - couldn't work out why I was having such trouble 'getting it'.

Then I realized what it was.

The gradual shifts in the left hand are incredibly subtle and, in many cases, not obvious. What my musical memory and fingers were 'thinking' ought to be played, often turned out to be wrong, and I had to look very carefully at what was written on the page. But my sight-reading is appalling! So I found myself continually stumbling and stuttering through what I knew should be a perfectly formed, ineffably sad and moving piece of music.

I remembered what my childhood piano teacher told me. When you've made a particular mistake you have a choice: either stop there and then, and go over it again and again until you've 'got it', or continue through to the end so you don't lose the 'shape' of the piece and then return to the mistakes. I did a bit of both.

I also began to really focus in on the tiny, subtle shifts inside the left-hand chords, and began to really appreciate how those subtle shifts affected the shape and sound of the piece.

After hours of focusing in on those shifts (and really concentrating) I finally was able to play the piece right through from start to finish...and with feeling. Aha, I thought, I've got it! But when I tried to play it again, the odd mistake crept in. I still couldn't trust my fingers, in the way I normally do, to effortlessly lead the way.

Reflection

While I identified the primary domains for this vignette as Homelife and Creativity, I also added Mindlife and Connectedlife. As my illustration of the learning domains in my life demonstrated, there is – particularly currently – great overlap between those domains.

Learning the Etude in E minor was an immensely frustrating but, in the end, also a hugely satisfying endeavour. Yes, I can now play it right through and play it well, but it's still touch and go whether a tiny mistake will creep in. I recall Phil Race's comments about competence being a rather grey area. The idea that one is either competent or not is muddled by whether the display of competence is a one-off (example: a bad driver passing the driving test on the day) or whether one is consistently competent (example: a surgeon).

I would love to be consistently competent, but I've spent too long improvising and playing 'at the edge of chaos' to be able to do that. Not helped by the fact that I often use that ability to just sit down at the piano and let my fingers do the playing to let my mind wander over a particular problem or just wander.

Why also the 'Connectedlife' domain?

- Sitting at the piano connects me to my life for the past 60+ years. The piano has been a constant 'companion' throughout that time.

- I've had the music book in which I found the Etude in E minor since I was about 13 years old. It has a number of pieces that I learnt to play. My piano teacher, Mr. Heron, was a German Jewish musician who had survived the concentration camps. I once caught the glimpse of the tattoo on his arm. When it was time to learn a new piece, he would play two or three pieces to me and let me choose which one I liked. He would then write my name and the date in pencil at the top of the page. Whenever I open that book and that it is a bit like the Proustian 'Madeleine biscuit' moment. I am deeply connected to my past/
- Playing Chopin or any of the great 'masters' connects me to a long and wonderful musical history. Realising that the piece I'm playing has been learned and played by countless people over the centuries...and will continue to be.

What have I learnt about learning?

That while I am, by nature, a 'butterfly' learner, easily diverted. There can be huge benefit and satisfaction in going in deep, really focusing at the micro-level. Discovering the beauty and meaning those tiny, subtle shifts within the overall structure and how they work together to produce a wonderful and moving whole.

Vignette 29: I hated school.

I wasn't able to get to the first Zoom meeting (sorry) so I have been catching up. This first vignette was partly inspired by many of your stories. Thank you.

Domain: Work

My work context

I am now in my 3rd career (lecturer rising to Head of Department level; educational developer ending up as head of a university educational development unit; and freelance consultant working part-time on a range of projects, most recently mentoring candidates for national awards in teaching excellence and supporting moves to online learning and programme assessment). One of my motivations towards this project was the realisation that I had better work out what career 4 will be - my academic career may be approaching its sell-by date. But I have been saying that regularly for the last ten years so who knows ...

My driver – back to school

Starting to think about learning and about my work history as one of my important domains, I realized that my main 'driver', both as tutor and as a developer, was to create experiences for students which were as far away as possible from my own experiences of school (virtually all of them) and university (some of them).

In particular, I hated school. I found strategies to get by – luckily I was bright enough to do all the work pretty well and that, plus a combination of determined compliance and willingness to do tasks/jobs when asked, gave me credibility with the teachers. My sense of humour and willingness to help other pupils (without having to be asked!) earned acceptance in my peer group. So I did learn the importance of communication, audience and context.

But my dominant learning was how learning is depleted and diminished by a context of:

- control by punishment. (I only 'got the belt' once – corporal punishment still ruled).
- learning as memorization.
- assessment as regurgitation.
- curiosity as discouraged.

I could go on!

I am really struggling to surface any memory of class sessions which provided really positive learning with lasting impact. Most memories represent different degrees of boredom and/or anxiety: the science teacher entering the class on the first day and blowing the dust off his folder of notes; the gym teacher with an approach spookily close to the one in the film of 'Kes', based on the wonderful book by Barry Hines; and the head teacher who tried to persuade me to study a 'real subject' instead of my chosen course – Psychology.

My undergraduate experience was much happier but still added more bullet points:

- Rigid compartmentalization of knowledge
- Ignoring students' previous (or even current) experience
- Relevance and application of theory neglected.

My career has been a series of attempts to create the opposites to all these bullet points and I started by finding a more sympathetic institutional context: an interdisciplinary department in a Polytechnic. My previous poor experience gave me the incentive to look for new 'better' ways of organizing teaching. And I am still looking.

Vignette #30 Patched

At dinner on Thursday my daughter claimed her mother had "patched her", I am sure that didn't happen, but I let it run. My wife "what are you talking about".

My Daughter "Dad, you know what I am talking about."

Me "I know what patch means if that is what you are asking. "I know because my daughter told me a few months ago that it is to ignore someone, so when you see someone has read the message, they don't reply. It was useful because I read a book called "The Young Team" about Greater Glasgow gangs. The Scottish poet Jackie Kay had recommended Shuggie Bain by Douglas Stuart some time over the summer and decided I wanted to read a few new Scottish voices, so I bought "The Young Team" by Graeme Armstrong, "Mayflies" by the ever-reliable Andrew O'Hagan to go with it.

"The Young Team" is written phonetically in Scots, as someone from the West Highlands it is not easy for me to read. I identified more with O'Hagan and his 1980's coming of age and going to Manchester to see bands as a teenager because I am that age I liked those bands and I did hitch from the West Highlands to Manchester to see bands. It was also written in English, so much easier to read. However, when I tuned into "The Young Team", I started to hear the voice and then someone "got patched". Somehow it helped me enjoy the book.

After I left home and went to work, I lived in a social housing estate described in the book and desperately avoided the gangs of lads that hung out on corners. Not always, I had some trouble, at the time I was living with a "local lassie" (a different life before I met my wife), and so people knew about me. I hadn't thought about it much till I read "The Young Team", actually, I hadn't thought about it till I wrote this vignette. There is something about working-class literature, three white male voices (albeit one queer literary voice, but still), all coming of age. We demand the voices are authentic, they need to establish their legitimacy as people who can speak for and from the people they write about. However, I cannot help feel that it is not the writers I worry about- it is the readers. These books are not being consumed by the people who they are about - nothing like it.

I tune back into the dinner table, my daughter explains to my wife (again and wondering why she didn't listen last time) what it means to patch, and I realise I missed something.

I ask "can you patch someone in person",

I cannot remember who says but the the kids look at me, and one says "of course, it's when a grown-up ignores what have said". "It's a Scottish expression, dad," says my son. "So just what happened here then," I ask, "tha sin ceart," says my daughter, and I reply "Ceart gu leor, sin agad e". My wife gives me a look that says stop showing off. Then my daughter asks if I was really wearing an old Run DMC T-shirt under my shirt at work today. It was cold in my office, and I kept it buttoned up so none of my clients would see it anyway.

Vignette #31 Survival of the friendliest

This week has seen a flurry of communications in a variety of contexts where I have been challenged in a range of areas, but particularly in my professional domain where there is a merge of my doctorate studies and my consultancy role. As a freelance consultant, building a network, sustaining, and developing relationships is key, and I have learned that these communities relating to my work have a significant influence on my motivation and subsequent productivity. Investing in developing relationships therefore is an increasing priority for me, one which I greatly enjoy and appreciate.

Meetings this week have taken me across the globe as well as across Yorkshire. I have talked with people with whom I have never met before as well as those with whom I work alongside regularly. Most of the conversations this week have been encouraging, organic and are likely to lead to professional adventures that excite me but one of them will probably result in no further engagements. Some of the conversations this week have meant juggling the joys of group zoom collaborations whilst others have been a duet on the phone – can you imagine!!! – with no face or shared screens. Some conversations were necessarily solution focused on a tight deadline while others were more explorative and reflective, looking for links, uncovering opportunities and identifying shared values. Language, culture and time zones have varied across the calls as have expectations and experiences. Communications this week have left me filled with energy whilst at the same time a sense of exhaustion from the agility required to communicate effectively across such a broad range of contexts with different ‘levels’ of relationships.

On my domains map, I have tracked ‘expected and unexpected’ as a theme of my world. On Sunday evening last week, my diary for the coming week was relatively clear and I had planned to complete a task that has been on the ‘to do’ list for quiet some time! As the week progressed however, new opportunities arose and invitations to collaborate evolved. This was both unexpected (relating to individual events) and expected (my diary has its own theme tune of unpredictability).

My focused reflection on a webinar I attended on Tuesday brings together my consciousness of the extent of my conversations during the week and the value I place on my ongoing collaborative efforts. As part of an ongoing project ‘United by Compassion’, during ‘[Dirt is Good](#)’ on Tuesday we were introduced to the notion of ‘[Survival of the Friendliest](#)’. This is proposed by Brian Hare and Vanessa Woods in their book with the same title. They suggest that Darwin is often misinterpreted and that ‘fittest’ is more about pro-social and collaborative endeavours. They quote Darwin, ‘...for those communities, which included the greatest number of the most sympathetic members, would flourish best, and bear the greatest number of offspring.’ Hare and Woods explain that winning strategies in nature are to increase friendliness, forming new co-operations that boost the sense of being part of a community. This attention to collaboration was further fuelled by a provocative article in the Harvard Business Review ‘[Collaborative Overload](#)’ which discusses the need to distribute work more evenly (difficult in my case as a sole trader!) whilst incentivising people to collaborate more efficiently. To add further provocation, I also uncovered this morning a [report from the University of Cambridge](#) that promoted the need to teach children empathy as it ‘measurably improves their creative abilities’. Of course, to be able to develop empathy, one needs to be in a range of relationships and environments with differing levels of complexity.

So my learning this week is a confirmation that efforts to consciously value opportunities to collaborate are essential. But there is an additional need to think increasingly critically about interactions, behaviours and outcomes during collaborative activities, reflecting on the effects of my communications and learning from the communication strategies of others. In an increasingly complex world, there is therefore a greater chance that my ‘friendliness’ will bring success – in all its forms. ‘Survive’ feels about right at the moment, but in time, I’d like to think ‘thrive’!



VIGNETTE 32 “The cloud”

DOMAIN: EDUCATION/LEADING CHILDREN; LEADING TEACHERS

NARRATIVE



In my role as head of an early years centre, I always get involved in classroom activity; I also help with children that need some timeout and one to one reflection. A 4-year-old child that has a poor routine at home, and less rules than needed, tends to have problems with self-regulation. In this case, the teacher took him out, after he had destroyed other children’s work, scream, and jump over a table; So I started a conversation with him, very calmly and holding his hands, and reflecting with empathy, with comments such as “ I know sometimes its difficult to keep up with things that you sometimes don’t want to do, “ or “ sometimes you feel tired but you may also feel the need of moving or running, when we are all sitting”, etc. I came up with the idea of telling him to watch the sky, and see the clouds that were moving slowly and peacefully. I said “you can imagine that you are a cloud, and you can move very lightly and peacefully, so we can join your friends in the classroom again, when you are ready. Maybe that can help you!; let’s try it!”. He engaged easily with the game and started to move almost like floating, as the clouds; and seemed to enjoy being able to control himself. He went back to his class, walking as a cloud, and could manage to play and engage with the rest of the activities of the day, clearly in control of himself. So, helping him visualize himself as something that would help him manage and enhance his self control, actually gave him a positive vision of himself and his ability to share with others positively. The image helped him organise the idea and words around it, not only as a powerful reminder, but as a powerful way of canalizing his activity.

REFLECTION

The effect (education is science and art, and sometimes you may come up with successful ideas to help children grow, that combine intuition, knowledge, theories, love...), was something that reminded me of Kieran Egan, imaginative education and the power of images and metaphors. Something that I normally use in my lectures with student teachers, and with children in planned activities. This made me think and connect with other areas of my life wide learning and noticed that an image was such an inspiration for a child, that made him see himself differently, and regulate himself, in order to enjoy and make the best of his day, that I wanted to use this to inspire the beginning of the year for my teachers. I normally start the year (in Chile the school year begins in march), with an inspiring team building and personal development activity; specially this year after the covid restrictions we had. So due to the “cloud” experience with my tiny student, I am designing a starting activity with the teachers, and inviting them to think of an image with which they want to relate, regarding their teaching in this coming year. It would be inviting them to think: “what image do you think could represent who you are to your children? To your team? As an example I will retell the story of the “cloud”, and suggest images of animals (the lion), artifacts (an arrow, a vas,) or others. It would be nice to have that image during the year, reminding me who I am for my students.

I may also use it with my first-year student teachers in the eerily years teaching programme, to find an image of what a teacher is...of what they want to become for their students...

And again an image or metaphor proves to be powerful and meaningful. In my case connecting areas is one of my goals, so using this experience as a team leader and as a lecturer, makes me love reflecting and noticing what is happening in the different contexts I sail upon.

DOMAIN: HOME AND GARDEN
NARRATIVE 33

TITLE: Learning through Gardening during a Global Pandemic



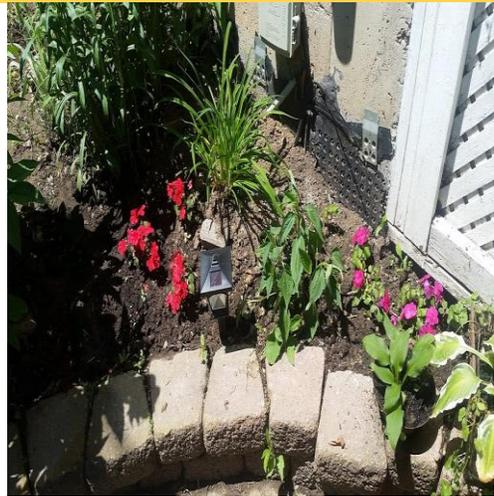
I chided myself for my behaviour and thoughts during the very first few weeks of the pandemic and lockdown here in Ontario. The television is not something that is turned on a lot in my home. I was wondering why they (the leaders), were making such a big "fuss" about a flu. I spent the first week glued to the TV and sponging all the bits of news coming through. However, once Spring rolled around I got lost in preparing flowers beds in the gardens around the house and planning little cozy corners in the backyard. I continued to be optimistic that 'this too shall pass' and we would have a great summer. My son from Vancouver decided to come and stay with me to see me through "the Covid", as the kids were referring to it. He ended up staying six months and assisting with many household chores and cooking gourmet meals. I did not think of all the restrictions too much once I was absorbed with the fancy meals, the clean ups, my gardening and my frequent drives through wine country with my partner.

Learning came in many different ways. We experimented with organically grown vegetables, lettuce and peppers. It took a lot of planning, nurturing, ruminating overnight about watering and daily attention. These activities aligned quite nicely to curriculum planning I thought. Using the garden metaphor, when planning new courses in a program, there is so much ruminating that happens. Then the right soil must be determined for growth – paralleling to the right Course Learning Outcomes, the framework for the course before attending to the sub sections and lesson planning. I determined where the garden boxes should be located, taking into consideration the sunlight, the special layout, what type of soil was needed for the best yield, and the esthetics. This parallels to where content pieces should be placed in the sessions during a semester to promote learning sequentially, or maybe juxtaposed for awakenings, or thrown into the deep end and gradually brought back to safety (depending on the audience analysis). Seamlessly, gardening and curriculum occupied most of my thoughts. But then there are the flowers and cozy corners for respite during a hot summer's day. Without regular family and friends visits I got to enjoy many moments of solitude pondering life's many joys, pathways, circumstances, anomalies, and beauty. I became a good cloud jumper by days and a star gazer at nights. There was beauty everywhere, if only we can find them. And then, my grand daughters came to visit and lighted up my life with waves of joy. It is funny how a simple smile and a gentle touch or a clunky bear hug can do wonders for the soul.

Towards the end of the summer, as friends seem to start moving about I had a few porch visits. I got a lovely rug, some potted plants, a few vases, Italian Glass Demijohn in baskets and created an oasis for drop in visitors. This area accommodated social distancing and well-deserved laughter and occasionally some food. There are many lessons learned during this time. Family and close friends have bonds that transcend time and place; having a choice of who you invite into your inner circle has its privileges; not seeing my children and grandchildren causes me a lot of grief; working for sweat can be pleasurable; and having an abundance of alone time is a treasured pastime.



Stems of tomatoes in different shapes that I can use to explain types of "sequencing" in curriculum design.



Vignette 34 Paradise lost

Domain: Travel

Narrative: My wife and I have worked in the Middle East for many years and on retirement we decided to come to Zanzibar to start of an extended 8 month holiday. After three months, due to Covid, we are still here and really not all that keen to depart. Please don't feel sorry for us. This is the view from our balcony. To spend any time on Zanzibar is special. It is a beautiful tropical island, relatively untouched. However, as with most exotic places, it is becoming increasingly popular with tourists. This is a double edged sword for the locals.



Living in our resort for an extended period has given us a totally different perspective to life in a tourist haven. Zanzibar is almost 100% Muslim among the locals and accordingly there are signs at the departure gates for most resorts alerting tourists to dress appropriately. However, if you go down to the beach, there are young tourists in minimal pieces of clothing. What effect is this having on the thoughts of the young local boys playing soccer in the same area.

Most of the holiday makers at our resort come for about a week and are on all-inclusive packages. That is fine but I am disappointed in the half empty plates of food left for the catering staff to throw out when the locals spend most of their day doing basic work for very low income. There are also too many

of the post-Christian Europeans who drink more than they should and again this is all observed by the locals.

Where is this taking the next generation of Zanzibaris? They have one foot in their past and the other in suspension as they decide whether to remain faithful to their roots or taste the western honey.

When I look at the local ladies spending most of the day bending over while they tend their seaweed farms, I am thankful for the relatively easy jobs that I had during my career. Is it fair to expect future Zanzibaris to live the same tough life? What is the alternative? Are they better or worse off to improve their standard of living through tourism, knowing that it will expose their children to lifestyles that are not in keeping with local values?

We now live in a global community but what is the associated global culture? Are we collectively being lifted upwards or sliding backwards.

I know we have to move forwards but in doing so, lets make sure we are laying the foundations for the next generation to experience deep joy and not just indulgent pleasure. Let me give you an example. Yesterday, I saw a young couple and their little toddler walking along on the beach in front of our resort. The husband was busy taking countless photos of his wife posing in every different position. The little girl appeared in none of the shots.



Reflection

So, what have I learnt from my extended time here in Zanzibar? In the end, I am only a visitor here. For the locals, it is their home. Most of us are so much more mobile these days, certainly in comparison to earlier generations. As we move around, it is fantastic to take photos and circulate them, but let us respect, not diminish the richness of the local cultures.

Vignette 35

Title: **Coffee**

2 Domain: **Hobbies and Interests**

3 Narrative: My Secret Santa gift this year (from my immediate family) was a Nespresso coffee making machine.

My interest in coffee dates back to when I lived in Chicago in 1979-80. At that time coffee shops, as we are used to them now, were just starting up in the US, as the fashion for these outlets spread from the West Coast. I worked for an independent coffee shop, located in an old, converted 1920s theatre building on the north side of Chicago, known as [The Century Shopping Centre](#). The owners of the shop were pioneers, bringing the idea of up-market coffee shops from their home state of California to the mid-west city. The shop sold coffee, roasted on the premises, varieties of loose tea and all kinds of tea and coffee related merchandise and paraphernalia. The interior of the shop was colourful, shiny and brightly lit and smelt of roasting coffee and scented teas. We served “beverages” from a small counter in front of the gorgeous, [ornate copper and brass Gaggia](#) machine. I became speedy and proficient in making and serving espressos, cappuccinos, lattes, mochas, café au lait etc. We also sold take-out pastries, bought in from the Chinese bakery on a lower floor in the mall.

I believe that my accent was the main reason I was hired as a barista. My English accent appeared instantly to convey to customers that I knew everything there was to know about tea. In reality, when I started to work, I knew very little, other than how to make a pot of “ordinary” i.e. English Breakfast tea.

On my first day of work, I was given 2 books, one about tea, and one about coffee. I read the books from cover to cover. I clearly remember being amazed that I seemed to be able to learn an extensive amount of detail about types and blends of tea, and the characteristics and origins of a range of types and roasts of coffee, in a very short space of time. I haven’t experienced such successful and rapid learning again. I am not good at learning detail. I have to work hard to retain what seems isolated or unrelated information. My knowledge, dating from this time, informs my current choices of ground coffee, or when ordering in a Starbucks, Costa etc. I still have those books as souvenirs. They have moved with me wherever I live, and I will pass them on to my children, if they will have them.

4: **Reflections**

As a new Nespresso machine owner, I have been sampling and choosing from the range of coffees the company sells. I recognise that descriptors of scents and tastes (of wine, perfume, coffee etc.) are merely labels and abstractions that need to be translated into meaningful understanding. By trying different coffees, I am learning what Nespresso’s terminology means for me by terms such as “velvety”, “intense” or “delicate”. I am integrating these meanings with my own coffee taste concepts, initially developed years ago in Chicago. The various blends of different coffees the company offers, different from and in addition to coffees categorised by their origin alone, provide new taste experiences and descriptions, extending my coffee concepts and vocabulary.

When I received my coffee machine on Christmas Day, I realised that coffee must be one of my enduring hobbies, and that others in my family have noticed this about me. My new acquisition prompted me to both gain new learning new, and to reclaim my earlier learning. The learning process also triggered my recall and revisiting, with pleasure, of memories of becoming a barista. Such a gift!

N.B. Apologies for mentioning so many company names, there are many more coffee machines and coffee shops available on the market.

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Domain: Self

Narrative:

In reading the materials for this project, I came across this question, along with the guidance that it is a question that every participant should answer for themselves. It prompted me to wonder why it is that I have chosen to get involved, at a time when it sometimes it feels like I am already juggling about as much as I can manage... and “overwhelm” is always a very real possibility.

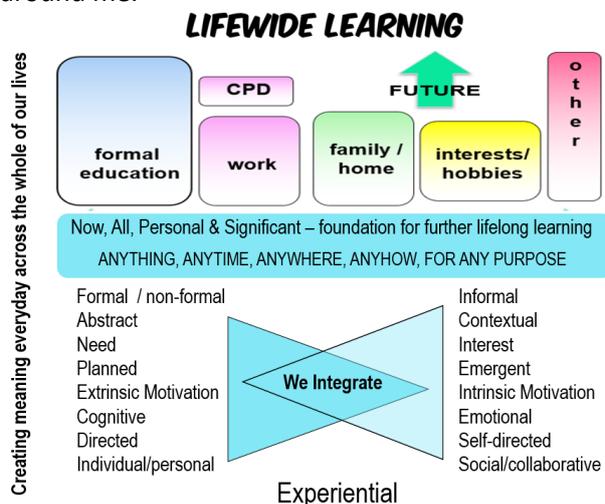
Reflections:

Firstly, I think there is something for me around the fact that current (Covid-19) circumstances have meant that learning & adapting (in almost all of my domains) suddenly feels urgent – it feels (to me) like we really are at a potential turning point, and a lot is at stake (both individually and collectively) in terms of coming through this period and ensuring that we move towards a more positive future... to salvage something good from all of the grief, anger, and anxiety.

But perhaps already I can see some positives... because I also think that the last 11 months has already shown me how much we are capable of enduring – and how much we are capable of learning/adapting, and how quickly.

Secondly, I have realised that writing (for me) is key to understanding things, on a deeper level.... But I struggle to motivate myself to write if it is not for any particular purpose, or it won't be read/shared – I need an extrinsic motivation in order to “do the work” that I know is required, despite having a deeper intrinsic motivation (comparisons with exercise could be drawn here – and why we often need gym classes or personal trainer to keep on track!). So I realise that I am already learning in a way that feels faster and more urgent than ever before... but I need to “write it up” to deepen the learning and help it stick. I also need to use the writing as a reminder (at some point in the future) of what has been learnt, so it doesn't get lost/forgotten as circumstances and situations change.

There is also something about the shared – but vastly different – lived experiences of the pandemic that feels quite unique, and is acting a driver to connect with others? I certainly feel that the majority of my learning at the moment is arising from (or consolidated by) conversations with those around me.



In reading up about the project and coming to write this, I was really struck by this diagram and the idea that experiential learning is about integrating these binaries (formal/informal, planned/emergent etc.)... as I still find myself trying to categorise my learning!

VIGNETTE # 37

WORK

Today I will be using Live Chat with our university students for the first time demonstrating new online ways of connecting an engaging with students. I have learnt how to do this and work with this new piece of technology. I observed my MA Careers Education and Coaching student this week doing her first careers guidance interview and this helps me to refresh my guidance skills but help future career professionals embark on this fascinating career. This is my third student that I have supervised from the MA and this year, I have an international student who is bringing new ideas and a more global perspective. This has helped me to learn about my own guidance skills and the practice of others.

I work with a range of clients from a range of backgrounds as I am also the Careers Consultant for the college that is part of the University so my skills need to adapt constantly, at lunchtime I am doing a mock interview with a students on a traineeships. I have learnt how to build their confidence but I am always pleased about how positive they are and how much they appreciate my help.

The university is considering how we are all going to return to campus post pandemic and I have learnt throughout this time to learn new skills especially technical ones and show I am competent even know it is nerve wracking sometimes and help others who are struggling and learn from others who are not. Just as our students and graduates are having to adapt to a new working world so am I but I am excited by it.

HOME – There is a family moving today from our street. We moved to the North West for my job as I wanted to work in a university which I have not regretted. We have been considering moving back to the North East but I am very undecided and torn about this monumental decision.

FAMILY – I have a husband who I met at university and we do a similar job and try and help each other develop our careers and learn from each other. I have two adult children and a grandchild who is 3. I have learnt how resilient my daughter is as she works in the NHS, but how COVID19 has changed the way she views work as she has had a number of negative experiences and is now looking for jobs elsewhere. I have learnt that my son who lives in the North East two and half hours is an excellent dad but still needs lots of support as he is a single dad. My parents are in their seventies and eighties and my dad cycles over 1000 miles a year and volunteers with the countryside rangers in the New Forest. I am inspired by him and his zest for life. I have witnessed many of my friends take on more caring responsibilities recently and I am going to support my mum after her hip operation at the end of the month. I have learnt a great deal from her as she trained as a Social Worker when I was young and has had a rich and varied life with lots of very interesting friends but I can see her world getting smaller and smaller the older she gets.

HOBBIES – Yoga helps me to relax and unwind literally and learn how to quieten my thoughts walking helps me to learn from my environment and COVID19 has made me appreciate much more my surrounding area and the canals and beautiful countryside that are on my doorstep. COVID 19 has also helped me to appreciate how much I miss going out to restaurants and cafes for a meal, enjoying the atmosphere and the company of others, learning about their lives and experiencing food from all over the world especially in Manchester. I have learnt not to take things for granted anymore.

Vignette 38

Background: For over 10 years the yum cha'ers, a small group of friends, have regularly met for yum cha lunch on Sundays. In addition to our regular lunches we have a tradition to yum cha before and after travel. After travel yum cha includes the giving and receiving of small gifts from the traveller. Birthday dinners at a location decided by the birthday person is another tradition.

Vignette: I ride share with two friends to J's birthday lunch. We're the first at the restaurant, a small Ethiopian eatery with lovely bold colours and artefacts. Directed to our table the three of us sit on one side of the table and remark how we probably look like an interview panel. As the remaining members of yum cha'ers arrive and sit down we swap greetings and study the menu.

The yum cha'ers span four decades. We've shared travelling stories, work angsts, experiences of house buying, house renovations, and the deaths of parents.

We order our food to share.

Today, two less frequent, but loved, members of the yum cha'ers are present. One is a partner, the other a brother (B). It's nice to have them there and hear their views on recent happenings.

I ask the B how his week has been. He's tired from running his brother around for appointments. I notice his brother's jaw clench, he's annoyed by this comment but bites his tongue. I make a mental note to try and influence the seating arrangements next time we meet; space from each other might be welcomed. We carry on talking and the conversation amongst the yum cha'ers swaps back and forth as we celebrate J's birthday.

Reflection: I love the yum cha'ers and our rituals. We are an odd bunch and we work well together.