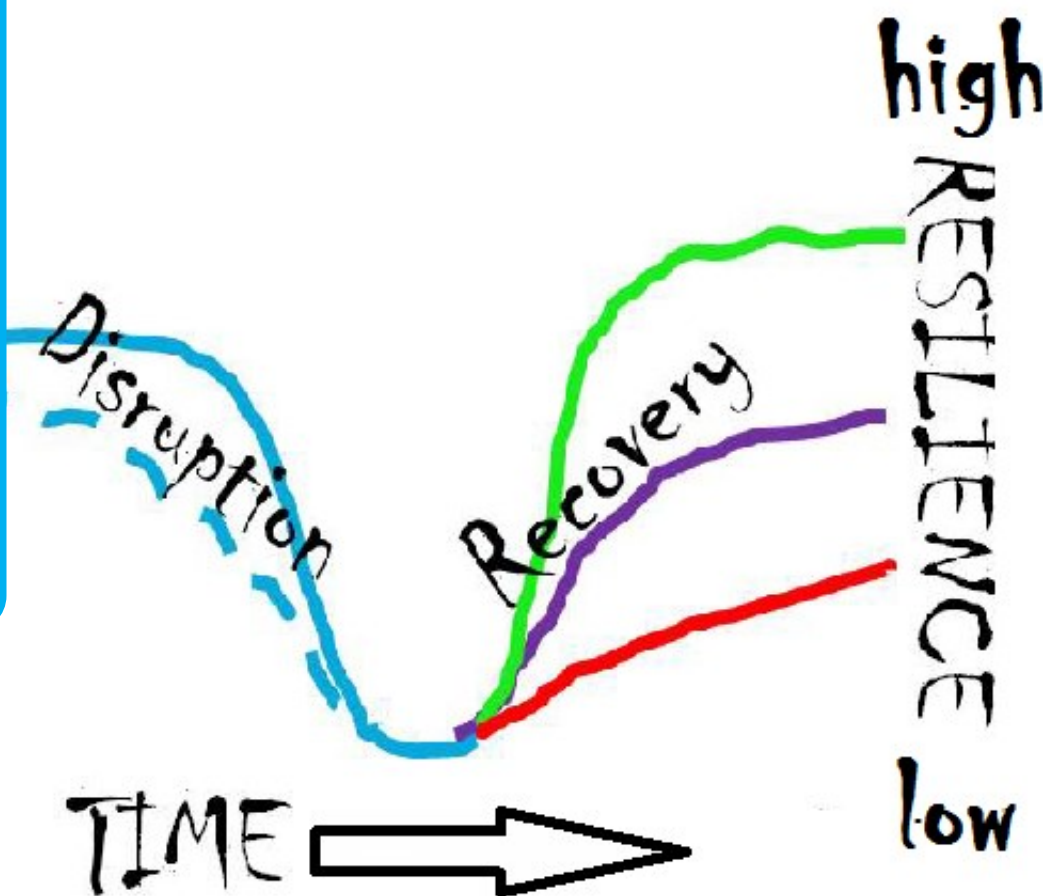




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EXPLORING DISRUPTION AND RESILIENCE IN THE SOCIAL AGE



Guest Editors Jan Gejel & Keith Chandler

Illustrations by Lifeworld Community artist Kibiko Hachiyon

Exploring Disruption & Resilience in the Social Age

Commissioning Editor's Introduction



Regardless of the era we inhabit, people have always been challenged by disruptive life changes: changes that disrupt the patterns, routines and relationships of everyday life and cause us to adapt or create an entirely new life for ourselves and perhaps reinvent ourselves in the process. These profound changes may be forced upon us or they might be chosen because our circumstances dictate that change has to be made.

In my life I have experienced several including: the loss of my first wife to cancer, being made redundant in my early 40's, leaving the UK to work in a culture that was very different to my own and then eight years later leaving that country to start all over again in the UK, changing careers in my early 40's and then being made redundant from a job I liked two years later, and experiencing serious illnesses within the family. Furthermore, we can see similar life-changing disruptions in the lives of our children, our parents, siblings and friends.

Such life-changing disruptions upset or destroy life's routines and may, in some cases, erode or even destroy our identity, our family, our economic viability, our mental and physical wellbeing, our enjoyment and enthusiasm for life. In extreme cases they can make us want to give up on life altogether. Such disruptions breed uncertainty and anxiety and affect our relationships with people who are close to us. They are a test of our character, fortitude and resilience - the process and result of coping with and adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress and disruption. However painful and difficult somehow we have to come to terms with a disrupted life and find a pathway to a different life. There is no turning the clock back: once it has happened we can only move on into a life that is different, mourn our loss and be grateful for what we now have. Our resilience - the qualities, attitudes, capabilities and



learning from experiences that enable us to cope with and eventually grow again, is one of our most important and enduring characteristics for surviving and prospering in a complex and messy world. Perhaps I'm more aware as I get older but it seems to me that there is more disruption in the working lives of family and friends. Perhaps it also has something to do with the speed of communication and the demands that characterise the on-line world of the Social Age (see issue 11). We need to ask ourselves how does the Social Age help us cope with disruption? How does it support our resilience?

Learning to cope with and move through and forward from disruptive change is a lifelong - lifewide challenge. Some people are 'lucky' and they manage to get through most of their lives without serious disruption, but most people encounter disruption in their lives, unfortunately sometimes at a very early age. This issue of the magazine is devoted to exploring some of the dimensions of this complex challenge that is both personal and social. Through the stories of people coping and moving forward from a disrupted life we can appreciate the characteristics of resilience, and consider the ways in which 'education' and other social enterprise including community-based networks and forums can help people who are confounded by such change, to understand and come to terms with it and eventually find new direction and purpose in life.

In commissioning and gathering articles for this issue I was moved by personal stories of suffering, loss, fortitude and resilience. I was also struck by how often the very idea of what learning means is questioned and challenged in the context of disruptive life change. It often comes down to 'learning to be' all over again. Having spent a lifetime learning to be someone, serious disruption can cause us to start learning to be an entirely different person. We often talk about education enabling people to reach their full potential. But what if that potential is taken away from and replaced by a different potential? I am curious to know how our education systems might help develop people so that they are better able to cope with such profound realities and in this respect we are indebted to our two Guest Editors Jan Gejel and Keith Chandler whose ideas provided the inspiration and some of the core content relating to the role of education in this issue. Their work for the Directing Life Change project www.directlifechange.eu funded within the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme provides much food for thought and many practical ideas to address the social issue of forced life change that are relevant to our lifewide learning and education mission.

WELCOME FROM OUR GUEST EDITORS



Jan Gejel is a Senior European Project Manager and an evaluation expert at the European Commission. He is working freelance and for Catalonia working with Europe to create and implement European project in the fields of 21st century learning. Jan has been engaged in European collaboration for 15 years and has designed and managed numerous European projects on lifelong learning, inclusion, life change and capacity building of people, institutions and communities. Over the years he has developed a special interest and capacity in the fields of learning communities and cities, empowerment of excluded youth and adults and how digital games and gamification can innovate 21st century learning strategies. Jan Gejel holds an academic degree in literature and culture analysis from the University of Aarhus, an officer degree from the Danish Air Force (leader education) and a diploma in project management of multimedia project and productions. He is well-known across Europe for his critical posts in LinkedIn.



Keith Chandler is a committed, experienced educationalist and advocate of lifelong learning, an effective project director, with an enthusiastic and positive outlook, an active dynamic approach to challenges which often inspires others, now actively drawing on over 25 years expertise in leadership and strategic management to continue to identify and deliver innovative approaches to developing people, to best satisfy their particular need for learning, whether it be intrinsic, personal, social, civic, or economic. He is a Visiting Fellow in Lifelong Learning at the University of Chester and Project Director, European Projects, University of Chester.

Life disruptions and the way individuals respond to them, is a complex phenomenon. As the perspectives offered in this issue of Lifewide Magazine reveal there are many causes of disruption and the way an individual responds to disruption - their resiliency, is also a unique combination of their dispositions and mental state, agency and self-belief, capabilities and circumstances. In spite of this complexity when people tell their stories of disruption and how it has affected them certain patterns begin to emerge and it is these patterns which help us advance our understanding and enable better help and support to be given to people whose lives have been disrupted to enable them to find their way to a new life.

Like other issues of the magazine the emphasis is on exploration by providing a range of perspectives so as to better appreciate the scope of this phenomenon and provide examples of how people have coped with disruption. For example, articles engage with: a range of health related issues - like disruption due to stroke, serious injury, stress and mental health; bereavement; moving home and moving between a lifetime of employment and retirement. The list is not exhaustive; but there are enough examples to enable us to explore the idea of life change and resiliency in response to disruption.

Why is disruptive life change important? People have always been forced to or have decided to make significant changes in their life. You might lose a job, get divorced or suffer from a severe illness. In such situations, a life change may be needed – or is the best way out of the forced change. This is not new. Why are we, then, talking in a different way about life change now? Is it simply becoming more fashionable to make life change? Or is it perhaps, because we need to find new ways of thinking, working and managing our lives in an age that is becoming more disruptive and where disruption in a career or working life is likely to be more frequent? The answer brings to light important issues and challenges, for the individual and their family, the community and the state.

Life change is increasingly important, socially and politically, because the world is changing. Life change is a reality for many more people, and it's not about individual preferences. In fact we might say that the reality of the modern world *produces* life change. Due to developments in markets, in economy, in technology in career routes, social life and personal life all have changed, and are continuing to change, dramatically.

We often use the term globalisation as an explanation for this complex and interdependent package of change. Technology has made it possible for products to be produced almost everywhere in the world, and the same is true for research, education and many other things. These fundamental changes have considerable impact on social and personal life. If

your life direction is broken due to e.g. severe illness or family crisis, and you are forced to leave a job or career, you cannot simply expect to recover and return to this job or this career. Dramatic shifts in the economy have great impact on social and personal life, and on what we might call: life options or life change options.

It is important to recognise that when many people find themselves in such forced change situations and need life change options, this is not caused by individual failure or weakness. But given this rapidly expanding need we must try to find new ways to help people work with and through such challenges. Because one thing is sure: if you don't play the game, you will never have a chance to win. Perhaps many of us will find, after struggling with forced life change for some time that this new game might just offer us unexpected new opportunities that we did not even think of before the life direction was broken.

While most of the articles in this issue are concerned with change that is forced on people a few articles consider the idea of self-disruption as a way in which people move out of a particular set of circumstances in order to grow and develop. This is particularly important in the area of professional development and increasingly we need to do this if we are looking for significant new ideas and personal development. Ultimately the aim of exploring the challenge of life change through disruption is to raise greater awareness of its importance to learning and personal development, in the hope that with improved understanding we can offer better support for those affected. Solutions need to be customised to individuals hence the full range of health, social, financial and educational services come in to play as well as all the informal social mechanisms for support.

Our particular interest is education, especially Adult Education (AE), and we have been developing, through the European Commission's Directing Life Change (DLC) project, new perspectives on how AE might be reconfigured to provide better support and help in finding a new purpose and direction in life. The project was coordinated by the University of Chester UK and targets adults aged 40+ with life changes and / or broken career paths. This age group is projected to make up a third of the population in developed countries by 2025 (OECD, 2010). Members of this key group have the potential to contribute to their respective national economies, to be significant consumers and service users, drivers for change and to participate in learning for a further 30+ years. You can find out more about this project in articles on pages 53-71.

We hope that you enjoy reading this compilation. Source OECD (2010) Education at a Glance Available on-line at <http://www.oecd.org/education/skills-beyond-school/45926093.pdf>



GREETINGS FROM EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Jenny Willis

I would like to welcome you to another edition of Lifewide Magazine in which we tackle the issue of disruption and the complementary spirit of resilience. Disruptions in life are something that we can all relate to. When I look back I can identify half a dozen that have had a significant impact on my life and have shaped me for better or worse into the person I am. Even over the last few months, within my family and friends I am seeing people grappling with difficult and challenging issues in their lives and dealing with them as best they can. The human spirit to conquer adversity is a wonderful thing but unfortunately sometimes people are so battered by life that their resolve is weakened and they need help.

In choosing the theme for this issue we were influenced by the recent experiences of bereavement, serious illnesses, medical operations and work-related problems within our small editorial team which revealed to us just how important disruption is as a phenomenon through which we learn to cope and survive and grow. As we reflected on our experiences we realised for the first time how such disruptions are often turning points in our lives taking us in a modified or completely different direction. We have always argued that one of the reasons for embracing a lifewide approach in higher education is to enable learners to gain recognition for the complex forms of achievement that are accomplished through coping with and growing through a significant life disruption. So we were delighted to come across the work of Jan Gejel and Keith Chandler realising that we had some anchor points on which we could promote educational change, at least in Adult Education, to help people prepare for and work through significant disruptions in their life.

We appreciate that some of the content of this issue is challenging and the subjects are often not those discussed in an educational, learning or personal development context but we believe they are important matters to think about and act upon.

We draw on the experience of individuals within the team, Lifewide supporters from as far afield as Australia, blogs and other media sources, a small scale research project and, of course, the important work being led by guest editors, Jan Gejel and Keith Chandler. A sincere thank you to everyone who has contributed.

As you can see, issue 12 of Lifewide Magazine is our longest yet. We understand that some readers will be selective in the articles they choose to read but hope that most will take a look at them all. Their richness and variety nevertheless reflect some common themes, and to help you navigate this process of reflection, we have grouped articles and inserted some section breaks, with a covering page that lists the pieces included in the section. The map on page 7 summarises the 6 themes addressed, as we move from theory and conceptualisation through examples of various types of life changing disruption to examples of how resilience enables us to survive and, very often, to come out a more contented, empathetic person.

Finally, on behalf of the whole team, may I thank you for your support this year and wish you and your loved ones a very Happy Christmas and prosperous New Year.

DISRUPTION & RESILIENCE IN THE SOCIAL AGE

Julian Stodd



Julian splits his time between research and writing about learning, alongside consultancy and project work. Much of his consultancy work is around e-learning, mobile learning, social learning and learning theory, working with global organisations to help them translate their learning objectives into practically focused projects that deliver. Julian writes a daily blog about his learning, where he joins his community of over 4500 followers to develop and share new ideas and understanding. He has authored several books including 'Exploring the world of social learning' and is a regular contributor to Lifewide Magazine

The narratives of our lives are written by many hands, touched by different people and places, each of which leave their mark. The journey may not be smooth: through matters beyond our control or a consequence of our actions, the path has many bumps. It's how we weather them and what we learn from them that counts and, in the Social Age, we don't make this journey alone.

When I was growing up, I remember my grandmother, who lived next door to us at the time, spending her days reading, watching some daytime television (on one of the four channels available to us at the time...) and, once or twice a week, telephoning a friend. At the time, it was normal: my perspective now is different. I see loneliness. I see a

disconnection from the communities that she had lived in and grown up with: restricted by both mobility and distance. As we grow older, our own experiences of old age will be different: connected in our communities, we will have access to both news and conversations on a far more synchronous basis. Our friends, who most likely will be spread around the world, will be weaving their own narratives

in clear view. We are spoilt for channels to stay in touch. But the path through our lives may not take the direction we expect: how we weather the pain, weather the changes, are changed as a result, these are the lessons we learn through lived experience.

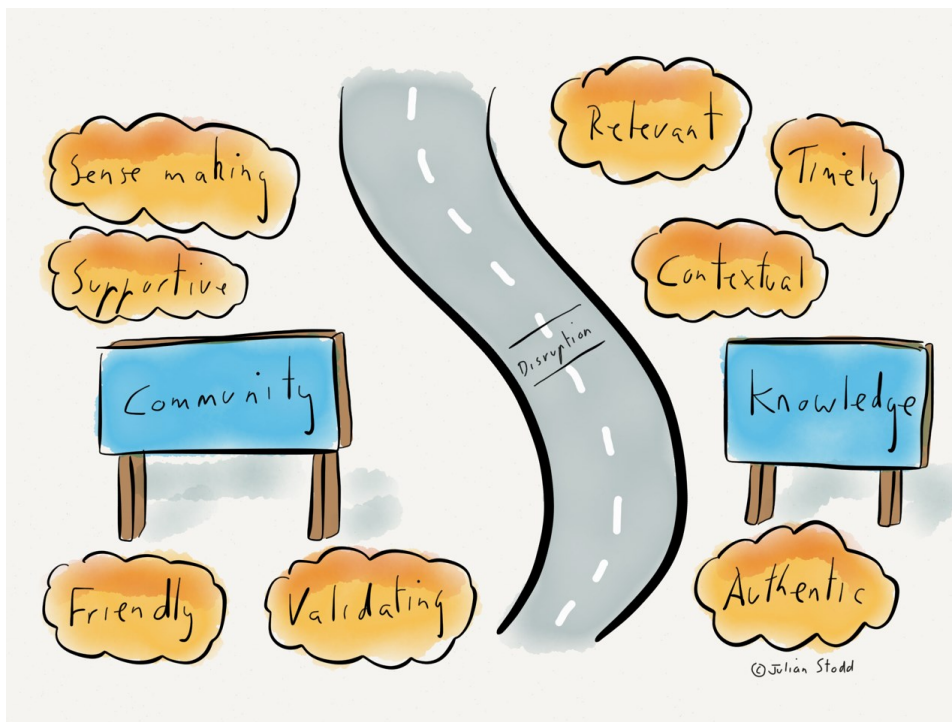
I've written before about depression: a bump in the road that many people face in their lives, but something that changes us in fundamental ways. Significant disruption in someone's life

is a serious challenge and it is right to pose the question how is disruption to one's life handled in the Social Age? How is learning to cope in Social Age different to the ways we used to learn to cope?

The answer lies in both information and in community and in the new ways we now maintain our relationships or form new relationships to help us learn and develop ourselves.

Be it a medical condition, a career choice or finding love, the answer may well be found online. If you only know where and how to look. My friend Anthony has weathered the journey of cancer: the shocking discovery of the illness, the process of learning about the medical and emotional aspects and, finally, the long path to recovery. He has explored this through

different lenses: the scientific and medical, the emotional and personal and, finally, through the lens of poetry, as he narrates his own learning in the way he knows best, through words. All of this is facilitated by the communica-

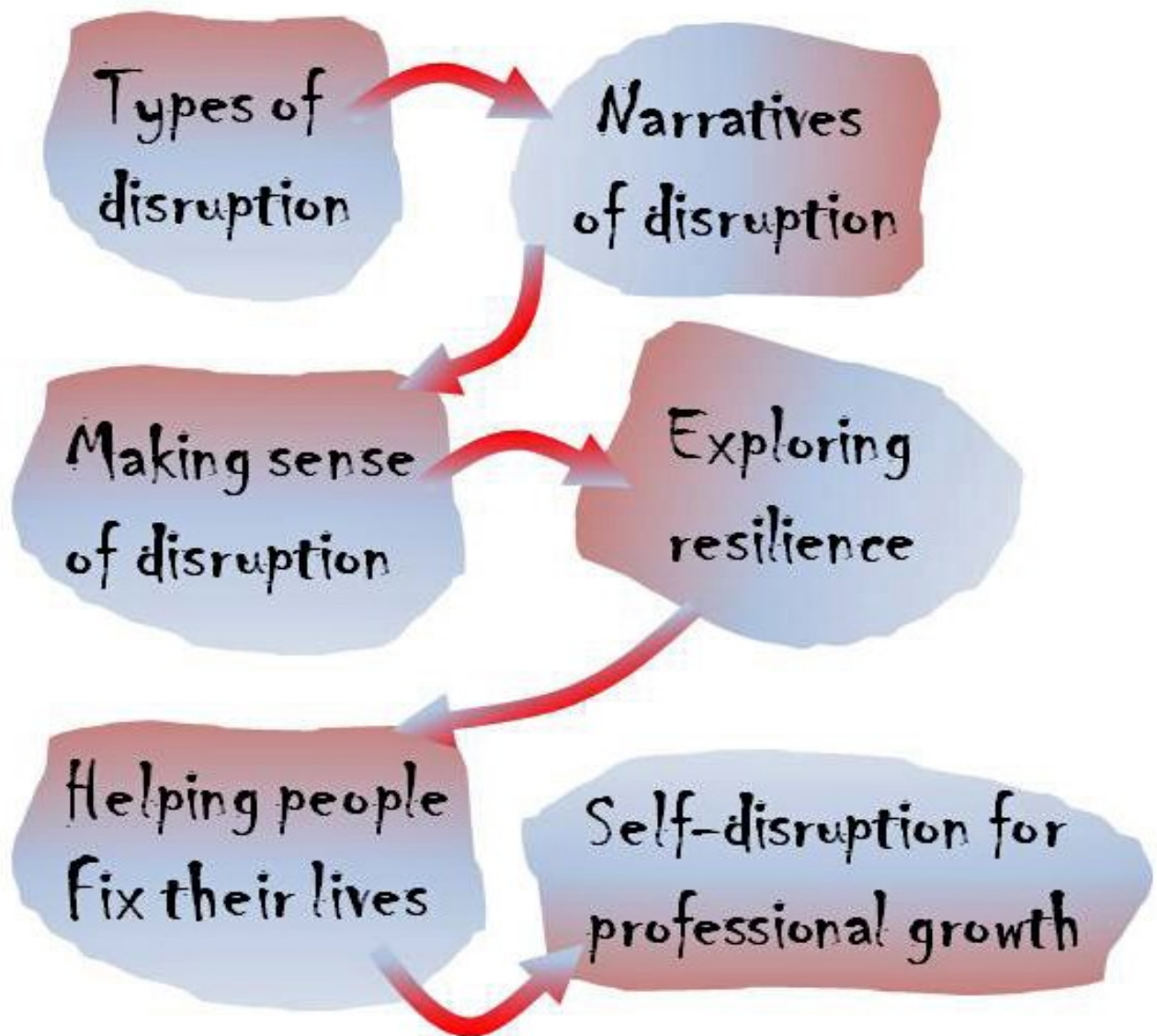


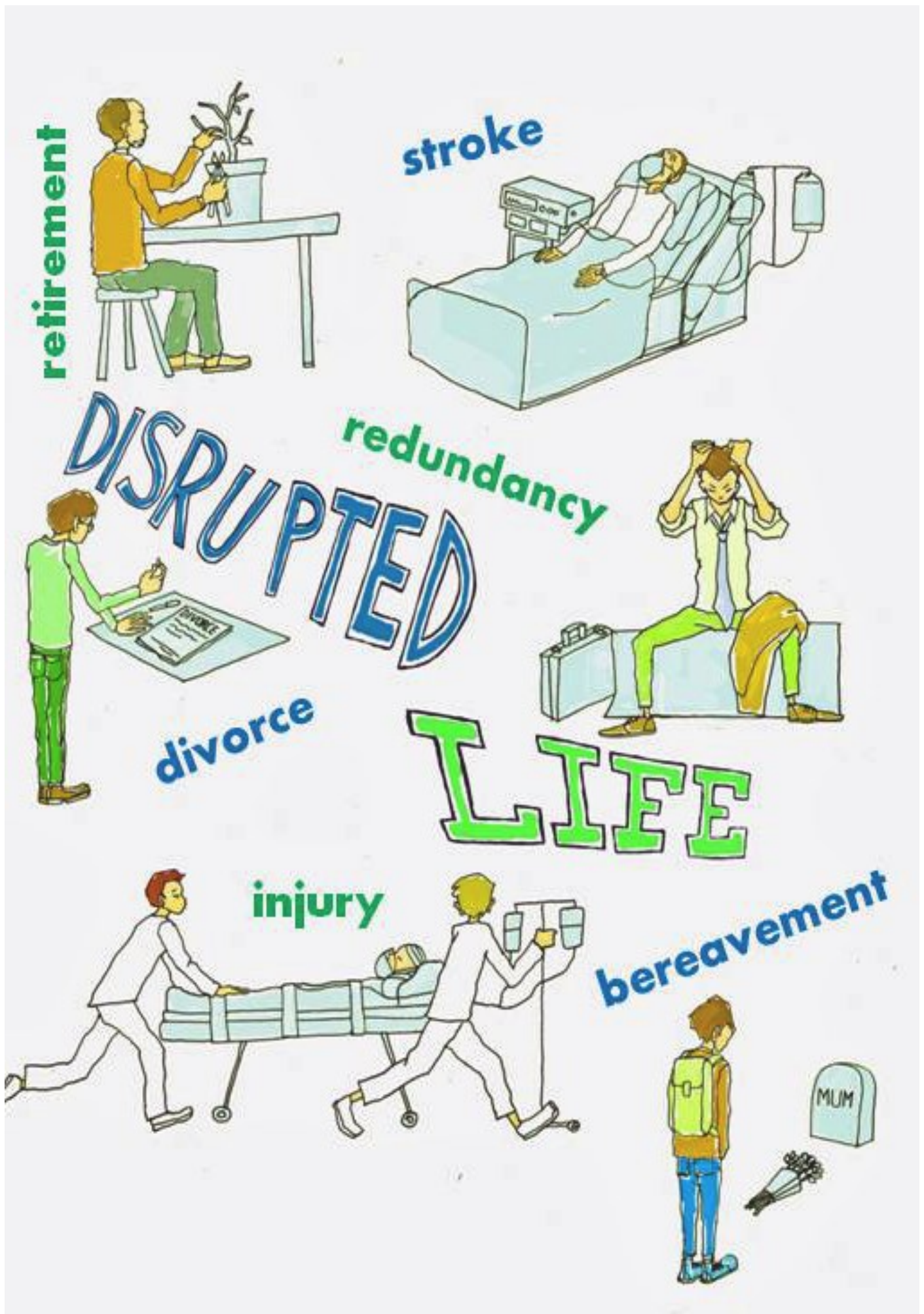
tions technologies and on-line communities that surround us; for nearly any disease state or disruptive condition there are forums and support groups, survivor communities and support communities usually set up and supported by people who care deeply about the social or medical challenge. If we have the technology and the know how we can be effortlessly and easily connected to these: barriers of time and space are no issue.

But we mustn't forget that loneliness is not a thing of the past: many are still disenfranchised. Through poverty, through illness, through being trapped in prisons too dark to escape. Some are constrained by their culture: unable to live the life they believe they were born to live. There are still fights to be fought: to connect to people who are dispossessed, lonely or lost. And some people simply cannot afford the technology or have never grown up with the technology that so many of us take for granted so are unable to access the help and support that can be found in on-line communities.

The Social Age is a time of great change: many of the innovations and shifts in social convention and technology make things better. Many of these things - can bolster our resilience or, at worst, better company to make the journey with. But we have a duty to reach out, to help, to share our hope. The salvation is not just for those who ask. As we approach Christmas, part of our thoughts must be for those still making their journey in isolation, alone. For the Social Age citizen cares: at this time of all times, we should be asking ourselves not how we can make our own journey smoother, but rather how we can reach out to help others whose journeys are not as smooth as our own.

Exploration map





MAPPING LIFE DISRUPTIONS

Norman Jackson

Disruptions to our lives can occur at any time and can originate from many sources and an infinite number of personal circumstances. Looking at myself, my family and friends I can see just how common significant disruptions, outside the routine pattern of 'normal' life, actually are.

Significant life disruptions can be *health related* - serious illness including mental illness and loss of memory, and serious accidental injury, or the birth of a child with a disability, all of which can affect self or family members that impact on you.

They can be related to the *loss or disintegration of personal relationships* - like the loss of a child, sibling, partner or parent, or the loss of a very close friend, and the splitting up and separation of partners and their families. Or from a child's perspective the loss of, or removal from, their parent(s) and being taken into care or being fostered.

They can be related to *work* especially the loss of a job, or serious stress within a job that causes someone to become unable to do their job. The loss of employment can lead to *financial hardship* which could spawn many more problems including going into debt or even the loss of a home.

For children, teenagers and young adults work equates with *study* at school, college and university and serious stress, bullying or significant academic failure can all result in the disruption of life.

Significant *transitions in life* are also potential sites for disruption. The very idea of transition suggest a journey from one sort of life to another. Transitions are often complex. They can affect different people in different ways, at different times, and for different reasons. Multiple interrelated transitions may also occur concurrently or in succession. There are some transitions that are almost universal, being experienced by most if not all people in the UK; some that usually result from unforeseen and/or unintended events but which may be short term and relatively recoverable; and others that are experienced by a small number of people and often associated with a longer term negative pattern or cycle – the revolving transitions. Table 1(1) lists some key transitions in each of these categories.

Transitions can be organised along two dimensions: voluntary vs. involuntary and gradual vs. sudden (Figure 1). For example, being the victim of a crime is usually involuntary and sudden, and moving house may be voluntary and gradual. While the same could occupy different categories for different people or contexts, this framework is useful in thinking about how to change how individuals experience a given transition. We tend to think of disruption as being sudden and the effects as being traumatic but disruption can also be a more gradual process with effects progressively accumulating and coalescing.

Control is important in reducing stress and coping with a situation as is a gradual transition which will usually increase the likelihood that the individual will cope better with change. Fundamentally, disruption is about coping with the stress, uncertainty and challenges of significant abrupt or more

gradual change.

Table 1 Examples of transitions often causing fast or gradual disruption (source 1)

Common transitions	Unintended/unforeseen transitions	'Revolving' transitions
Being born	Losing your home	Entering/leaving care
Starting/leaving school, college university	Entering the criminal justice system	Becoming truant
Starting/changing jobs	Losing your job	Entering/leaving gangs
Starting an organisation/ enterprise	Leaving a long term profession	Entering leaving prison
Forming a relationship	Divorce or relationship breakdown	Becoming homeless
Becoming a parent	Entering into financial difficulty/ serious debt and bankruptcy	Engaging in self-harm, abuse or addiction
Children leaving home	Experiencing serious crime	Entering long term welfare dependency
Entering/leaving hospital for treatment	Serious physical/mental illness or injury	
Retirement	Becoming a long term carer/ grandparent with caring responsi-	

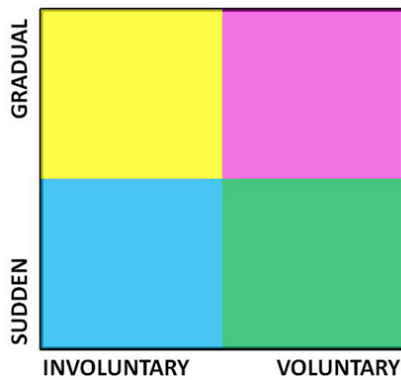


Figure 1 Simple framework for considering the nature of disruptive and transitional change in an individual's life (source 1). In this issue of the Magazine we will consider examples of both sudden and gradual, and involuntary and voluntary disruptions to life.

rehabilitation and alteration of self. If the self wants to continue to live their life as fully as they are able, the self is required to go through a process in which a new

self is created: a process that also requires the giving up of a former self. We define ourselves in terms of the relationships we have and serious disruptions will affect these so our loss of identity is compounded by the loss of the relationships that give our life wider meaning.

The extent to which individuals are able to rebuild or reinvent themselves will of course be dependent on the individual, the cause and nature of the disruption and the individual's circumstances. The process of re-creation raises the issue of how do we recreate ourselves? How do we learn to be a different person in circumstances that are not our choosing and this is very much a focus for this thematic issue.

Some people have the agency and determination to extricate themselves from their disruption and move on to a new life by themselves. But often, situations become so complex that people need help to stabilize a situation and then to rebuild their life. Such help can take many forms - the support of spouses, children, parents, siblings, friends and employers, support from specialist services - like health and social care, public and voluntary sector agencies offering advice and support, and educational services that enable people to develop themselves, and increasingly in the Social Age - on-line communities and forums where people can gain support and advice from others who have had similar experiences and who are willing to share their personal knowledge to help others in need.

In this Issue we aim to explore the idea of disrupted lives and how individuals overcome significant disruption and how they

change, adapt and grow through their experiences. The issue also examines some of the ways society helps and enables people to repair their lives and discover and progress to a new and different life. The question for HE is what can universities and colleges do to help students prepare for a lifetime of disruption?

Significant Life Disruptions are Lifelong and Impact on Our Lifewide Existence

Health related – illness including mental illness and loss of memory, serious injury through accident, and injuries at birth causing disability

Loss or disintegration of significant personal relationships

Work related - loss of a job or serious stress within a job. Loss of employment can lead to financial hardship spawning more problems

Study related - serious stress, bullying or significant academic failure

Significant transitions like finding or starting a new job or retiring from work.

Information sources

(1) Next Steps: Life Transitions and Retirement in the 21st Century. A preliminary research report led by Lord Wei and written by Dr. Alison Hulme supported by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. Available on-line at <http://www.gulbenkian.org.uk/files/01-07-12-Next%20steps%20Life%20transitions%20and%20retirement%20in%20the%2021st%20century.pdf>



Narratives of Disruption, Learning And Resilience

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PACK YOUR BAGS, WE'RE MOVING AGAIN - A DISRUPTED CHILDHOOD

Jenny Willis

I often joke that I know the key events in world history over the last century according to where I and my family were living. The son of a regular soldier, my father was conceived in India in the wake of WWI and as parts of the British Empire were beginning to seek independence. For my part, I was conceived and born in Singapore, the first child of a serving airman whose then- role included mopping up after WWII and monitoring the developing Korean troubles.

In 1956, our idyllic life in the Middle East was disrupted by the Suez crisis and we found ourselves being evacuated first to a transit camp in a now notorious part of Iraq then 'home' to England. Much of my subsequent childhood and adolescence was determined by, and shrouded in, fear and mystery over my father's work during the Cold War. And so I could go on through the course of personal and international history.

A family story recalls how, as a young child, if we had been in one place for nearly two years, I would ask when we were moving again. For me, having known nothing else, it was natural to move every 6 to 24 months. Unlike the Army, where complete units move together, the Air Force moves individuals, hence the sense of change is all-consuming: change of location, people, schooling – in fact, I attended four grammar schools in the space of 7 years, each of which had a different curriculum and a different examination board.

So what impact did this relentless change have on us? Clearly, responses are individual so I do not claim that my story is typical of all service children. Indeed, my own siblings have had quite different outcomes from mine. And I should stress that I do not regret the many benefits I derived from this exposure to so many cultures and languages ... but, and there is a big BUT, both my own and my father's mental health suffered immensely from this sense of dislocation and instability, having no control over what would happen next, in his case, not even knowing if he would be alive the next day.

Unconsciously at first, I withdrew from social contact, protecting myself from the emotional pain of having to sever friendships when we moved. As a consequence, I was painfully shy, socially inept yet intellectually precocious. I survived by immersing myself in study, which I could take with me and which in time created my sense of identity. As I have written elsewhere (page), the danger of this is that when



your eggs are all in one basket and that is smashed, you have nowhere to fall back on and your human inadequacy is exposed.

As anyone who has lived in RAF quarters will know, the furniture and furnishings are standard, though occasionally we would have a colour change – blue here, pink in the next house! Perhaps that was not merely for economies of scale, but deliberately designed to create a sense of continuity in your new home. We were adept packers: personal knick nacks were meticulously wrapped in newspaper and arranged safely in packing cases. My parents would stay up all night on the day of arrival in our new home, unpacking so that by the time we children got up, the house looked as much like our previous one as possible. Amazingly, it was only decades later that I learnt this from my mother.

By the time my father retired from the RAF, he and my mother had had 29 homes in the space of 24 years. How did they cope with this relentless change? I am reminded of Sarah and Norman's article on the immersive nature of change (page), and can recognise a number of factors in our family story. The sense of journey is omnipresent, and there are paradoxes in the way we turned potential adversity into success. For the individual, loss of identity can be quite overwhelming, as happened with my father and me, impacting on our mental health for the rest of our lives. The fact that the other three members of the family did not suffer such damage reminds us of the individual characteristics that determine how we respond to circumstances. In the case of my sister, time is also a factor: she had eight fewer years of disruption than did I, and with one exception, she moved within the UK. Finally, the support of others is significant in the way in which the family survived: my parents did all they could to create a sense of continuity.



Only in recent years has attention turned to this overlooked consequence of conflict and the armed services.

See: <http://rnmchildrensfund.org.uk/new-report-launched-the-overlooked-casualties-of-conflict/>



LONG-TERM IMPACT OF EARLY PARENTAL DEATH: lessons from a narrative study

Jenny Willis

This article summarises the findings of research conducted at the University of Liverpool, reported in 2013, on the impact of one or more parent's death on individuals up to the age of 18 years. The complete report and all references can be found at:

J R Soc Med. Feb 2013; 106(2): 57–67.

doi: [10.1177/0141076812472623](https://doi.org/10.1177/0141076812472623)

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3569022/>

PMCID: PMC3569022

Jackie Ellis, Chris Dowrick, and Mari Lloyd-Williams

Context of the research

It is estimated that 5% of children in the UK are bereaved of a parent before they reach the age of 16. The likelihood of experiencing parental death will vary according to locality and social circumstance. In the absence of reliable evidence, it is speculated that ethnicity and class differences may also be found, especially for migrant groups who lose their established support networks.

Those studies that have been carried out reveal many negative outcomes associated with childhood bereavement, e.g. an increased likelihood of substance abuse, greater vulnerability to depression, higher risk of criminal behaviour, school underachievement and lower employment rates. Risk will be affected by factors such as the child's prior experience of loss and coping; their family and social relationships; their wider environment and culture and the circumstances of the death.

There has been little research into the long-term outcomes of childhood bereavement and how the individual constructs their own narrative of events. The Liverpool team therefore sought to examine these issues and how the bereavement was perceived to have impacted on individuals' adult lives.

The research methods and cohort

A qualitative narrative approach was adopted as it affords the opportunity to hear the participants' own words.

A respondent sample was selected in order to offer maximum variation, hence reliability of common findings. There were 33 participants (7 men, 26 women), aged from 20-80 who had been between the ages of 13 months and 17 years at the time of their bereavement. (To minimise distress, no one who had lost a parent within the last 12 months was included.) They were based in North West England, and included English, Irish, Scottish, Welsh and a Yemeni Arab. Their religious backgrounds were Protestant, Catholic, Muslim and Jewish.



Deceased parents included 14 mothers and 15 fathers and four respondents had lost both of them (total of 37). There were 29 sudden or unexpected deaths (at least from the perspective of the child), four of these being accidental and one suicide, the others being from disease (i.e. cancer, cardiovascular and neurological disease) with dying trajectories of various lengths.

Interviews lasting 1-2 hours were recorded and transcribed; alternatively, respondents could choose to write their own narrative.

Findings

A number of common themes emerged.



1 Disruption and continuity

There was a need to maintain continuity despite the disruption and loss, as illustrated by Ruth (age 46), who lost both parents within a period of 6 months, when she was 16:

I didn't want to go to family – I didn't, I think because, the enormity of what of happened and the fact that I'd lost both parents in such a short time – I had been able to stay with my aunty O ... it meant that I didn't have to make new friends because it was the one constant – my school and my friends were the world that didn't change. Everything had changed, I'd lost my home, I'd lost my parents, I'd got no brothers and sisters, I'd got nobody but you know nine o'clock or half eight in the morning I went off to school and I came back at say half past three and in that time I was like any other, I was a normal schoolgirl if that makes sense.

When continuity and stability do not occur, the bereaved child experiences an even greater sense of insecurity, fear and loneliness, as described by Anne-Marie (age 25), whose mother died of a brain haemorrhage when she was 8:

So first of all, that was really strange because I wasn't living with my sister anymore and then just further compounded my feeling of loneliness because now I was stuck with my nana – who I loved – but she was an old woman and where's my sister gone. I had no one to confide with, or share it with and stuff like that so that was awful. I remember feeling very upset that L (name of sister) wasn't there anymore. Urm and at the time I didn't realize why she didn't want to be there, it was just like well she doesn't want to be with me either. So yeah L went and went to live with my aunty'. Urm, since then I have had real issues with loneliness – I've had real, real bad issues throughout my life.

As a result of this experience, Anne-Marie has continued into her adulthood to have overwhelming feelings of loneliness, isolation and difficulties in trusting others.

The long-term impact of how the bereavement was handled is also revealed by Jane (age 51). Her father died of a heart attack when she was 17. She describes her mother's actions:

She was throwing everything out in house that belonged to me dad and I was gutted ... but she started throwing things of mine out then and I just felt alone; I had no one to back me up and I couldn't talk to her about it and then it happened every single year after and I'd buy more books to replace what she'd thrown out and she'd do the same and, in the end I had to leave.

2 The role of social networks and affiliations

A second theme was the extent to which social and institutional affiliations (e.g. schools, religious organizations, neighbours and friendship networks) mediated the impact of the parent's death. For some this support provided access to role models, moral guidance and a sense of security, replacing the parent. Sam is now 72 and recalls his father's death from heart disease when he was only 3:

My father's death caused my mother some disillusionment with religion but she was happy for me join a church choir hoping that the church would exercise a strong moral influence. She was less enthusiastic about my joining the Boys' Brigade as she still remembered its early military associations but soon came to see it providing 'manly' activities in a safe environment under the control of dedicated men who were providing a strong masculine influence, which she did accept was lacking in my life.

Christina (age 57) found a similar source of support when her mother died of leukaemia, when she was 5 years old:

The convent had given me security. It wasn't just a place of worship or a holy house. Unlike the other children who had gone off through the school gates and gone home, I'd actually seen the other side of this convent life- that was the security ... And better still I could probably walk into most convents now and fall into the routine even now quite naturally ... And it's not, they'd be no awkwardness there, or it doesn't feel right, it was a sense of security as well as a belief.



As before the converse of receiving (or perception thereof) support compounded distress. Gerald was 17 when his father died after a long period of illness. Now 62, he reflects

I think they might have supported my mother- I'm sure they did support my mother very well. I think, looking back on it now I think in an analytical way I think actually what it was, was that they assume that a 17 year old boy can cope and they just didn't do anything or say anything or you know really at all.

3 Communication

Distress was compounded when children were not given accurate information, not only in the event of death, but also when the parent is lost to them through illness. This lack of information was perceived to contribute to the ensuing fear and bewilderment experienced.

It is now 40 years since 8 year old Jimmy's mother died of encephalitis. He recalls vividly his childhood feelings:

...at the time, so kind of bewildered about what was going on around me and not really understanding or having it explained to me. But being a fairly bright kid so, with the ability to make, to create a back story which probably had no foundation in reality at all but, does that make sense? ..., I can I can remember I can remember being so scared and bewildered, I didn't, nobody had explained to me what the nature of her illness was, how she got there.

Some families are unable to talk about the death, fearing that it will distress the surviving partner and family. Implicit rules for the communication of thoughts and feelings are established. At the extreme, families stop functioning as a family and become 'individuals in a family'. This is reflected by Lucy (age 43), whose father died in a plane crash when she was 10:

I suppose we were all a bit separate in our family and still are- I don't feel that close to my mum, I had to tell her something recently and it's taken weeks of courage to tell her something and I'm not really that close to my brothers and sisters, slightly better with my sister recently, I think it was because we were separate and left to work things out for ourselves and that's how it has always been and that as I say how we found out about the accident was piece it together.

Concluding comments

The ages of respondents demonstrate the long-term impact of early parental death. Whilst the individual experience of bereavement was unique, common themes which mediated the experience emerged, including disruptions and continuity, the role of social networks and affiliations and communication.

The research confirmed that moving home and separation from family and friends made adjustment to parental death significantly more difficult and increased the child's distress.

Broader research on childhood trauma suggests that the quality of the relationships within the family influences a child's recovery after trauma occurs. An important factor is whether the child feels safe and secure within a loving supportive family, with a surviving partner who is able to parent effectively. Even temporary changes in parental capacity were found to be distressing for children, as respondents often did not understand what was happening. This results in a 'double jeopardy' whereby the child not only suffers the loss of a parent but the symbolic or temporary loss of other parent. The analysis further suggests that where these changes are longer term the distress experienced is compounded and there may be significant impact in adult life in terms of loss of self-esteem and self-worth.

The study also demonstrates the distress experienced by the child when their support needs are not taken into account by the social network. The findings suggest that where possible the child/children should remain in existing their social networks (e.g. live in the same area, go to the same school, and maintain the same friendships and other social affiliations). Those working with bereaved families also need to ensure that support which increases stability, continuity and cohesion is introduced at every level of the family system. This includes essential practical support, e.g. practical household tasks housework, cooking, shopping and taking the children to school, as this reduces the social, economic and caring burden on the surviving parent.

Much of the literature emphasizes the need for open communication with regard to the physical death and the need for regular updates regarding the course and prognosis of the disease, but there appears to be little or no acknowledgement of the fact that children also need to be given information when the parent is no longer able to fulfil the parenting role during a terminal illness. The findings from this study demonstrate the distress experienced as children and adults when they are not given clear and honest information at appropriate time points relevant to their understanding and experience.

The study emphasizes that communication is dialectic, dialogic and dynamic in nature. Therefore, rather than unilaterally promoting open communication the findings suggest that it is essential that those working with bereaved families discuss the complexities of communication with the family members and explore the different meanings associated with sharing grief experiences with each other. This supports the family as a unit to integrate experience and adapt to changes with few attempts to control thoughts and feelings. In the absence of resources such as economic security or social support, individuals and families are forced to rely on interpersonal, negotiated, emotional controls as a strategy of last resort, and this is likely to have a negative impact on relationships in adulthood.

The researchers acknowledge the small scale of their study and recognise that there may be unconscious memory construction in individuals' accounts. Nevertheless, the study raises some important indicators for those dealing with childhood bereavement, whether as professionals or as social contacts.

The Childhood Bereavement Network developed a set of guidelines to provide organizations and individual practitioners with a baseline 'best practice' framework for support of parents of bereaved children. These guidelines recognize the importance of supporting and affirming parents of bereaved children and acknowledge that parents have the primary role in providing support for their children. The guidelines also acknowledge that parenting is challenging, varied and long-term, and families will have a broad range of practical, emotional, social and financial needs. The findings suggest that it is crucial for such guidelines to be followed if the damage and suffering experienced by individuals in adult life is to be minimized. <http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/>

COPING WITH STROKE AT A YOUNG AGE

Edited by Jenny Willis

Editor's Note: Whilst researching this magazine's theme, we came across a recent study into the impact of suffering a stroke at an early age, which provides an excellent insight into strategies for coping with such a profound and unexpected life changing experience. Coping with stroke at any age is a serious matter and unfortunately, such incapacitating illness or disease is all too common and even within our small core team we have members, who only in the last year, have had close family members in a situation where they have become incapacitated through a serious illness. From a lifewide learning perspective therefore, we are interested in whether what was learnt through this study of stroke victims might be applied to other contexts in which life has been seriously disrupted through a condition of incapacity. Here we summarise the key issues; the full article and references can be found at:

Int J Qual Stud Health Well-being. 2014; 9: 10.3402/qhw.v9.22252. Published online Jan 23, 2014. doi: [10.3402/qhw.v9.22252](https://doi.org/10.3402/qhw.v9.22252) PMID: [PMID: 2481846](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/2481846/) <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3901846/>

Kerry Kuluski, Clare Dow, Louise Locock, Renee F. Lyons, Daniel Lasserson,

Background to the research

The study was carried out by a team of professionals from the Health Experiences Research Group at the University of Oxford. Strokes are a major cause of disability in the developed world and one in four 'victims' are now under the age of 65. Only 42-53% of this age group will return to work; family life, employment, finances, leisure pursuits, marital relations may all be disrupted in the wake of a stroke. The question was, what strategies do young people use to recover from or cope with a stroke? Understanding these strategies could inform the way in which care is designed for such people.

The researchers used a conceptualisation of the consequences of strokes which focuses on biographical disruption and biographical repair. This was to counterbalance the more traditional focus on physical aspects of recovery and to produce a more holistic study of physical, psychological and spiritual factors - previous studies had found that victims had a sense of disorientation, disrupted sense of self and altered roles and relationships.

Between 2006 and 2011, 57 individual narratives were collected through interviewing 17 stroke survivors (six men, 11 women) aged 23 - 55, living in the community across the UK. Their strokes had occurred between 1 and 12 years previously.

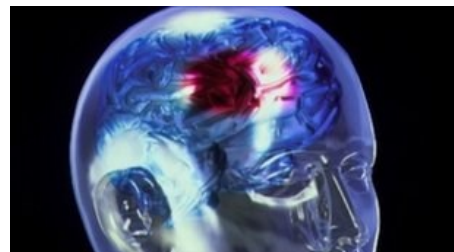
Findings

Two broad themes emerged: an altered sense of self and an adapted sense of self, each of which had sub-themes.

1 Altered sense of self

Following the stroke, all individuals felt that some aspect of their self had been disrupted. Common challenges included a compromised ability to perform activities of daily living (e.g. eating, moving, and bathing) in addition to problems with speaking and remembering. For some, these challenges improved over time; however, the lasting impact tended to manifest as a discredited notion of self. Individuals perceived themselves differently due to changes in their characteristics, their ability to fulfil certain roles (e.g. in the family or workplace), and their ability to engage in activities that were important to them, including being part of meaningful social relationships. There were three key elements to this:

What Is A Stroke?



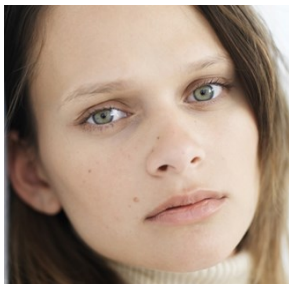
A stroke (cerebro-vascular accident (CVA)) is an illness in which part of the brain is suddenly severely damaged or destroyed. The result is loss of function of the affected area of the brain. It usually causes weakness, paralysis of the arm and leg on either the left or right side of the body, twisting of the face, and in some cases other effects which may include loss of balance, disturbance of vision, disturbance of speech, loss of control of the bladder and bowels, and difficulty in swallowing. In very severe cases, there is a loss of consciousness or confusion of thought. A haemorrhage causes the damage in the brain. If the clot is very big or if it affects a vital part of the brain, the person may die. In less severe cases partial or complete recovery occurs.

1.1 Loss of identity: Many individuals were shocked that they had a stroke at such a young age, particularly if they perceived themselves to be in relatively good health beforehand. A 41-year-old woman who had a stroke at the age of 34 described her reaction:

[A] lot of the sort of, "why me?" started to creep in, particularly because I was so fit, hadn't drunk, hadn't smoked, lived at the gym virtually, blood pressure was always bang on normal.

In a few cases, the shock of dealing with the stroke was exacerbated by a delay in receiving a diagnosis, as medical staff felt that the person was too young to be experiencing such an event e.g. one woman, who experienced visual disturbance, was thought to be taking drugs or alcohol.

Following the shock of diagnosis, many individuals described feeling a sudden loss of their former selves. A woman who had two strokes over a 3-month period at age 45 described her stroke as bereavement, and pinpoints the precise date.



...it really is like a bereavement, a stroke. I mean, it really was like that woman had died, the one that wore high heeled shoes and walked around and ran a business and, had a fantastic memory. I had one of the most amazing memories that I took totally for granted. There's so much that one can take for granted, you know, I take walking for granted. I always think, "If only somebody had told me on New Year's Eve 1995 that that's the last hour I would ever walk like a normal person I would have walked all day..."

Some people felt as if they had reverted back to being a child, as if they were "a baby with an adult mind." Even simple daily tasks, like taking the city bus, became an unnerving process. Losing the ability to fulfil activities of daily living and take on multiple tasks hindered motivation, patience, and confidence. This was particularly difficult for people who were used to juggling a range of activities, including family life, a regular exercise regimen, and work.

In summary, the shock of diagnosis, the initial symptoms, and the impact on day-to-day functioning (which was once second nature) were met with much frustration.

1.2. Family disruption and role change: Many respondents noted changes in family roles following the stroke. A woman who had a stroke 18 months after her child was born had "very little recollection of her [daughter] as a tiny baby." For other respondents with young children, not being able to read to them, embrace them, or pick them up from school became difficult realities. In some cases, individuals were encouraged to hold off on having children following their stroke. A young woman who was interviewed with her husband, a stroke survivor, explained that they decided not to have a second child.

In addition to childrearing interruptions, the stroke had an impact on family relationships. A man with a wife and two young children who had a stroke 2 years before the interview at age 45 talked about the impact on his family.

And the initial shock of coming home actually did remain for quite a long time because the psychological effect on the kids of seeing my condition and that I couldn't be the dad that perhaps I once was in terms of physically playing with them and doing things. I couldn't even pick them up because I could only use one hand, one arm that was quite hard on them. And the kids had quite a lot of counselling. And my wife and I had quite a bit of counselling.

In some cases, the spouse or partner had to take time from work (temporarily or permanently) to fulfil caring duties (of the person with stroke and/or of children). Respondents were embittered that "they [family] have had to learn to live with my deficits as well as myself and they've had to learn to adapt their lives."



People in this age group often have dual-facing care responsibilities, with not only their own children but also aging parents looking to them for support. An unanticipated reversal of care responsibilities between generations was noted by one woman who said that she should be caring for her aging parents, and not the other way around. Younger stroke survivors might need support from their parents not only for themselves but also for their children, with grandparents suddenly placed in a parenting role again.

Some of the participants indicated that their disability compromised the romantic side of their relationships, as in the case of this married father of four children who had a stroke at the age of 45:

It would be great to be able to go on a holiday, just hold hands and walk along a beach or just go for a picnic out in the country and sit by the river [...] But if we do anything like that, I've got to rely on my wife to push me in the chair, which I don't think sounds very romantic then, having to be taken rather than me taking my wife...



In summary, disruptions to childrearing plans, changes to spousal and family relationships, notable impacts on others in the family (e.g. spouses taking time from work, and children seeking counselling), and concerns about the quality of future relationships were noted.

1.3. Loss of valued activities (work, recreation, and socialization): Loss of valued activities included disruption to tangible activities (e.g. employment, recreational activities, driving) as well as relational activities (e.g. socialising with friends). These activities were commonly described as integral aspects of self. They were not only enjoyable but also, in the case of employment, financially necessary. A divorced mother and former fitness instructor with two children who had a stroke resulting from a previously undetected heart problem explained how the stroke was a double blow to her identity:

It's the fact that my sport was my life, it was my pleasure, it was my job, financially, everything.... every spare moment of the day was devoted to aerobics or pilates or yoga or whatever I chose to do, whilst the children were at work and, at school, and I, I lost it just like that with, with literally the turn of a page or a, a breath, that's all it was. It was a breath while a clock moved upwards.

This reference to a pinpoint in time—"a breath while the clock moved upwards"—represents the sudden breach with an active self.

Loss of employment, whether temporary or permanent, was noted frequently. For example, some participants had to close a self-owned business while others were made redundant post stroke. Some individuals had already returned to work, albeit in a modified capacity. In most cases, work disruption had clear financial consequences due to loss of revenue, which, for some, was compounded by additional expenses required for home adaptations to accommodate their disability.

In addition to the costs and impact related to loss of employment, loss of ability to partake in recreational activities was noted. For some, recreation (i.e. fitness) was a defining part of their identity that stroke threatened. A man who had a stroke at

the age of 53 during a heart operation shared the following:



...obviously you're thinking ahead, months and months ahead, "Is this how it's going to be?" You know, "As I say, I've run marathons, half marathons, climbed hills and played golf and cycled" and I was thinking ahead, you know, "Is this how it's going to be?"

In addition to the loss of the more tangible activities, disruptions to social-relational activities were noted. For some people, the ability to socialise was compromised due to functional limitations like fatigue.

Some participants distanced themselves from social relationships and outings because it was a reminder of their former self. Others were concerned that they would be perceived to be “not as fun anymore” or self-centred due to memory issues and a lack of ability to engage in meaningful, ongoing conversation.

In sum, the stroke left people unable to engage fully in their hobbies, work, and social activities that had been regular aspects of their lives previously.



2. Adapted sense of self

Although the stroke caused seemingly catastrophic disruptions and alterations to their lives, this was frequently countered by personal efforts to adapt and move on with life in its new form. This adapted sense of self includes three subthemes: seeking external support, restoring normality, and positive reflection.

2.1 Seeking external support: Despite the changes in social relationships and family roles noted in the themes above, some respondents, including those who initially felt isolated from family and peers, talked about the important roles of family, friends, peer support groups, and employers in the recovery process. A woman who had a stroke at the age of 28 said:

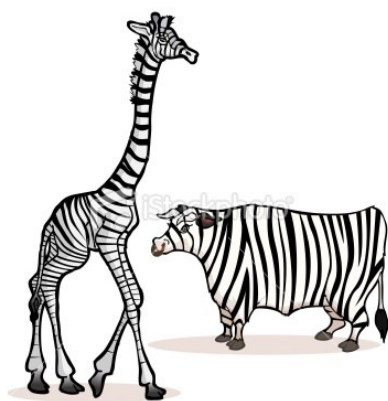
I have had the most tremendous support from my family and friends and I think that has just made the biggest difference to me. Everybody around me has just been so good I think. That's really helped me with my overall outlook on things that I've just kind of just got to get on with it.

Among those who had to take time from work, some were able to return in a modified capacity after a period of recovery.

So, despite the initial disruption and stress associated with work and family, they became important sources of support.

2.2 Restoring normality: A few individuals described their post-stroke experience as akin to being a new person. Removing aspects of their old self became a form of coping. A woman who had two strokes 3 months apart shared the following:

I had long hair [...] I had all my hair cut off. Right off, while staying with a friend. I mean, really, really short. The hair dresser said, “Are you sure about this?”, but it was because in a way I thought, “Well, this hair is the hair of her, it's the hair of the woman, that could, that walked and was well and wasn't, you know, and, wasn't disabled and I don't want her hair anymore because I'm not her now. I'm somebody new.”



Many individuals, including those who initially sought to create a “new self,” tried to restore their sense of self by engaging in activities that were important to them before the stroke such as visual arts, music, or public speaking. Others sought to re-establish roles to ease the burden on loved ones by helping out around the house, taking the kids to school, and preparing meals. One man says he did this so he would “not just be a useless blob around this house that can't do anything”.

In addition to re-establishing roles in the household, equally important was re-establishing a role in the workplace. One woman talked about what it meant to get a job back, even though it was a different job from what she had before her stroke.

I sat down with a blank piece of paper and thought, “Well, what do I want to do?” I knew I didn't want to stay at home all the time. I quite enjoy meeting people and seeing people and being part of a team, if not leading people, so I decided to go and see an old friend to ask her to be my second reference if I applied for something and she offered me a job so I've been there ever since.

In summary, restoring normality was an important part of the recovery process. Re-establishing roles in the household and workplace and reverting back to old hobbies were common among the study participants.

2.3 Positive reflection: As respondents settled into their lives post stroke, it was typical for them to alternate between grieving for their former capabilities and positively reflecting on their progress.

A woman who had a stroke at the age of 53 during a major heart operation talked about the importance of accepting dependence as part of adapting to it.

...you're going to the toilet, you know, and they're [medical staff] actually cleaning you up, you know, and you're thinking to yourself, "God, this is terrible." But they're actually saying at the time, "Don't worry, this is, this is our job, we do this every day, we'll do it for years to come, so don't worry." And once you get that in your mind, once you get that implanted in your mind and accept it, to me, that is a big, big hurdle to get across.

Some participants expressed gratitude for being given a "second chance" or told themselves that it "could have been worse." Others drew on stories of those who had overcome hardships, using downward social comparison with people they perceived to be worse off than they were, to motivate themselves. One respondent noted:



[Douglas Bader] actually was quite a successful Spitfire pilot. Shooting down lots of German planes when he had two wooden legs. And there's been times in my life when I've need to get up the steps or try and use a lawnmower or anything and I just think in my mind...Douglas Bader, Douglas Bader. "If he can get in a plane and fly with two wooden legs, then I can do anything."

For younger stroke survivors, wanting to continue to meet parental responsibilities and goals, such as "wanting to see the children grow up and settle down and have families of their own," could provide an added spur. Similarly, another respondent reflected "that looking after my two kids and being a mother to them, being a mum, doing what mums do, that's an achievement to me."

In summary, people reflected positively on their progress and expressed gratitude for having the opportunity to continue on their life trajectory, despite ongoing hardships.

What conclusions can we draw?

The above examples illustrate how individuals were typically shocked by their diagnosis and questioned their sense of identity, resulting in a "discredited notion of self". They confirm the impact that the stroke had on family, marriages, and social relationships, including the most intimate.

In terms of coping or seeking repair, much resilience was demonstrated across the whole sample in terms of positive attitudinal shifts, restoration of some aspect of self, and making small continual gains. There did not appear to be a consistent relationship between the time that had elapsed since the stroke and the extent of recovery.

Stroke rehabilitation tends to be concentrated in the first 6 months following a stroke, but the research found that stroke recovery is a much longer process, characterised by periods of stability and periods of uncertainty.

Young stroke survivors have stated that care services tend not to be congruent with their needs post stroke. Whilst there have been clear advances in hospitalised stroke care to address acute symptoms, there remains a lack of focus on post-stroke interventions that address psycho-social symptoms, including the manifestation of depression and stress that may hinder social and workforce participation.

What next?

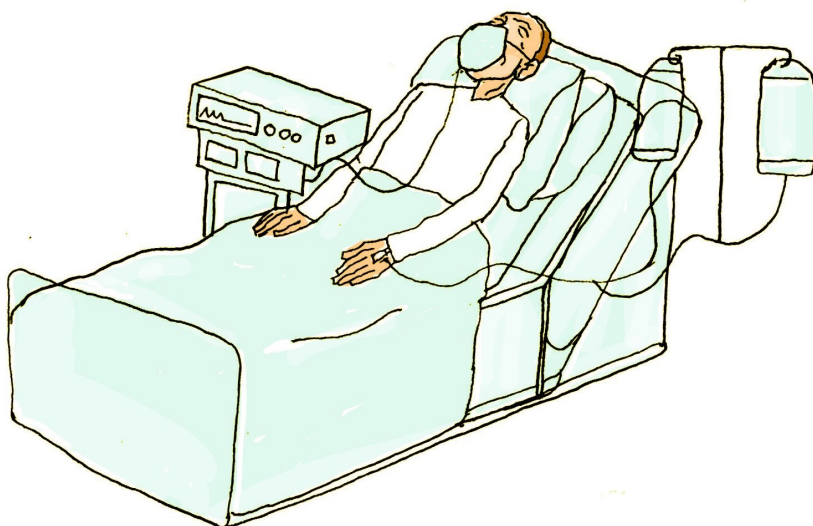
The researchers call for 3 forms of increased support:

- workplace reintegration,
- mental imagery, internally-driven care may represent a way to minimise the notion of self-loss that characterises the post-stroke experience
- psychosocial support for the person with stroke and their family - the emotional impact of stroke is less predictable and requires ongoing attention throughout the years following stroke. Strategies are needed to help persons re-engage in their social networks and maintain social capital; these are critical for ongoing health and wellness.

The researchers conclude:

A holistic model of rehabilitation that helps individuals regain the capacity for everyday activities related to work, family life, and leisure can begin to address the emotional ramifications of diseases such as stroke, restore wellness, and work towards minimising the burden felt by family caregivers and children. A key goal of our study population was going back to work and remaining active in their social and family lives. An incredible amount of resilience was demonstrated in our study population, which was mixed with feelings of uncertainty and frustration. These is an opportunity to capitalise on this readiness for change through a long-term rehabilitative strategy designed to reintegrate individuals back to some aspect of their pre-stroke self sooner than is occurring at present.

It is a model that we might extend beyond recovery from a stroke and apply to unwelcome forced change brought about not only by illness but and disability but also through altered social circumstances.



Young stroke victims in London to be offered help returning to work

Evening Standard: Published: 23 May 2013

A scheme has been launched to help working age Londoners who have suffered a stroke return to employment. The Stroke Association said the case of BBC presenter Andrew Marr had “shone a light” on the misconception that strokes affect only elderly people, as it launched its Back To Work initiative.

Marr, 53, who had a stroke in January 2013, said he was “lucky to be alive” but vowed to return to work. Some 35 per cent of stroke victims in London are under 65. Many face a huge battle to cope with depression and the “loss” of their past identity and get back into work. Tom Greenwood, head of London operations at the charity, said: “People need to be given the support so they can come to terms with what has happened to them and emotionally process it. You don’t expect someone to come out of this experience where their life has been turned upside down, be given Jobseekers’ Allowance and be told, ‘Get yourself a job’.”

The three-year project, which will operate across the capital, will offer survivors and their employers 12 weeks of support as they re-enter the workplace.

SOME SOURCES OF HELP & INFORMATION

Stroke Association

<http://www.stroke.org.uk/>

National Strike Association

<http://www.stroke.org/>

ACCIDENTS THAT CHANGE YOUR LIFE: LIVING WITH PERMANENT DISABILITY

Jenny Willis

A few months ago, I underwent surgery which I knew would require a long period of recovery. I had the luxury of being able to plan for this: I used my car whilst I could still drive to stock the cupboards; did household and gardening jobs that would be out of bounds; made arrangements for emergency transport to my father (fortunately not needed); planned the next issue of Lifewide Magazine around my period of greatest incapacitation, and so on. As I did all of this, I could not help wondering what it must be like to find yourself suddenly disabled, without warning, and leaving your life completely changed. Seven years ago, I had gone overnight from apparent normality to near death, but after a series of operations and time, I was able to resume life as before. What, though, if the bolt from the blue results in permanent disability?

One of my pleasures is to watch documentaries, from which I learn so much. Co-incidentally, there are two series running at the moment that have given me some insight into the effects of life-changing accidents. They include many examples of the struggles and challenges involved, but here I will give just two illustrations.



WIL

Wil is a police sergeant who studied law and decided to join the police because of the impressive way they had handled a case in which he had been the victim. He loved the job, recalling fondly

I loved foot chases and car chases, grabbing bad guys, you know? There is something very satisfying about that.

Then he pauses before adding

And then yeah, the accident. I couldn't do that any more.

The viewers had not yet seen that Wil is in a wheelchair at his desk. He goes on to describe the horrific car accident that had resulted the immediate loss of one leg and the subsequent amputation of the other. From being 6'2", he is now 5'8" when he dons artificial limbs to practise walking for his big day escorting his bride down the aisle.

My Mum wonders how I'm able to deal with everything that's happened. The simple answer is that I know I'm a better person as a result. Everything I've gone through has made me re-evaluate who I am, and I honestly believe it's made me a better person. I look at my life now and everything I have in my life and I couldn't be happier.

This is not mere bravado: it is clear that Wil is very contented with his life and has come through this immense life change still smiling. To some extent, this is due to his resilience and tenacity. He admits:

I always think that you've got to push yourself and test yourself against all kinds of things you can do ... [I am] always looking for a new experience.

Another vital factor in his story is his relationships, both family and professional, and especially with his fiancée. Their shared sense of humour is the icing on their cake:

Bonnie fell in love with a legless Wil. She has a T-shirt that says 'Only in it for the parking'.

He smiles and nods happily.



KERRY

By co-incidence, our second case study is also an amputee. Kerry is a 29 year old dental nurse who is helicoptered to hospital after she crashed her motor bike, severing one leg. We see her arrive, accompanied by a parcel containing her former limb, to be greeted by grim-faced specialists from no less than seven medical departments. Her distraught grandparents, with whom she lives, tell the camera:

We begged her, literally begged her, not to get it. But Kerry desperately wanted motor bike.

Her grandfather explains,

She was just a very confident girl ... She drove a 360 digger ... She was just a good, gutsy girl... Kerry was a 110% perfectionist.



As with Wil, we see the importance of intrinsic character traits in how the individual will respond to such life changing events. Kerry's strength and determination to succeed will see her move on from grief when she realises, 'But I've only got one leg, Grandad.' And as before, her close relationships are essential to her adaptation to a new life. She admits:

I am a person that likes to set myself goals. I could have either gone up or down and I nearly went down, but I had so much support around me that I went up and it's the support and my family and everything that's just helping me moving forward.

Reminiscent of the feeling I had on surviving (page), Kerry says

Knowing that you were that close to death and you survived, especially when I was one of those people that would say 'That'll never happen to me. That'll NEVER happen to me.' And it blinking well did. I was like ... oh, I'm definitely, definitely lucky to be here.

But Kerry was not content just to survive: we see her taking part in a 10k race. Her next intention is to *run* that race. She sums up the situation with characteristic modesty:



You just really have to pick yourself up and carry on going, because at the end of the day there's always someone worse than you. And I survived.

These two moving stories are typical of so many individual acts of bravery in the face of life-changing tragedy, and yet the 'victims' deny themselves this label. They take the challenge of using adversity to start a new chapter in their lives. Thanks to a magical combination of their own determination and the love and support of family and professionals, they demonstrate how it is possible not only to survive, but genuinely to enjoy their new lives.

Thank you to Wil and Kerry. We wish you well on your continued journeys.

Sources

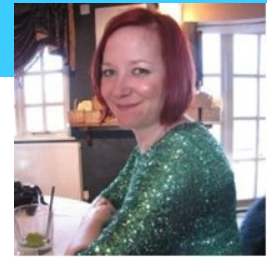
Sgt Will Taylor's story can be viewed at <http://www.channel4.com/programmes/24-hours-in-police-custody/on-demand/57099-007>

Kerry Water's story is on <http://www.channel4.com/programmes/24-hours-in-ae/videos/st-georges-hospital-series-7/>



IF ONLY LIFE WERE SIMPLE

Emily Jeffrey



Emily Jeffrey, is Senior Campaigns Officer at the Citizens Advice Bureau which helps people resolve their legal, financial and other problems by providing free, independent and confidential advice to people who need it.

Debt and welfare remain big issues. Families, in particular, are struggling – 1.4 million families with dependent children are behind with payments on household bills and credit card payments. And the £89 million reduction in legal aid funding for social welfare law since 2013 has already led to nearly 900 new cases brought by private individuals to resolve custody, adoption and care arrangements according to the Children and Family Courts Advisory and Support Service.

We live in a digital age, more connected than ever before through technology and social media. Adapting to that challenge poses different challenges for different sets of people. We are bombarded with up to five thousand branded messages every day, which we must navigate and interpret. 21 per cent of people in the UK don't have the basic skills to use email, search engines, browse the internet or fill in forms. These people are easily cut off from the best deals for goods and services and find themselves unable to access help and support. Government moves towards becoming digital by default will require significant adaptation for many trying to access welfare benefits and information about a welfare system that is changing rapidly. One million people who come to the Citizens Advice service find it hard to understand how the system works.

Even our advisers, who have a wealth of training and the collective experience of our 75 years of service, cannot escape the difficulties of dealing with complex problems – 90 per cent reported they struggle to find specialists to refer people to where more detailed advice is needed.

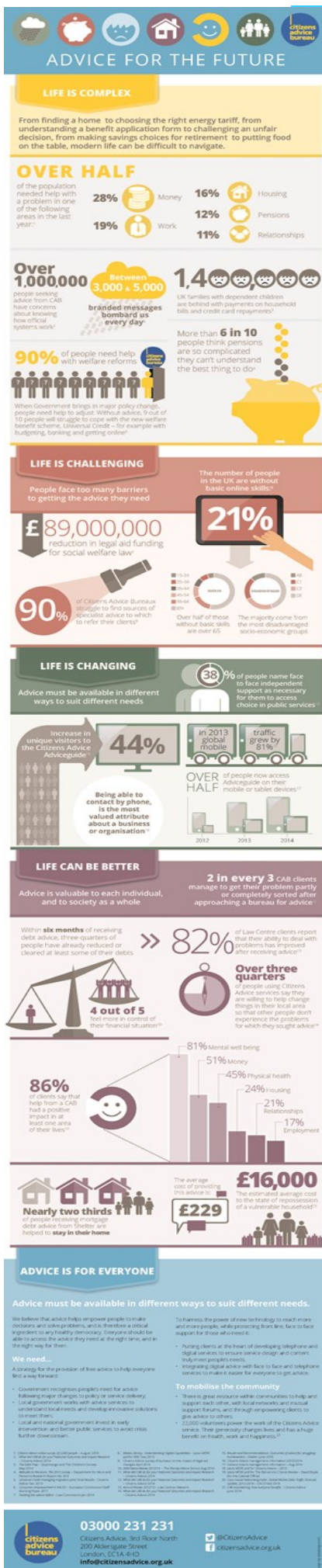
The growth of online communication is changing not only the problems people face but also how they seek advice. In 2013/14, Citizens Advice saw a 44 per cent increase in the number of people visiting our dedicated advice site Adviceguide with 22 million visits.

Despite the complexities, advice is incredibly effective at helping people navigate their problems. Two in three people who came to us in 2014 said their problem was partially or completely resolved as a result of seeing us. 81 per cent of our clients said the help they received from us had a positive impact on their mental health, highlighting the knock-on impact of the problems people face. Every time we or another agency offering free advice help to keep a vulnerable person from becoming homeless through repossession, we save the taxpayer £16,000.

Advice services are getting ever more important because life is getting more complicated. We need free advice to continue to support people to navigate the complexities so that problems get resolved rather than spiralling. We believe that advice helps empower people to make decisions and solve problems, and is therefore a critical ingredient to any healthy democracy. Everyone should be able to access the advice they need at the right time, and in the right way for them.

Blog post and infographic 10 November 2014

<https://blogs.citizensadvice.org.uk/blog/if-only-life-were-simple/>



REBUILDING SHATTERED LIVES



St Mungo's Broadway helps people recover from the issues that create homelessness. We provide a bed and support to more than 2,500 people a night who are either homeless or at risk, and work to prevent homelessness, helping about 25,000 people a year <http://www.mungosbroadway.org.uk/>

The **Rebuilding Shattered Lives** campaign was a national 18 month campaign organised by St Mungo's Broadway to raise awareness of women's homelessness, to showcase good practice and innovation and, ultimately, to improve services and policy for the future. The campaign addressed nine key areas which are often significant issues for homeless women and where a lack of access to appropriate services can have a real impact on their ability to recover from homelessness. Each theme was investigated over a two month period during which time individuals, statutory and voluntary organisations from across the UK were invited to submit their examples of effective services and promising new ideas. A group of Experts, each with exceptional levels of knowledge and experience, to support the campaign across these different themes

Women who are homeless are among of the most marginalised people in society. They often find themselves homeless after lengthy experiences of violence and abuse, mental ill health, substance use and more. These challenges are often interrelated and self-reinforcing, meaning it is difficult for women to progress in one area without also addressing the others. We know from our work with women that their needs often differ from those of men. It is unsurprising then that women tend to do less well in support services which predominantly work with and are designed for men. These male focused services often fail to comprehensively address the needs of their female service users, and a lack of coordination between services can result in some needs remaining unmet altogether.

Rebuilding Shattered Lives brought together a range of sectors working with women who are homeless to share understanding of the particular experiences of these women and the challenges they face, explore how organisations in different sectors are working with women to overcome these challenges, and discuss how we can better ensure women get the right help, at the right time. Drawing on the expertise of a panel of advisors working in different fields relating to women's homelessness, individuals, services and organisations were invited to submit their experiences, ideas and research. The full report can be downloaded from the project website.

Carole's story

In 2006 after the breakdown of my marriage, I found myself homeless. I was referred to a St Mungo's project in Notting Hill, where I spent some time recovering for a few years. Unfortunately, things went wrong for me while I was there. I got involved in the wrong company and one thing lead to another. I found myself going down the wrong road. I got in trouble with the police and went to prison for two and a half years. I served 15 months, then I got referred to St Mungo's again, this time in Earls Court.

That's when I really got my act together. I started thinking about what I could do with my life. I weighed up the pros and cons. I was determined not to go back to prison.

During my first session, my keyworker pointed out some of the workshops that were on offer there. I took advantage of most of these workshops just to keep my mind focused on moving forward and doing something meaningful with my time. I surprised myself by how much I really enjoyed meeting new friends and learning new skills. I developed the confidence to talk to people who were in the same boat as I was and to share my learning with them. It felt good.

I really wanted to better myself; I started cookery classes, then Indian head massage (which was so relaxing it helped me think straight) then I thought of doing the computer course. I couldn't stand computers at first. I thought my brain couldn't handle it so I forced myself to just get on and do it. After the first few classes I found myself really getting into it. Roger the tutor has so much patience; he helped me to understand how easy it was to learn how to use a computer. So much so, now I won't miss a session or a chance to use a computer. For someone who used to hate computers, now I love them.

After a few months of living at St Mungo's I was nominated to get my own flat. I snapped it up straight away. It's been over a year now. I've done it up so it looks great. I bought my sofa bed online, did some other shopping online and regularly check my email for notices as well as news from family and friends.

My life is beginning to feel complete. I've come so far from where I was to where I'm at now. Everybody tells me how I look so much better and happier now. I am so proud of myself for just getting down to doing something educational and keeping busy while staying away from the old company. I wouldn't want to go back to that lifestyle again. I love my life as I am now. I've truly found myself again.

Shawn's story

"I was just 16 when my mum threw me out – it felt like it came out the blue, but things had been rocky for a while." Shawn was struggling with dyslexia and bullying, as well as trying to cope with the breakdown of the relationship with his mother. He admits he had no confidence. Shawn started sofa surfing, not staying in one place for any length of time. "Sofa surfing is bad because you are never secure. You also feel like you owe people something. Inevitably crime comes into it."

It was when in prison in early 2012 that things started to turn round for Shawn. "This time, I'd just had enough and I wanted to do something more worthwhile." After leaving prison, Shawn began a 12 week peer mentoring course with an organisation that helps people to learn to drive in exchange for volunteer hours and moved into a St Mungo's Broadway hostel in Earls Court.

"I was always told I'd never be able to get a job. People were very negative about my dyslexia and I was bullied, I had no confidence but St Mungo's Broadway helped me build my confidence." Shawn applied and was accepted onto an apprenticeship scheme, which involves studying towards a health and social care qualification while working in a hostel. "It was great to be told I would be on the apprenticeship scheme. I really thought it would do wonders for my confidence and that was true. I can relate to clients as I have been homeless myself. Doing the nine to five, I haven't been late once. The apprenticeship has given me a future and I owe my life to St Mungo's Broadway." Shawn now has his own place go's Broadway." Shawn now has his own place and a job in a Westminster hostel as a project worker



Information source

<http://rebuildingshatteredlives.org/>

St Mungo's Broadway provides a bed and support to more than 2,500 people a night who are either homeless or at risk, and works to prevent homelessness, helping about 25,000 people a year.



DEPRESSION—REFLECTIONS ON LEARNING

Julian Stodd

Julian splits his time between research and writing about learning, alongside consultancy and delivering projects out in the real world. He writes a daily blog about his learning, where he joins his community of over 3000 followers to develop and share new ideas and understanding. He has authored several books and Guest Edited issue 11 Lifewide Magazine.

Depression is not being sad: depression is about being on a different island. Out of sight, away from other people.

Depression is being surrounded by a sea you cannot swim.

Depression is a perspective that you cannot alter, a frame you cannot shift.

Depression is about stigma and weakness: or maybe that's what we fear. Who wants to shout about it? It makes me sad to even think about it.

I read once that there must be an evolutionary benefit to depression: the theory being that perhaps those people who experience it develop empathy. I think it's true. You cannot swim for someone else, but maybe you can shine a light, show the way, even if the footsteps we take are always our own.

For me, depression was like slowly wading out to sea: past your ankles, your knees, your waist, your shoulders, up to your neck, and then the moment when your feet leave the sandy floor and you start to float. Just like that: gentle, but aimless. A lethargy. A loss of direction. Slowly, you become someone else, someone left behind, left outside. Alone on your island.

Redemption is a personal thing: for me, structure and time. Imposing a structure slowly allowed me to find perspective. A toe nudges the ground, your foot touches. You start to walk, pushing through the water. Slowly. Wading, splashing, emerging onto the beach. The cold of the water is just a memory: something that happened to someone else. Because you are someone else: the experiences of life change us, alter us. We learn through depression just as we learn through school but we learn different things about ourselves.

Some people spend a lifetime wading through tumultuous seas between small islands of calm. Sometimes, they never make it ashore. Fame, money, friends, love: for some, it's not enough. It's too far away, too faint to see or to hear.

For many, the journey back is slow but steady: depression can be contextual, triggered by loss or grief. We heal. We emerge. Changed, maybe stronger, maybe different.

The journey through depression is not one of fixing yourself: we are not broken but rather detached. Detached from one set of rails and searching for the next. The learning involved is not of striving to be better in some future self, but of releasing our attachment to our old self. Depression changes you, because when you emerge, you are not the same person as you were before. Grounded, maybe, by the same roots, but changed by the process of searching and discovery, much of it in our own heads.

Perspectives change with time, affording us different views. We can't turn the clock back and constrain our eyes to visions from the past. Instead, we remember the vibrant colours that, for a while, were muted, and we remember how we found our way and how we can help others to find theirs. That's what I learnt.

Should I be ashamed to say I suffered from depression? Lest you think me weak? Lest you fear I'll fall again? Does writing this expose part of me that I want to keep hidden? No: that was a previous life. The past that makes us into our present self.

And sharing is part of learning.



Developed from my blog post 13 August 2013 <http://julianstodd.wordpress.com/2014/08/13/depression-reflection/>



BREAKDOWN OR BREAKTHROUGH?

Jenny Willis

Whilst most of the articles in this issue focus on social change, clearly, accumulated microcosmic actions contribute to and are in turn influenced by what happens at the macrocosmic level. In this article, I illustrate how an individual's experience can provide indicators of dealing with personal change, mirroring the strategies for effective social change.

'A breakdown can be the opportunity for a breakthrough', said the psychiatrist, for once concentrating not on symptoms but on the cause of the problems that had haunted me since I began to think about the meaning of life, at the precocious age of seven. Unlike previous doctors, he seemed to understand that my condition was a metaphysical matter not something to be treated superficially with medication alone.

Here I was, having survived what should have been a fatal attempt on my life, yet somehow I was still alive. Why? Did my body have some unsuspected attachment to life? I certainly didn't attribute my survival to an act of divine intent. But it seemed significant that I was still here. What, though, did I have to live for? Astutely, the psychiatrist played along with my intellectual predilection and suggested I draw up two lists, one for, the other against, living.

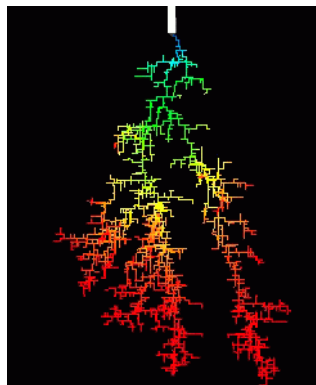
The negatives appeared overwhelming: I was 43 years old and had invested my whole life in my career. Now in senior management, I would leave for work at seven in the morning, and often not return for home until eleven at night, when I would drive the 30 miles journey, eat and fall asleep. Weekends were totally absorbed in any work that could not be fitted in to weekdays.

Consequently, my life had become a compulsive, blinkered, attachment to the job I loved. I had placed all my metaphorical eggs in one basket, and that basket was now in tatters, leaving me forlorn. I was banned from returning to my job, was unable to say goodbye to those I had worked with, had no social network beyond the workplace, and must endure a period of enforced hospitalisation. I was being confronted with the need to embrace forced change or opt out of the 'game' of life. What was it, then, that prevented me from giving way to the apparently overwhelming negatives? How is it that I can look back on this distant me and feel a sense of satisfaction, achievement even in how I coped with these multiple changes?

Partly, I have to concede, there was a fundamental willpower within me, the same resilience that had supported me throughout my career. But there was more to it than that: without realising it, I had been forced to accept the absurdity of life. I became empowered to join in what might now be

termed the gamification of life (see Gejel 2014). Suddenly, I had lost my fear of risk-taking outside my professional identity; I entered into new ventures.

So what exactly did I do? If I was to make meaning of the time I had on this earth, I felt that some form of social contribution was called for. I had little to give other than my professional experience and interest in the then-emerging technologies. I put these interests together to work as a volunteer for a political party in my ward, which no councillor then; going back to my linguistic roots, I began to work for the Open University as a teacher, staff tutor and researcher. Building on the confidence this gave me, I fulfilled my lifelong intention to gain a doctorate, something I had had to abandon as a new graduate, when I had my first breakdown over 20 years



previously. This incremental journey required constant adaptation to change and relied on my being able to create then use the opportunities that arose.

An essential component of my breakthrough was the unexpected, and timely, meeting of my soul-mate. After all these years of chosen insularity, I had someone who challenged me. Polar opposites in so many ways, we paradoxically gelled and were intellectual companions.

Together we have travelled extensively in our curiosity about world religions and culture; from being isolated, I now had an extensive adoptive family, scattered across the globe following ethnic violence in their home land. I am living across two cultures, immersed in new cultural practices, values and language. In Gejel's terms, I have been experiencing 'the dissolution of solid structures, such as lifelong employment, family, social security, belonging and community cultures.'

I tell this personal narrative as an illustration of how the ability to deal with the sorts of change 21st century life is forcing upon us requires a fundamental understanding of our existential values. I had spent forty years trying to make sense of what I believe is a senseless world. It was only when I accepted this absurdity and began to 'play the game' that I was able to find peace of mind and enjoyment. This is not a finite task: the game goes on and I am empowered to make of it what I will.

Reference: Gejel, J. 2014. Gamification and Empowerment.

OPENING BOXES

Editor's note: At the author's request, we are publishing this article anonymously

Before I begin, I want to let you know that 99% of the time, I have a very happy and lucky life; including a family that loves me, supports me, and makes me laugh like no-one else can.

I'd always thought that I was fairly adept at coping with significant disruption and change. I am from a family that struggles with mental health issues, with two immediate family members suffering from severe depression. I've had to deal with suicide attempts from both in the past five years, as well as the distress the daily depressions (when they arise, which is infrequently), have on them and my other family members. I was always quietly proud that I never really took a day off work to deal with what happened; I always went in and tried to carry on as usual.

The whole 'brain feeling on fire' was nicely suppressed by getting on with the day job. I'd have a day off to deal with an upset stomach or a virus, but something traumatic, oh no; that could wait until I got home. Whilst my 'day job' is in the business of personal development, reflection, and encouraging students to undertake this activity, I'd never associated this with what was going on in my wider life. I can tell you what skills I've gained from any given work activity in a heartbeat, but just don't touch on my 'real life'.

I have always been fully subscribed to Danny Torrance from Stephen King's (1977) *The Shining's* methods of dealing with horrors: locked boxes in your mind. Mine was a dark grey filing cabinet. One drawer for 'home', and one for 'work'. Really, that should have been my first clue that it probably isn't the best way to deal with things.

I've always been an avid supporter of lifewide learning as a concept; however it is only since I have reflected on what has happened to me this year, for this article in fact, that I realised I haven't practised or advocated it as much as I thought I had. I also hadn't quite made the connection in my mind that recognising life-wide experiences helps prepare students for dealing with the disruption life brings outside of work, whilst maintaining a job. It seems so obvious now I am letting myself experience it.

This year has been a real challenge. In January we found out I was pregnant, after trying for some time; in spring I had a missed-miscarriage. It was devastating. Six months later we found out that one of my parents has terminal cancer. I've still not got to grips with even comprehending it.

It is difficult for me to say how I have been able to adapt and grow through my experiences, because I've not dealt with

them properly yet. They are still so raw. What I can do is reflect on how my old method of keeping my 'home' and 'work' life stringently separate isn't the answer.

A year or so ago I spoke to my line manager and let her know about one of my family members who had tried to attempt suicide. Ordinarily I wouldn't have chosen to say anything, but I was due to attend a conference the day after it had happened. I knew that I couldn't keep it locked up any longer, and I wanted to pull out of the conference last minute. My line manager was, and continues to be, very supportive. I was nervous about letting someone at work know, but once I had done it, the relief was indescribable. This was the first step to being able to cope with what has happened this year.

My manager and a work colleague knew I was pregnant so I had no choice but to let them know when 'it' happened. Again, a huge amount of support came from them both, whilst I was off work and when I returned. When I discovered one of my parents had cancer, I actually opened up to a number of people at work so that they would know that it might have an impact on my work. Of course, as you would expect, everyone is supportive.

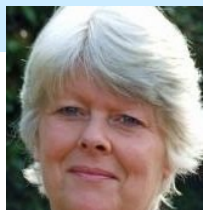
I have realised that lifewide learning is something I have supported and encouraged others to do, but it has taken until now to realise that it is not something I've actually practised. I think this is because I only considered myself the 'professional' not the 'person', when undertaking self-reflection. Now, I have started to re-assess whether I am fully encouraging it, and embedding it in the work I do, because I feel I've only just had my eyes fully open to it. I don't have the answer for that yet, and that's ok. It's a positive challenge to get my teeth into.

Writing this now, it seems strange that I had spent so many years boxing off what had been my home life from my work life. The answer is so obvious when you have time to sit back and reflect. Don't get me wrong, I still don't broadcast it from the rooftops. I am still discreet, and still struggle to speak about these things out loud; but that locked box lets a chink of light in these days.



AS I GROW OLDER: WHAT DOES LEARNING REALLY MEAN ?

Elizabeth Dunne



Liz Dunne is Head of Student Engagement and Skills at the University of Exeter and a member of the Lifewide Education Team

As I grow older, I wonder frequently about what learning is, what it really means, what it really means to me, as a person.

I can say I have learnt a lot about technology recently. I'm proud of that - I don't find it comes easily. My adult children are amazed that I occasionally know more about something than they do! 'How did you learn about that?' they ask. Possibly more important than the actual learning of how to use blogs and wikis and portals and flipcams and Facebook and Youtube and the multitude of free technologies online, is the understanding of how they can help me in my life and work; what can I do with them? What do they afford that is different? And the answer is, a lot; and I recognise and rejoice in that fact, knowing that in my old age I will be able to stay connected with the world, with friends, with family, in ways that have not been available to previous generations.

Such experiences can be easily recognised as 'learning'. I take something new; I become more skilled in its use; the more I learn, the easier new learning becomes because I can see similarities and connections; I understand the application of that learning to new contexts; I recognise my own development and how I can support others in developing.

I sometimes struggle with this learning, but I know how it works, I am an experienced and reasonably good learner. I have done it all my life; I have confidence in the process (though I'm inevitably 'learning' that my memory is not quite as sharp as it was).

But there are other kinds of learning processes that I have less confidence with, that are less routine. I'm not sure they are even 'learning'. But I don't know what else to call them.

On this day of writing, it is the birthday of my children's father. For many, this would be a day of celebration; for my family, a sad and poignant day. He is no longer here to celebrate with us. You might now ask - 'So what has this to do with learning, or with development?' That, perhaps, is my question to you, as you read this account.

A pleasant weekend family meal with friends: the phone rings. My son answers. In the single, ashen-faced word 'Mum', I know there is something seriously wrong. Heart attack... cycling with friends... sudden... air ambulance... pub... 60s... too late. The sheer animal scream of my daughter will haunt me forever. But in that single moment of shock, I learnt that I could recognise the nuance of voice and expression in my son, that I had an inexplicable closeness. I learnt too, that my children would respond in such different ways: one with calm, clear-headedness, the other with an unearthly howl. I learnt that I would be un-nerved by both. In a split second I also learnt that I would be able to cope, I knew that the closeness of our relationship would deepen, that we would all be able to cope, in our different ways.

I have used the word 'learnt' in this account, because it is the word that comes naturally, but I could have used other words, such as 'recognised' or 'knew' or 'acknowledged'. But to me, I believe this experience gave me the deepest experience of learning that I can imagine. I learnt about myself and I learnt about my children. I learnt that I could think on my feet, in the most unexpected of circumstances, in a state of shock. And I continue learning from this experience, alongside my children, as they create lives for themselves that are in so many ways a reaction to this death. I had to learn that I would be deeply affected in a way I could never have anticipated, even two years on. My son left his well-paid job to follow his love and to live in New Zealand for a while - I think he learnt that you must live life while you have it. My daughter decided, with much heart-wrenching, to train as a GP: something long in her mind, but she learnt that this really should be her vocation. Both examples may sound trite, but I know them to be heartfelt responses.

Such experiences are maybe less easily recognised as 'learning' in the conventional sense. Unlike the technology example, I cannot keep building on my experience. I do not think I will be better prepared in the future; I do not have confidence in the learning process. It is an emotional journey, emotional learning, forced upon me unexpectedly; and I have developed as a person because of it. Somehow it gives me a deeper sense of humanity and what it means to be human. This is not the same as learning about technology (though my relationship with technology is sometimes extremely emotional as I swear at the computer for its failings)! Technology gives me skills that I can describe and measure; I am largely in control of what I learn and what I want to learn; I could be tested on my learning.

So the question remains: is something that has by far the greater impact on my deepest feelings, my 'inner' being, appropriately characterised as 'learning'. No-one would wish to test me on this learning, but it has changed the ways I behave, the ways I think, the ways I interact with people, the ways I appreciate the world around me. Strangely, this is also what technology achieves, though in such a different way. Technology does not impinge on my inner being, but it does change the ways in which I think, behave, interact and appreciate the world.

So, I ask, is this the meaning or the very purpose of learning, whatever form it takes to enable us to think differently, to shift our perceptions and understandings, and to allow us to grow as individuals and as members of the human race?

Editor's Note: Retirement in the Social Age

For people who have spent most of their lives working for someone or themselves, the gradual or abrupt process of leaving work and / or a professional career, is an important point of disruption in their life. The literature tends to discuss retirement as a discrete point in time. For many, however, the boundary between work and retirement has become unclear: for example, people are not sure when to say they actually stopped working or when they started calling themselves retired.

Many more people, especially those in receipt of occupational pensions, are not delaying retirement, instead they are retiring early and starting new careers: in fact the older workforce is growing more rapidly than the younger workforce. In the past, the stereotypical image of retirement was of 'living a life of leisure'. Instead, for many, "leisure world" is no longer the goal of retirement. Not working is not enough. With more freedom to spend time as one chooses, retirees want less stress and more meaning, fewer obligations and more joy. For some, retirement takes the form of a second career, part-time work or an "encore career" sometimes to help pay the bills, but often to give back rather than accumulate more wealth.

Having a sense of control over the decision to retire, being able to decide how and when to retire can impact the person's ability to plan, and is correlated with higher levels of self-efficacy, mental well-being and how well people take care of their health. Forced retirement, on the other hand, is a predictor of adjustment problems and can have negative effects on the retired worker and their spouse or partner. Another consistent research finding is that retirement tends to be easier for people who are goal-oriented and therefore able to plan what to do once they have retired.

For those people who have the means and capability, retirement in the Social Age is assisted and enriched by the availability of the internet, social media and communication technologies. Having social networks — including social connectedness as well as internet connectedness — are vital at any time in life and definitely in retirement. This is a time in life when people can experience many losses. The retiree's world can shrink and change dramatically — through the ending work, declining health, death of loved ones including partners/spouses, family, friends and moves. Therefore, having and being open to others and staying connected to others in person when possible, or by email, skype and google is especially important at this stage of life.

It's an interesting fact that half of Lifewide Education's core team are technically 'retired' but they are still active in all sorts of ways including supporting the Lifewide Education community. There follow three articles by members of our community on this form of life disruption.

Source: <http://myretirementworks.com/research/>

PERSPECTIVES ON RETIREMENT IN THE SOCIAL AGE

Jenny Willis

Introduction

As outlined in the editorial note above, retirement from work can be a major disruption in an individual's life course and have repercussions on their spouse or partner. We wanted to gain our own perspective on this so we conducted a small scale study involving two transcribed interviews with four interviewees. To preserve confidentiality, pseudonyms are used for the four respondents. At the time of the research, 'Ben' and 'Jane' had both been retired for three years, 'Sue' for three months. These participants are recipients of an occupational pension. Ann was preparing for imminent retirement. Ann lives in her adoptive country, Australia. Each interview followed a similar structure, focusing first on individual perceptions of retirement, both before and after the event, then moving on to discuss how respondents spend their time. The small scale nature of the survey was counterbalanced by the richness of data that was collected.

What does retirement mean?

Although Sue, Ben and Jane are formally retired from their careers, it is immediately clear that none of them is sitting back, waiting for the Grim Reaper. Indeed, they are reluctant to accept that retirement is an accurate description of their stage of life.

Ben explains:

I often say I'm semi-retired and then explain what I'm doing. I do things occasionally to earn money but it is not for myself, it's for my social enterprise. But I'm not in full time employment; I am taking pension and therefore I am retired. I often joke that I'm being paid through my pension to run my own business.

In other words, he implies that receiving payment for activity is one indicator of being in active employment. The distinction is echoed by Sue who says that if she had to decide on her status,

I would tick 'retired' because I'm not doing anything else that is paid.

The point is reiterated by Jane, too, in her interview:

I have theoretically retired though it doesn't feel like it when I spend every minute of every day working. But I am retired from paid employment.

An alternative term is proposed by Ann, which encompasses the notion of being active while avoiding mention of any financial remuneration:

I'd probably say occupied [...] it's just [...] an all embracing terminology.

Retirement is, then, associated with the notion of no longer earning money, but that does not mean that individuals are inactive, as we shall see later.

Outer change but inner continuity

When asked if they had any youthful images of what retired people look like, respondents share a common stereotype:

grey haired or bald (...) had plenty of time to go visiting people (...)not working basically (Ben)

really old (...) had grey hair and one grandma had a floral pinny on and was doing housework and cooking and, yeah, seemed to have lots of time to pop to the shops every day (Sue)

So, associations include both the physical signs of ageing and not being in paid work, leaving endless time for leisure – or shopping! Are these images with which you can identify, asks Jodie.



I don't feel like the person I look like,

responds Sue, admitting that she tries to mitigate the signs by dying her hair every six weeks, but knowing that her young charges are not fooled by this and laugh at the incongruity of seeing her go down a slide in the playground. Coincidentally, Jane also questions whether it is time to stop dying her hair, and asks

should I be dressing as if I was elderly, as my grandparents' generation did?



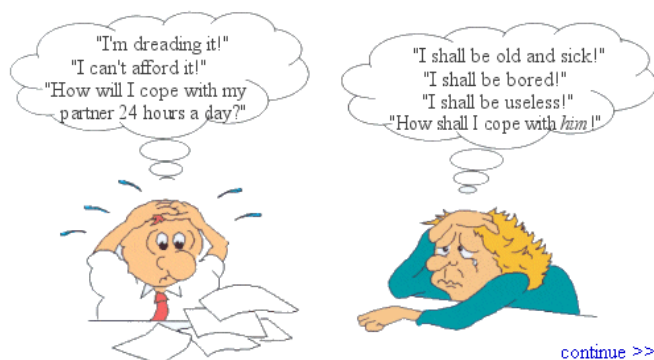
There is therefore some conflict between perceptions of old age in the past and what it means for a generation who will live on average longer than their predecessors. To some extent, the conflict is not social but individual. Those of us who have reached a similar age will recognise Ben's observation that how we feel and look are different, and whilst the outer appearance changes we still *feel* the same person:

as you grow old you realise that inside you there's quite a young person.

Jane suggests that we not only see ourselves as younger than our years, but we put other people's age into perspective against our own:

as we get older we don't see people looking the age that we know that they appeared when we were younger.

RETIREMENT!



[continue >>](#)

Returning to the impact of age, Anne takes up Jane's description of being 'over the hill' and says of her grandparents' generation:

their lifestyle was more sedentary and they just seemed to be almost, I don't know, they were like hermits in their own environment.

Ageing appears, then, to be a relative concept. Subjectively, we do not feel different from our younger selves, but we experience some conflict between this inner sense and the outer signs of age. We defy the process not only in how we reject the image of older people once taken for granted, but also in how we spend our time in retirement. Before we look at this question, what did

respondents have to say about their expectations compared with the reality of being retired?

Anticipating and experiencing retirement

Unlike Ben, Sue planned her retirement at 60, but faced external pressures *not* to retire:

I felt like it was what I wanted to do but I had to convince everybody around me.

She admits, though, that part of the reason for her resigning 6 months prior to this was to help her accept the decision:

I think part of that was me getting my head around it as well.

In contrast, Ben had given no thought to retiring; it was an unanticipated change: that was thrust upon him:

I had just come to the end of a project and the university decided not to keep me on. I was suddenly confronted with the proposition that I could retire and it was only when they said, look your pension would be this much that I thought, yeah, I could retire from employment. But I had had no idea that I was going to retire at that point.

He admits:

I surprised myself when I retired and I had to come to terms with it then, once I had made that decision.

The usual advice is to ensure that you have activities to keep you engaged after retirement:

people advise you to plan for your retirement and to have hobbies and all sorts of things to do when you get there.

Ann's pending retirement is something of a forced change, though she stresses her decision to take it. As her parents have become elderly and more in need of support, she has decided it is time to retire

to make sure that I can give them some quality of life.

Retirement is also offering her a welcome change and opportunity to regain control, since

I have felt that my business has taken over my life. We've got this reverse horse and cart going on at the moment and I'm sort of trying to retain control of that.

Meanwhile Jane has been through the process of retirement twice, the first time when only 45. She admits that, as a workaholic, forced retirement was life-changing:

to have that (work) suddenly taken away from you, it left me completely without any identity at all. Because I'd put all my eggs in one basket.

Ann feels that men may experience this loss of identity more than women,

I often find that the men are actually linked so closely to their job that it defines who they are in lots of ways.

The two respondents question the nature of retirement for those who have no children and agree that it may have different drivers for those with no children to carry on their legacy.

But like Ben, Jane has turned the negatives to her advantage, sharing her time between social/family commitments and personal development in order to make her life meaningful. All four respondents illustrate the significance of intrinsic qualities such as determination and ambition in order not to sink into lethargy once they have retired from the active workforce.

The importance of spouses emerges for the two respondents whose partners are still working, and are too young or reluctant to retire, though there is some peer pressure to do so. Sue and Ben believe that their support has been invaluable and that their own examples have made retirement more acceptable to them.

Retirement activities

What has made their retirements so positive? And do respondents conform to their own youthful image of having infinite time to chat and potter?

Personal dispositions once more influence the way in which retirement is spent. Ann couples this with physical health, suggesting

It is about being able to do it while you are still fit and young enough to do all these things. Who knows what is going to happen in a year, two years, three years time? I think as you grow older you realise that through your experiences in life that you have to live for the now and not worry too much about the future.

A similar point is made by Ben when he says

there's something about... you need to do these things when you need to do them.

Underlying this sense of compulsion there is often a desire to leave a legacy:

I want to do something that will impact on other people either through teaching or through the writing, as something that would leave, leave a mark.

says Jane. Anne echoes this in her belief that

At some point most human beings want to have a significance in something, and be part of an important community issue or whatever it might be

Anne and Jane talk explicitly about self-fulfilment and compare their state of being with the higher levels of Maslow's hierarchy¹. Ben touches on the same issue when he remarks his joy is

**I'm
Retired**
Not Expired

Retirement
is a Journey..
Not A
Destination!



To still find some time to live a fulfilled and meaningful life, I guess, but without the obligations to an employer to turn up and work.



Jodie guides the conversations to the activities in which respondents engage in order to achieve this sense of fulfilment, and asks specifically about priorities: do they lie in the family or with personal choices of how time is spent?

Family responsibilities are important for all interviewees, but these are more a source of pleasure than of obligation. Sue's immediate response to how she spends her time is

Childcare mostly! And looking after an elderly mum, caring things which is very much what I enjoy doing and meeting friends. It's nice to have the freedom to meet friends for lunch.

Her family commitments span three generations: looking after her parents and her children's children. She does not see these as obligations, though, expressing the immense pleasure she derives from them:

I feel like I am being paid, not in monetary terms but just in the joy of getting to know my grandchildren and having that opportunity.

Ben's interests are also people-centred. He explains

The way I divide my time, roughly I guess, is like 50% is all to do with family ... Then the other half is really linked to a social enterprise that I am trying to support and lead.

We have already heard that Ann has chosen to retire in order to give more time to her elderly parents. Nevertheless, she acknowledges a personal need, which co-exists with her sense of daughterly responsibility:

retirement is about taking back my time and actually being able to prioritise it for what I would like to do. Because most of my life my time has been revolving around other people's choices rather than my own. (...) for me it is about giving myself back some choice, it might sound a little selfish, but that's what retirement is for me, as I move forward.

Jane admits that she is in a fortunate position, not currently having caring responsibilities, so she can prioritise other activities. She recognises, though, that if her elderly father were not so independent, her priorities would have to change:

I'm very fortunate. If he wasn't in such a good condition that would have to be my priority. But because he is able to look after himself, for me it's the new challenges.

Another personal disposition is thus paramount: a sense of loyalty to family.

Having the time to deal with such commitments is crucial. Ben illustrates this:

in life that things crop up, like my son was very ill last summer and so we had to drop everything and had I been at work that would have been very difficult to cope with.

Whilst Jane feels she is always busy, she admits that, when something serious crops up, she has the luxury of choice:

although I say that time is precious, I suppose that ultimately I do have the...I have the flexibility to decide what I do and when I do it. I have to prioritise. So I appreciate that.

Social commitment does not stop with the family. Since retiring, Sue explains,

I'm involved in Girl Guiding, I'm a Rainbow Unit Leader, and I've been doing that for a few years now, probably about five years.

She goes on. *I have volunteered at the local hospice as well.*

and quips

I don't want to be bored but I don't think there's much chance of that at the moment!



Ben has been engaged in fund raising for a child with cancer, which has brought him great intrinsic pleasure, in addition to his social enterprise. Jane contributes to the same social enterprise, and spends time supporting mental health issues and teaching.

It is clear that the ability to take part in such activities is greatly facilitated by having a pension income, and our respondents are privileged in this respect. Financial security enables them to spend time on other activities which are more personally centred.

For Ben, this is creative and intellectual:

I'm always writing and I guess a big part of my life is also about writing mainly about education but other things as well. So, yeah, that sort of consumes the other part of my life, but I enjoy doing it, it's not like a task and in a sense if you were to say what the benefit of retiring was, it has given me a lot more time to devote to that which is some thing I want to do.

Jane has similar interests, which bring her self-fulfilment but she also admits to a need to remain abreast of change:

I feel it's imperative to keep abreast of things, and I'm very conscious that because I'm no longer in the working world and I don't have children, I'm losing touch with a lot of the changes that are going on. Particularly in the technological sense.

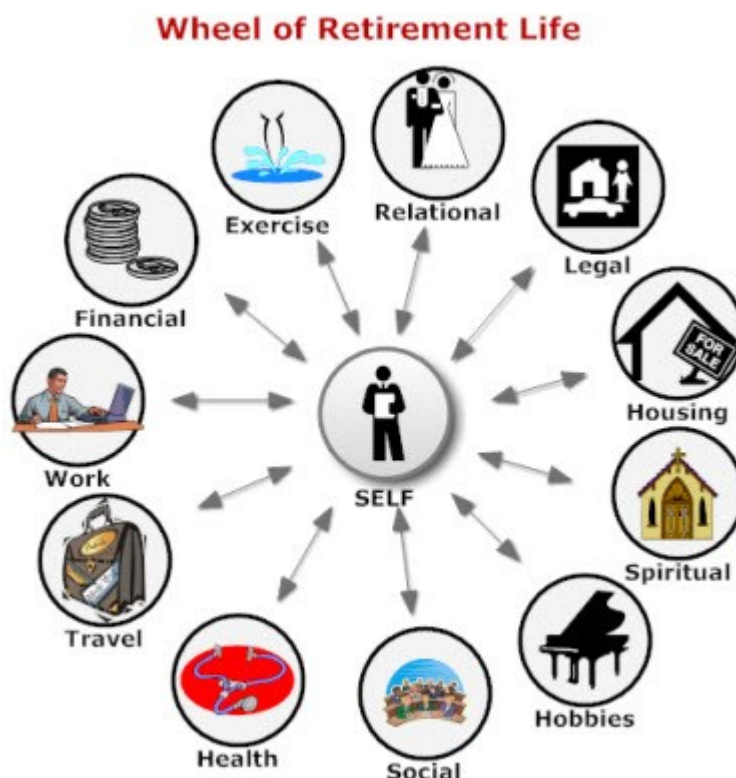
This drive to keep on learning and enjoyment of new discoveries is common to all four respondents, and must surely be fundamental to their positive experience of retirement.

So what have we learnt about retirement?

The interviewees confirmed that the stereotype of retirement being a time of inactivity or oriented towards leisure is far from accurate, at least for them. Three have chosen or are choosing to retire early in the 60's so as to spend more time doing the things they want to do which are partly for themselves but also for other people, especially for family members. They reveal some conflict between their outer appearance of ageing and their inner sense of being still youthful, and are challenging their bodies and minds to remain active. All three respondents who have already retired seem to be adjusting well to the lifetime disruption. Individual disposition seems important to the way in which retirement is approached: for those with an enquiring mind and enjoyment of learning, it can be a time of great self-fulfilment.

Clearly, all the subjects in this small scale study were enjoying their new freedoms but the sample is clearly skewed towards people who are financially secure, with strong family links and professional backgrounds. For these reasons, the ways in which they are enjoying their retirement may not be possible for all who reach their age. However, it does seem that retirement offers an enriching time of life when generations are able to support one another, to individual, family and wider social advantage. Our respondents offer us a reassuring model of how to continue to lead meaningful lives at ages that once were considered 'old'!

¹ Maslow, A. 1943. The theory of motivation.





THE SLOW DISRUPTION OF AGEING

Jenny Mackness

Jenny is an active independent researcher, writer and educational consultant living in Cumbria. She shares her work on her blog at jennymackness.wordpress.com

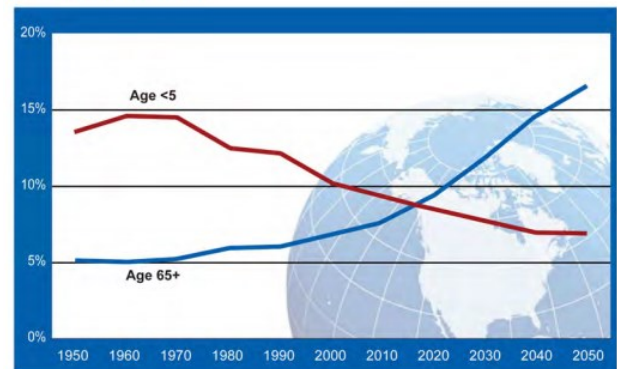
Old age is like a plane flying through a storm. Once you're aboard, there's nothing you can do. (Golda Meir)

It is predicted that by 2060 in the United States there will be as many people over the age of 85 as under the age of 5. Currently the proportion of the population over the age of 65 is the largest ever (Alexander, 2014) and continues to rise. According to data published by the University of Oxford, I am likely to live another 20 years. I enjoy good health, have a good income and have never had a manual job.

In twenty years time, 2035, if I am still alive I will be 88. I am fully expecting to live longer than this as longevity is a family characteristic. But this will only be a blessing if I can manage the challenges and changes that ageing will bring.

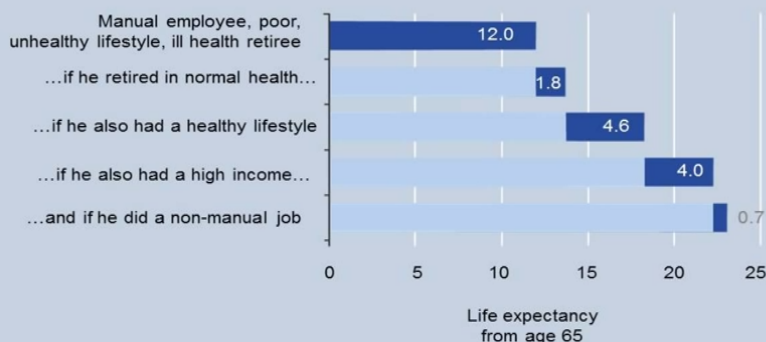
I had never thought until recently that ageing would be a disruptive process, that it would mean changing the way I live my life, re-evaluating what I can do and re-thinking my identity. As I watch my mother growing old (she is now 89), I am increasingly aware of the changes I can expect – personal, relational and societal.

Young Children and Older People as a Percentage of Global Population: 1950-2050



Source: United Nations. *World Population Prospects: The 2010 Revision*. Available at: <http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp>.

Impact of different factors on longevity



Source: Oxford Institute of Population Ageing

Unlike some other significantly disruptive life experiences, such as a catastrophic accident or bereavement, where from one day to the next life changes for ever, the disruption of ageing creeps up on you.

On a personal level I don't remember when it started, but one day I woke up and realized that I no longer leap out of bed like I used to, despite taking regular cardio-vascular exercise and doing weight training. I resent the feeling I now have that exercise is something I really must do to ensure that I live a long and healthy

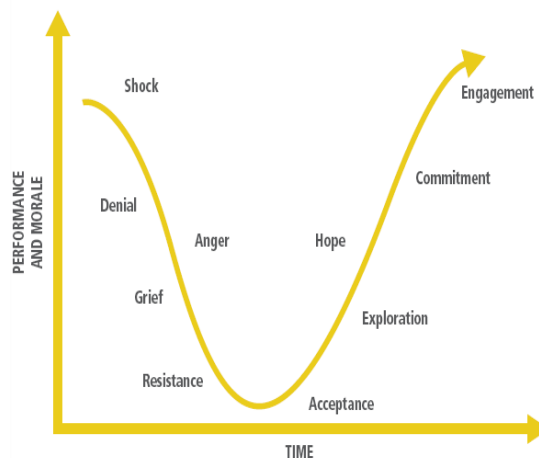
life, rather than something I used to do for pleasure and without much thought. Mental activity has also become a necessary exercise, although it remains high on my list of enjoyable activities. I have been drawing my pension for a while, but I am strongly resisting giving up my work as an independent education consultant and researcher. I have been working in education for more than 40 years. It is a significant part of my identity. If I gave it up, who would I be? For now I am putting off answering this question and the associated disruption it would cause if I gave up this aspect of me. On a relational level, people close to me are also ageing and as a result their lives have been disrupted with knock on effects for mine. A few years ago my mother was diagnosed with dementia and from one day to the next life changed for her and for me. She lost her car and independence and I lost the mother I knew and gained a dependent. My partner is also suffering from the ageing process. His loss of mobility and independence is progressive, and I see him and me going through the transition curve as an ongoing cycle of first resistance and then adaptation to change. It's not easy.

For me the swings in the transition curve are not huge, but are continually present and oscillating. I have gradually found myself in a new role as a 'carer' for my mother and partner, a role for which I feel unsuited. I now find myself doing many of the things that nurses do in their daily practice and remember that nursing is a profession that never appealed to me.

Source: karisburton.wordpress.com

On a societal level, it feels disruptive to live in a world in which the population is increasingly ageing. In my twenties and early thirties I lived in Brazil when the majority of the population there was under the age of 25. That was such a wonderful time to be young and surrounded by the energy of youth. Now I live in a country (the UK) where there are more people aged 60 and above than there are under 18 ([Age UK, 2014](http://AgeUK.org.uk)) and there is concern at a national level, which I share, about whether the country is prepared for an increasingly older population.

Because ageing is not a uniform process, people feel old at different ages, with some beginning to feel old at the age of 50. At the other end of the scale, it is not difficult to find examples of elderly people doing amazing things physically and mentally well into their 80s and 90s that would have been unheard of not so long ago, and it is predicted that the number of people living well past the age of 100 will increasingly rise. I like to think that I too will be physically and mentally active in my 80s and beyond.



Ageing is context dependent and will be unique to each individual. I know that when I finally admit to being 'old', this will be, mentally, a disruptive process. It will affect my perceptions of who I am and influence how others think of me. Resist or accept, I know that I cannot hold back the ageing clock forever, but perhaps I can manage the process and minimize the disruption by being better prepared. My preparation includes wanting to continue as long as I can to make a valued contribution to society. I want to continue working as long as possible. I want to exercise regularly. I feel constrained by my increasing caring duties but I am committed to living as full a life as possible. This is my challenge, but I am not yet sure how to achieve it.



I feel fortunate that I have had a career in education and know the value of learning. I also feel fortunate that I am relatively 'tech savvy'. I know how to seek and find information on and off the internet. I'm hoping that this information will help me with pensions, benefits and financial support, healthy living, care and support and more. A number of charities such as [Age UK](http://AgeUK.org.uk) already provide these services. I'm very conscious too that keeping fit, physically, mentally and socially, will be important. I know about [The University of the Third Age](http://TheUniversityoftheThirdAge.org.uk) and other organizations that provide activities for people post retirement. I am an

active participant of free open online courses. I recently learned a lot about the ageing process and how to prepare for it from the [Growing Old Around the Globe](http://GrowingOldAroundtheGlobe.org.uk) online course.

I know that learning lies at the heart of coping with the disruptive changes that ageing will bring. I also realize from my own experience that young and old alike will experience the effects of ageing, either directly or indirectly, and formal and informal education is needed to prepare us for these changes. I'm hoping that I will be prepared for them.

Editor's note: what do you see in the image above? An elegant woman with a stole and feather in her hat or an ugly old crone with black hair?



Making Sense of Disruption And Resilience

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USING COMPLEXITY THEORY TO VISUALISE LIFE'S DISRUPTIONS

Norman Jackson



The human condition is to try to understand situations in order to make good decisions about how to act or not act. Some situations are easy to comprehend: they are familiar and we have dealt with them or something like them before and we are confident that we know what to do. Others are more difficult to understand and some are impossible to understand until we have engaged in them. The amount of stability will vary from one person's life to another. Instability leading to disruption is not something that can be controlled, and there are many things in life that we have little or no control over. But some aspects of our life we can control and we can actively seek stability by avoiding putting ourselves in situations that might lead to disruption.

We might hypothesize that people who behave conservatively, who do not take risks or venture into situations of uncertainty, are less likely to encounter self-created disruption. But also perhaps, they are less likely to be able to deal with it when they encounter it. On the other hand, people who go looking for adventure and change, who are willing to take risks, are more likely to encounter self-created disruption in their life. And because they have experienced it before and dealt with it, they are better able to cope with it should it happen again.

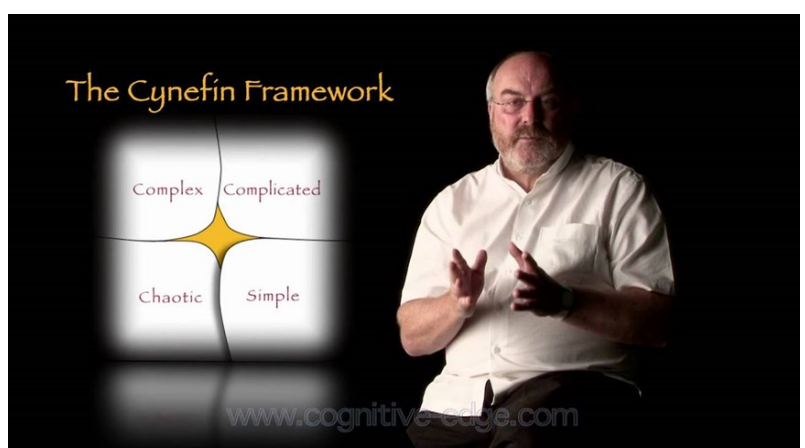
This article is concerned with how we might understand stability, change and disruption in our personal life using complexity theory to help us appreciate what is happening and why it is happening. Complexity theory is a set of concepts that try to explain complex phenomena not explainable by traditional cause and effect theories. It integrates ideas derived from chaos theory, cognitive psychology, computer science, evolutionary biology, general systems theory, fuzzy logic, information theory, and other related fields to deal with the natural and artificial systems as they are, and not by simplifying them (breaking them down into their constituent parts). It recognises that complex behaviour emerges from a few simple rules, and that all complex systems are networks of many interdependent parts which interact according to those rules¹.

Interpreting life disruptions using the Cynefin framework

The Cynefin sense making framework, developed by David Snowden^{2&3} is a simple tool to help us explore and appreciate the nature and level of complexity in any situation. It was originally developed to aid understanding of organisational change, but the conceptual tool can also be used to evaluate personal situations. A life is after all made up of many situations of differing levels of complexity all being enacted in real time. Fortunately, for most of us, most of our life is made up of situations that are fairly stable and we can reliably predict what will happen within such a situation and we can behave accordingly. We are not challenged to invent new behaviours or learn new things in order to act appropriately and effectively.

Disruption occurs when events and circumstances cause the patterns, routines and relationships of everyday life to fundamentally change and we are forced to relinquish our existing life, or significantly adapt it, or invent an entirely new life for ourselves and perhaps reinvent ourselves in the process. In such situations we are challenged to invent new behaviours and learn new things in order to act appropriately and effectively.

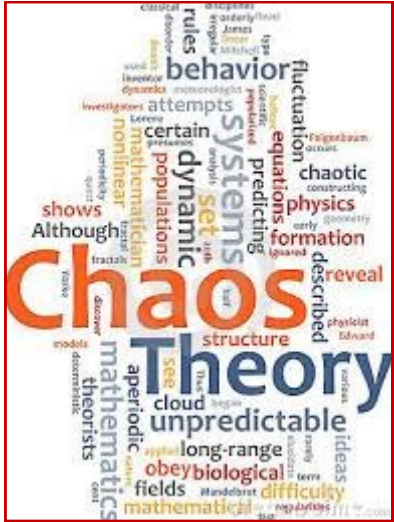
The Cynefin framework developed by David Snowden <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7oz366X0-8>



At the other extreme is the *chaotic* domain where there is no perceivable relationship between cause and effect. If this situation happens in your life, you feel totally out of control and overwhelmed physically, intellectually and emotionally. We encounter this out of our depth, never experienced before, situation in some life changing experiences. In these situations we sometimes do nothing, either because we do not want to exacerbate the situation or we feel so overwhelmed that we can't imagine anything we do will beneficially affect the situation. Alternatively, we may feel that we have to act, believing that it is better to do something than nothing. In fact it is only by doing something and seeing the results of what we do that we know whether what we did was effective. The feedback we get from our actions enables us to see what we need to do next. It's a trial and error suck and see, who can help me process. It won't get us out of chaos but it may well take us one step in the direction we need to go.

Between these two extremes there are two other types of situation depicted in the Cynefin framework.

Complicated situations are not single events but involve a stream of interconnected situations linked to achieving a goal, like solving a difficult problem or bringing about a change in one's life. An example might be the way someone searches for, finds, applies for and eventually, after a long recruitment process, manages to secure a new job which will bring about a significant change in their material circumstances. Searching for, finding and buying a house might also fall into this category of life challenge. In such situations there are cause-and-effect relationships but sometimes you have to invest effort into working out the relationships by gathering information about the situation and analysing it to see the patterns and look for possible explanations of what is happening. Engaging in these sorts of challenges is the way we become more expert in achieving difficult things, including finding a job and being a parent with teenage children who are trying to find a more independent life.



Complex situations are the most difficult to understand. They are not single events but involve multiple streams of variably connected situations linked to achieving a significant change or, in the context of life disruption, a collection of situations that have coalesced and conspired to make a situation very messy and difficult indeed. In their article Jan Gejel and Keith Chandler⁴ describe life scenarios where a severe illness leads to depression, leads to loss of job, leads to economic problems and perhaps loss of home, leads to relational problems in the family or the loss of job leads to economic problems, leads to health and social problems like clinical depression and family problems; a divorce leads to loss of family identity, leads to a depression, leads to loss of job. These are complex and very messy situations that may tip people into chaos and without help, few people are able to create a new and better life for themselves. In such situations the cause-and-effect relationships are so intermingled that things only make sense in hindsight and sometimes well after events have taken place. The results of action will be unique to the particular situation and cannot be directly repeated. In these situations relationships are not straightforward and things are unpredictable in detail. People involved may not know the cause of the change that they have been involved in or ascribe the source of change to something that is quite removed from the trigger for change. The way you make progress in understanding what is happening is to sense the patterns of change and respond accordingly. This is exactly where the construction of narratives can help especially if the process is aided by a trusted empathetic facilitator.

Learning for a Complex World

Traditional academic forms of higher education are founded on stability and certainty and seek to control learning and development within prescribed outcomes-based models of education. They work predominantly with abstract book knowledge and theoretical approaches to problem working. In terms of the Cynefin framework higher education tends to position learning in the simple and complicated domains. Consequently, these forms of education do little to prepare people for the really significant disruptions they will face in their life. Formal education can equip us with knowledge, understanding and ways of thinking that can assist us in particular contexts but it is limited in so far as it cannot offer us the experiences of actually dealing with complex situations as they emerge in the social world that is our life outside the classroom.



The real educational challenge for higher education is to help learners prepare themselves for the disruptions, some forced, some chosen, that they will undoubtedly encounter in their lives. In helping learners develop the knowledge, capability, creativity, will and resilience to deal effectively with the full range of life situations we are developing their ability to comprehend and appraise situations of different levels of complexity, and act appropriately and effectively. We do this intuitively throughout our lives because that is what life is about. It stands to reason that a university that adopts a lifewide concept for learning and development⁵ extends the opportunity to engage students with the situated and contextualised environments in which such complexity emerges. That is why institutions that seek to encourage learners to draw on their whole life experience for their own development are moving in the direction we need to go if we are to create an education system that will really help people prepare for their uncertain and unknowable futures.

Biographical Note: Norman is the founder and leader of Lifewide Education

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2 Snowden, D. (2000) Cynefin, A Sense of Time and Place: An Ecological Approach to Sense Making and Learning in Formal and Informal Communities. Conference proceedings of KMAC at the University of Aston, July 2000 and Snowden, D. (2000) Cynefin: A Sense of Time and Space, the Social Ecology of Knowledge Management. In C. Despres and D. Chauvel (eds) *Knowledge Horizons: The Present and the Promise of Knowledge Management*, Bost on: Butterworth Heinemann.

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5 Jackson, N.J. (2014) Lifewide Learning and Education in Universities & Colleges: Concepts and Conceptual Aids in N Jackson and J Willis (eds) *Lifewide Learning and Education in Universities and Colleges* Chapter 1 available at: <http://www.learninglives.co.uk/e-book.html>

THE IMMERSIVE NATURE OF SERIOUS LIFE DISRUPTION

Sarah Campbell



***Sarah** is a doctoral research student at the University of Surrey, researching music and emotion and how it could be used to facilitate neural plasticity in recovery from addictions. She is also a member of the Lifewide Education team.*

The most disruptive experiences in life are often immersive in the sense that they become all consuming. Perhaps the most obvious case would be lying on your back in hospital with serious illness or injury. The experience is your life - your whole life. *Immersion* is a metaphorical term derived from the physical and emotional experience of being submerged in water. The expression *being immersed in* is often used to describe a state of being overwhelmed, engulfed, submerged or stretched to the point of not being able to cope.

Studies conducted by the authors at the University of Surrey recognised 'Immersion as a chosen or necessary form of engagement to cope with a situation that has been created by circumstances beyond an individual's control, e.g. chaos at work, severe illness, bereavement, coping with extreme situations like natural or manmade disasters', as one of four categories in their classification scheme. A full report of this work will be published in a future issue of the Magazine which will be devoted to this topic. Here we simply draw attention to the simple conceptual framework that was devised to show the sense of journey reported in many narratives of immersive experience which probably approximates the journey of many people transiting through a serious life disruption. Three overarching themes were identified in the biographic accounts of immersive experiences: the experience, the individual and facilitating factors in coping with and enabling the transition from one life to another.

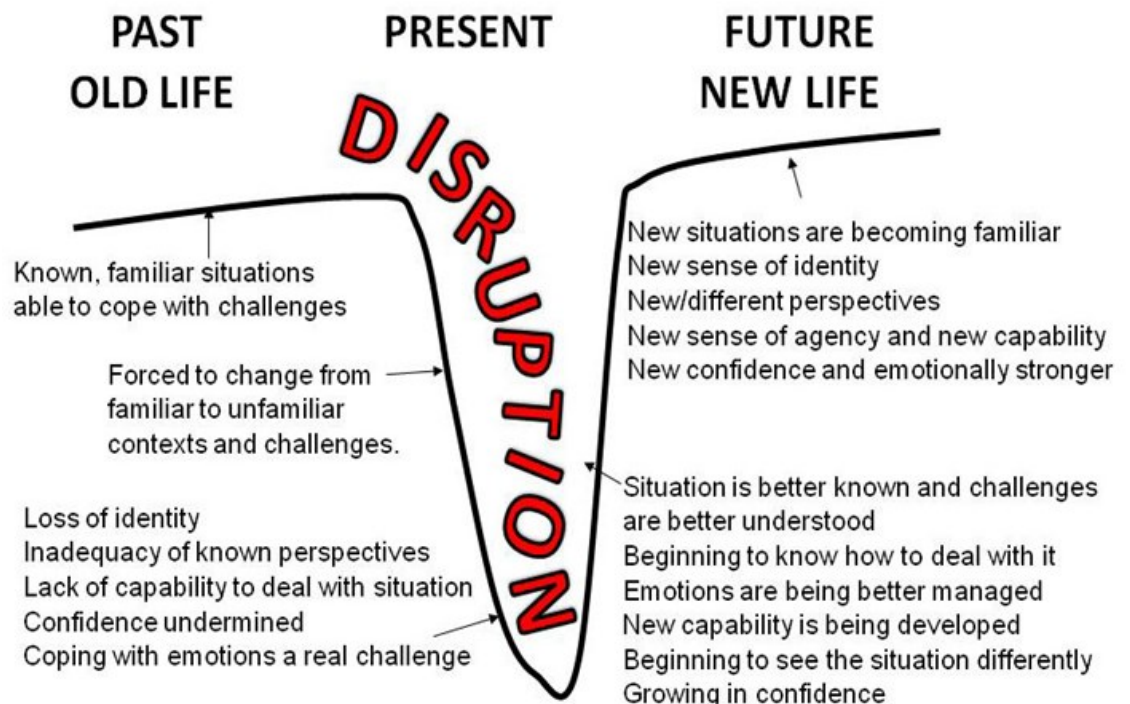
The experience

A sense of journey – is the predominant theme of immersive experience stories in which the past contained the everyday journey of one sort of life, the present the everyday situations of the disrupted life and eventually a future, in which is different to what was experienced before the disruption.

Emotions – there is a strong emotional dimension to

immersive experiences, and it appears that these emotions are a significant factor in the motivation of an individual to either resist change or to choose to change.

Paradox –immersive experience involves juxtaposition. In the context of life-disruption it is the juxtaposition of a past life with a totally different present life. Depending on how sudden and unexpected the disruption was people may experience an initial state of shock but eventually they must come to terms with the paradox.



The individual

This second overarching theme captures what happens to the individuals who engage in immersive experiences and the important changes (transformations) that individuals undergo during the experience.

Choice – in significant life disruptions people would not choose to be in that situation, although in some cases like the conscious decision to divorce a partner a choice will have been made. However, choice becomes important when people try to move out of a difficult situation and to learn new strategies and skills to cope with and master a situation.

Loss of identity/role change – in significant life disruptions there is a sense of loss of self, characterised by uncertainty and loss of confidence. The question is whether a new sense of self can emerge made up from integrating old parts with new parts.

Perspective change – the juxtaposition of the past with a very different present and an uncertain future creates strong negative feelings and a sense of being overwhelmed. Cognitive reappraisal, or perspective change, reduces dissonance and helps the individual re-evaluate the situation and see it more positively, therefore making it more manageable. Other people are often instrumental in this perspective change.

Factors that facilitate transformation

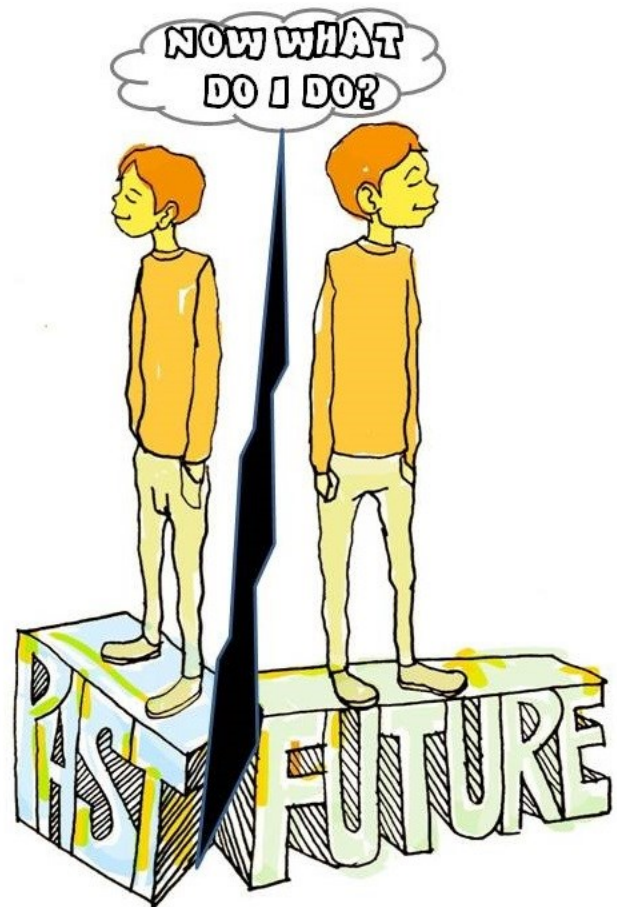
The third overarching theme identifies some of the factors that influence the process and representation of transformation.

Support from others – the supportive role of others in immersive experiences is essential to helping people make sense of their experiences, provide other perspectives, help individuals understand their emotions and regain balance and help them imagine a new future. This support was sometimes direct and in other instances was indirect. These significant others may be members of the family or friends, they may be people with specialist knowledge and skill for example people involved in health care, social care, advisory services, religious affiliations or, in the social age, they may be people contributing to on-line community forums. People who act as facilitators help people reconstruct their biographical narratives and help them progress to a new but different life. Support may also include professional specialist support such as medical care, counselling, and so on.

Comparison – not surprisingly comparing the familiar past with the unfamiliar present is a way to understand and contextualise the sudden unfamiliarity in which people find themselves during a significant life disruption.

Sources of information

1 Campbell S and Jackson NJ (2014) Immersive experiences: an important ecology for lifewide learning and development in N J Jackson and G B Cooper
Chapter C6 Available at: <http://www.lifewideeducation.co.uk/research.html>



Editor's Note: It's clear from the stories contained in this Issue that you cannot talk about significant disruption in a person's life without talking about their resilience. Disruption and resilience are partners in life and where resilience is absent or weak is where people end up despairing their circumstances and spiralling down into clinical depression. This article is based on the Guide produced by the American Psychological Association. It provides helpful advice on what resilience is and how it might be nurtured and developed. Such thinking could be incorporated into designs for learning particularly those designs that value and recognise learning and development gained through learners' life experiences.

THE ROAD TO RESILIENCE

American Psychological Association

<http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/road-resilience.aspx>

Resilience is the *process* of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress [and disruption] — such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems or workplace and financial stressors. Being resilient means that you have and demonstrate the ability to "bounce back" from difficult experiences.

Research has shown that resilience is ordinary, not extraordinary. People commonly demonstrate resilience. Being resilient does not mean that a person doesn't experience difficulty or distress. Emotional pain and sadness are common in people who have suffered major adversity or trauma in their lives. In fact, the road to resilience is likely to involve considerable emotional distress. Resilience is not a trait that people either have or do not have. It involves behaviours, thoughts and actions that can be learned and developed in anyone.

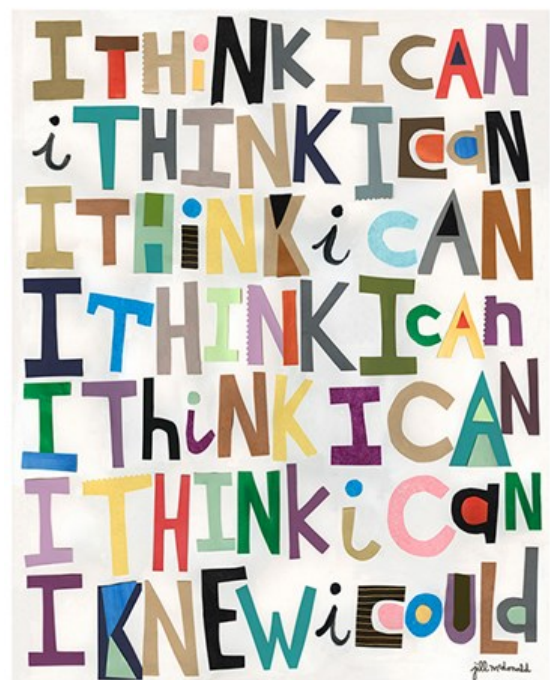
Factors in Resilience

A combination of factors contributes to resilience. Many studies show that the primary factor in resilience is having caring and supportive relationships within and outside the family. Relationships that create love and trust, provide role models and offer encouragement and reassurance help bolster a person's resilience.

Several other factors are associated with resilience, including:

- The capacity to make realistic plans and take steps to carry them out.
- A positive view of yourself and confidence in your strengths and abilities.
- Skills in communication and problem solving.
- The capacity to manage strong feelings and impulses.

All of these are factors that people can develop in themselves.



Strategies For Building Resilience

Developing resilience is a personal journey. People do not all react the same to traumatic and stressful life events. An approach to building resilience that works for one person might not work for another. People use varying strategies. Some variation may reflect cultural differences. A person's culture [national and familial] might have an impact on how he or she communicates feelings and deals with adversity — for example, whether and how a person connects with significant others, including extended family members and community resources, or whether they are willing to share how they feel. With growing cultural diversity, the public has greater access to a number of different approaches to building resilience. Some or many of the ways to build resilience in the following pages may be appropriate to consider in developing your personal strategy.

Ten Ways to Build Resilience

Make connections. Good relationships with close family members, friends or others are important. Accepting help and support from those who care about you and will listen to you strengthens resilience. Some people find that being active in civic groups, faith-based organizations, or other local groups provides social support and can help with reclaiming hope. Assisting others in their time of need also can benefit the helper.

Avoid seeing crises as insurmountable problems. You can't change the fact that highly stressful events happen, but you can change how you interpret and respond to these events. Try looking beyond the present to how future circumstances may be a little better. Note any subtle ways in which you might already feel somewhat better as you deal with difficult situations.

Accept that change is a part of living. Certain goals may no longer be attainable as a result of adverse situations. Accepting circumstances that cannot be changed can help you focus on circumstances that you can alter.

Move toward your goals. Develop some realistic goals. Do something regularly

— even if it seems like a small accomplishment — that enables you to move toward your goals. Instead of focusing on tasks that seem unachievable, ask yourself, "What's one thing I know I can accomplish today that helps me move in the direction I want to go?"

Take decisive actions. Act on adverse situations as much as you can. Take decisive actions, rather than detaching completely from problems and stresses and wishing they would just go away.

Look for opportunities for self-discovery. People often learn something about themselves and may find that they have grown in some respect as a result of their struggle with loss. Many people who have experienced tragedies and hardship

have reported better relationships, greater sense of strength even while feeling vulnerable, increased sense of self-worth, a more developed spirituality and heightened appreciation for life.

Nurture a positive view of yourself. Developing confidence in your ability to solve problems and trusting your instincts helps build resilience.

Keep things in perspective. Even when facing very painful events, try to consider the stressful situation in a broader context and keep a long-term perspective. Avoid blowing the event out of proportion.

Maintain a hopeful outlook. An optimistic outlook enables you to expect that good things will happen in your life. Try visualizing what you want, rather than worrying about what you fear.

Take care of yourself. Pay attention to your own needs and feelings. Engage in activities that you enjoy and find relaxing. Exercise regularly. Taking care of yourself helps to keep your mind and body primed to deal with situations that require resilience.



Additional ways of strengthening resilience may be helpful.

For example, some people write about their deepest thoughts and feelings related to trauma or other stressful events in their life. Meditation and spiritual practices help some people build connections and restore hope.

The key is to identify ways that are likely to work well for you as part of your own personal strategy for fostering resilience.

Learning from past experiences

Focusing on past experiences and sources of personal strength can help you learn about what strategies for building resilience might work for you. By exploring answers to the following questions about yourself and your reactions to challenging life events, you may discover how you can respond effectively to difficult situations in your life.

Consider the following questions:

What kinds of events have been most stressful for me?

How have those events typically affected me?

Have I found it helpful to think of important people in my life when I am distressed?

To whom have I reached out for support in working through a traumatic or stressful experience?

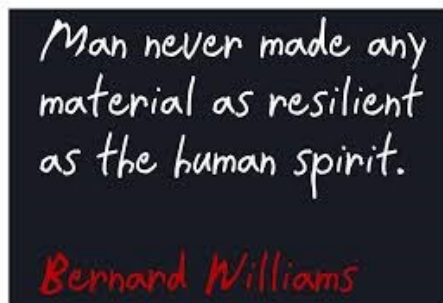
What have I learned about myself and my interactions with others during difficult times?

Has it been helpful for me to assist someone else going through a similar experience?

Have I been able to overcome obstacles, and if so, how?

What has helped make me feel more hopeful about the future?

Maintaining flexibility



Resilience involves maintaining flexibility and balance in your life as you deal with stressful circumstances and traumatic events. This happens in several ways, e.g.

Letting yourself experience strong emotions, and also realizing when you may need to avoid experiencing them at times in order to continue functioning.

Stepping forward and taking action to deal with your problems and meet the demands of daily living, and also stepping back to rest and reenergize yourself.

Spending time with loved ones to gain support and encouragement, and also nurturing yourself.

Relying on others, and also relying on yourself.

Finding and Accepting Help

Getting help when you need it is crucial in building your resilience. Beyond caring family members and friends, people

often find it helpful to turn to:

Self-help and support groups. Such community groups can aid people struggling with hardships such as the death of a loved one. By sharing information, ideas and emotions, group participants can assist one another and find comfort in knowing that they are not alone in experiencing difficulty.

Books and other publications by people who have successfully managed adverse situations such as surviving cancer. These stories can motivate readers to find a strategy that might work for them personally.

Online resources. Information on the web can be a helpful source of ideas, though the quality of information varies among sources.

For many people, using their own resources and the kinds of help listed above may be sufficient for building resilience. At times, however, an individual might get stuck or have difficulty making progress on the road to resilience.

A licensed mental health professional such as a psychologist can assist people in developing an appropriate strategy for moving forward. It is important to get professional help if you feel like you are unable to function or perform basic activities of daily living as a result of a traumatic or other stressful life experience.

Different people tend to be comfortable with somewhat different styles of interaction. A person should feel at ease and have good rapport in working with a mental health professional or participating in a support group.

Rafting down a river - A useful metaphor for life

To help summarize several of the main points in this brochure, think of resilience as similar to taking a raft trip down a river. On a river, you may encounter rapids, turns, slow water and shallows. As in life, the changes you experience affect you differently along the way.

In travelling the river, it helps to have knowledge about it and past experience in dealing with it. Your journey should be guided by a plan, a strategy that you consider likely to work well for you.

Perseverance and trust in your ability to work your way around boulders and other obstacles are important. You can gain courage and insight by successfully navigating your way through white water. Trusted companions who accompany you on the journey can be especially helpful when you have to deal with rapids, whirlpools, upstream currents and other difficult stretches of the river. You can climb out to rest alongside the river. But to get to the end of your journey, you need to get back in the raft and continue to the end.

Source American Psychological Association <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/road-resilience.aspx> How Resilience Works

HOW RESILIENCE WORKS

Notes from an article by Diane Coutu

Resilient people possess three characteristics: a staunch acceptance of reality; a deep belief, often buttressed by strongly held values, that life is meaningful; and an uncanny ability to improvise. You can bounce back from hardship with just one or two of these qualities, but you will only be truly resilient with all three. These three characteristics hold true for resilient organizations as well. Let's take a look at each of them in turn.

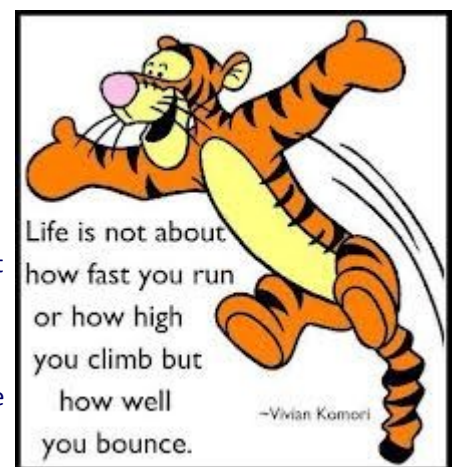
Facing Up To Reality

A common belief about resilience is that it stems from an optimistic nature. That's true but only as long as such optimism doesn't distort your sense of reality. In extremely adverse situations, rose-colored thinking can actually spell disaster. The fact is, when we truly face up to reality, we prepare ourselves to act in ways that allow us to endure and survive extraordinary hardship. We train ourselves how to survive before the fact.

The Search for Meaning and Purpose

The ability to see reality is closely linked to the second building block of resilience, the propensity to make meaning of terrible times. We all know people who, under duress, throw up their hands and cry, "How can this be happening to me?" Such people see themselves as victims, and living through hardship carries no lessons for them. But resilient people devise constructs about their suffering to create some sort of meaning for themselves and others.

This dynamic of meaning making is, most researchers agree, the way resilient people build bridges from present-day hardships to a fuller, better constructed future. Those bridges make the present manageable, for lack of a better word, removing the sense that the present is overwhelming. Resilience is neither ethically good nor bad. It is merely the skill and the capacity to be robust under conditions of enormous stress and change. Values, positive or negative, are very important for resilience. Resilient people will give up doing something that threatens to compromise their values.



Resourcefulness

The third building block of resilience is the ability to make do with whatever is at hand. Psychologists follow the lead of French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss in calling this skill *bricolage*¹ [rather than resourcefulness]. Intriguingly, the roots of that word are closely tied to the concept of resilience, which literally means "bouncing back." Says Levi-Strauss: "In its old sense, the verb *bricoler*...was always used with reference to some extraneous movement: a ball rebounding, a dog straying, or a horse swerving from its direct course to avoid an obstacle."

Bricolage in the modern sense can be defined as a kind of inventiveness, an ability to improvise a solution to a problem without proper or obvious tools or materials. *Bricoleurs* are always tinkering—building radios from household effects or fixing their own cars. They make the most of what they have, putting objects to unfamiliar uses. In the concentration camps, for example, resilient inmates knew to pocket pieces of string or wire whenever they found them. The string or wire might later become useful—to fix a pair of shoes, perhaps, which in freezing conditions might make the difference between life and death. When situations unravel, bricoleurs muddle through, imagining possibilities where others are confounded.

Obviously, luck does have a lot to do with surviving. But resilient people face reality with staunchness, make meaning of hardship instead of crying out in despair, and improvise solutions from thin air. Others do not. This is the nature of resilience, and we will never completely understand it.

1. See, e.g., Karl E. Weick, "The Collapse of Sense-making in Organizations: The Mann Gulch Disaster," *Administrative Science Quarterly*, December 1993.

Source: Harvard Business Review May 2002 <https://hbr.org/2002/05/how-resilience-works>

promoting resilience

in the health promoting school

Resilience
describes a person's
capacity to cope with
changes and challenges
and to bounce back
during difficult
times

A person who
is resilient is likely to

- recognise and manage their own feelings and understand the feelings of others
- have a sense of independence and self-worth
- form and maintain positive, mutually respectful relationships with others
- be able to solve problems and make informed decisions
- have a sense of purpose and goals for the future

A caring and supportive
school environment can promote
a sense of connection and belonging
and help children, young people and
staff become more resilient
and confident to learn



Encourage the development of a positive attitude, self-belief and communication

- Provide positive feedback, encouragement and reassurance
- Help pupils learn to understand and express their feelings
- Communicate openly with all pupils



Increase support networks for pupils

- Someone to talk to
- One-to-one support
- Peer support/buddying/befriending
- Foster a culture of listening



Encourage the building of trusting and co-operative relationships between pupils and adults

- Foster mutual respect between everyone in school
- Recognise outside pressures/influences on pupils
- Activity days/residential trips



Increase pupils' engagement with learning

- Flexible use of teaching methods and styles
- Opportunities for performance
- Provide additional support for learning
- Formative assessment to plan learning experiences



Foster a positive and inclusive ethos

- Build a sense of belonging in school and class
- Involve pupils in decision making
- Celebrate diversity within the school community



Activities outwith the classroom

- Lunch time/after school clubs
- Development of safe social areas in school grounds
- Participation in eco schools/health promoting schools groups



Encourage a sense of fun

- Make time to have fun in class
- Opportunities for games, laughter, jokes and relaxation
- School dance/pantomime/carnival/fundraising



Develop life skills

- Practical/project work
- Pupil involvement/responsibility for running tuck shop, looking after visitors etc
- Work experience/voluntary work
- Opportunities to think and act in enterprising ways
- Build literacy and numeracy skills

for resources and further information



www.healthpromotingschools.co.uk

Adapted from 'A Bright Future for All', Mental Health Foundation, 2009 by the Schools Team, Directorate of Public Health, NHS Tayside

THE RESILIENCE CYCLE

Jerry L Patterson & Paul Kelleher

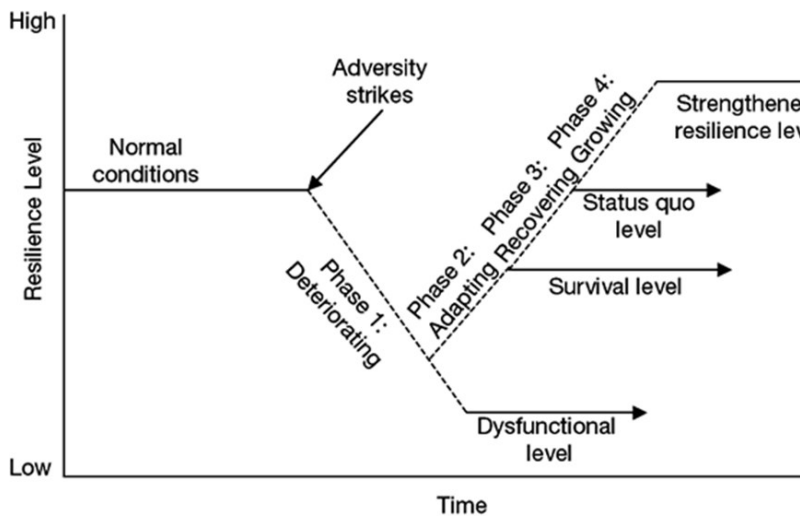


Figure 1 The Resilience Cycle

We have identified four phases in a resilience cycle that you as school leader move through when adversity enters your life - 1 Deteriorating 2 Adapting 3 Recovering 4 Growing. The cycle, illustrated in Figure 1 begins after a disruption to what we're calling *normal conditions*.

We realize that some school leaders would take issue with our contention that today's school environment contains any hint of normalcy. However, we also recognize that most leaders would not characterize their jobs as filled with constant, relentless adversity. In the rare situation where a school leader's daily life actually is filled with ongoing adversity, this quality often becomes a new definition of normal for the leader. We make the assumption, then, that the resilience cycle you experience begins with so-called normal conditions.

Phase 1: Deteriorating After adversity hits, virtually everyone encounters the first stage in the resilience cycle: *deteriorating*. Pearsall (2003) describes the deteriorating phase by stating, "We react like kindling wood being added to fire. At least for a while, we think in ways that cause our problems to heat up and become more intense. We become angry and even aggressive. We blame others or degrade ourselves. We become our own and our problems' worst enemy" (pp. 8–9). Denial, grief, and anger thrust you into the victim role for a time. This is an unhealthy phase to be stuck in, but in the short term the downturn from normal can be healthy if you handle your anger and frustration constructively. The good news is that for a vast percentage of people, the deteriorating phase is temporary. Rarely do individuals plateau out of the deteriorating phase into the dysfunctional level indicated in Figure 1. School leaders who find themselves stuck long-term at the dysfunctional level likely will not be able to continue functioning in their professional position.

Phase 2: Adapting After experiencing the downward-sloping deteriorating phase, most school leaders bounce back to reverse the trajectory upward to the *adapting phase* when they take personal actions to turn things around. You adapt to the adversity by reducing anger, confronting your tendency toward denial, and assuming less of a victim role. This phase should be seen as a necessary transitional step on the way to someplace better. It is not a healthy place to plateau. Those who do level off here end up trapped in the survival mode. The survival mode conveys a view of barely getting by in the aftermath of tough

times. As one leader described his hope for the future, "I just hope I can hang in there for three more years without getting fired. Then I'm eligible for retirement, and I'm outta here." This leader focused his energy in doing whatever it took to keep his job. If it meant playing political games or ignoring conflict about to erupt, that's what the leader did to achieve his goal of survival. Surviving is a necessary step in the process of recovery, but it shouldn't be the final step.

Phase 3: Recovering Continuing the upward trajectory, the adapting phase gives way to the *recovering phase*, a path back to the maintenance level called status quo. For some school leaders, the ultimate goal is to return to the level of how things were before the storm. "If we can only get through this budget crisis and get back to normal, things will be just fine." If you plateau at the status quo level, you may continue to function adequately, but you don't give yourself a chance to experience the growth that is possible from lessons adversity has to teach you.

Phase 4: Growing Learning from the adversity, you can make the transition from the recovering phase to the *growing phase* on your way to a sustained level of strengthened resilience. Pearsall (2003) calls this stage the thriving level. "We thrive when we surpass and transcend our prior level of functioning, regain and even accelerate our upward psychological trajectory, and seem to have mentally and emotionally benefited from our suffering. Because of our crisis, we seem to begin to flourish. Thrivers aren't masochists who seek or somehow endure pain better than others, but they do tend to be rational optimists who learn from it, know when to fight or flow with it, and when to give in and move on" (pp. 17–18).

Sources:

Patterson J L and Kelleher P () Resilient School Leaders Chapter 1. A Deeper Meaning of Resilience
<http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/104003/chapters/A-Deeper-Meaning->

RESILIENCE

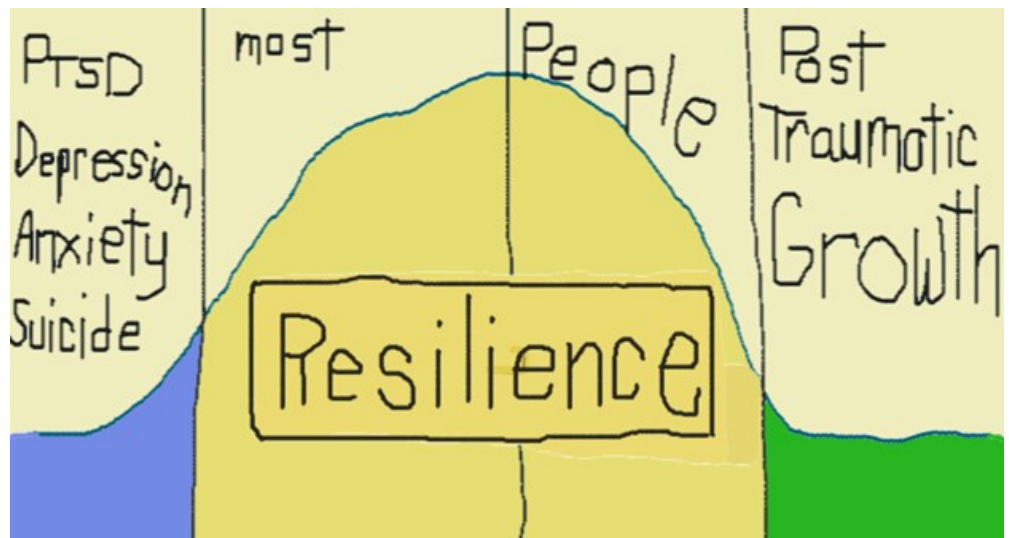
By *ihidemychocolate*

Sally is 51 – a daughter, a wife, and a mother of two teens. She is a marketing executive in the media industry, a certified yoga instructor and a blogger

“Resilience,” she said. Or lack of. That is the word that came to her mind when I described my latest bout of overwhelming anxiety, my sadness at the passing of time, and the impact of my emotional and indecisive swirl on the people I love. My life is so good right now and yet my mind succumbed to negativity. Why can’t I sustain happiness? I am plugging away at my writing. I am plugging away at teaching my yoga. I am plugging away at nurturing new projects at work. I am plugging away at my tennis serve and my downward dog. I am plugging away at living my life with more meaning, compassion, and happiness. Ho hum, plugging away. Boring.

AHA!

You see – My ego thinks that I am beautiful, smart, perfect, special. I should be doing something GREAT by now. What pressure! Clearly, I am a fraud and a failure. What beauty I have has banged into middle age. (Who is that woman with the wrinkly neck in the mirror?) I am smart, whatever that means. (I have a good education and I take tests well.) But being smart is no guarantee of success and there are many



people who are smarter than me. I have never been perfect and I am tired of trying. And, I am no more special and no less special than you. Wow, what a relief. I don’t have to hide my self any more. (If only I believed this at my core.) Resilience is not discipline. I am disciplined. I am not resilient. Yet.

Discipline is getting up every day and plugging away at making progress. It is crucial to achievement. It can be somewhat routine and automatic. David Brooks succinctly summarized recent research stating that it takes 10,000 hours of disciplined practice to become great at an activity.

Resilience is more about flexibility and attitude. It is defined as the ability to bounce back from defeat. Resilient people see failure as productive feedback, not a setback. Resilient people are optimists. Not me. I respond to setbacks through the lens of PTSD. I see failure as trauma, severe and tragic. I want to quit, not fight. I feel scolded, shamed, embarrassed. I want to hide. I am angry at not being appreciated, but I don’t know how to deal with my anger. As I toil away, alone, perfecting a project, someone who is less perfect but more out there with her self and her productivity leapfrogs ahead of me. Hmm. Maybe it is time to learn, change, and move forward.

Resilience is mindful. It is pausing with self-reflection and making a conscious decision about how to move forward. Yes, it means plugging away, but not in an automatic way. And it’s definitely not boring. It means changing course if necessary. Keep getting up and getting out there with eye contact and a smile and genuine connection. Other people don’t know what you are going through. They are more concerned with what they are going through. Forget about waiting for perfection and just put something out there. It’s better than you think.

BLOG POST 30/08/12 <http://ihidemychocolate.com/2012/08/30/resilience/>

A PERSPECTIVE ON RESILIENCE FROM A SAMARITANS VOLUNTEER

Written by a member of the Lifewide Community who is a Samaritans Volunteer

When I was invited to write this article by Lifewide Magazine, because of my involvement with the Samaritans, the question posed was “Do callers to the Samaritans have less resilience than most other people?” My response, was a resounding no! but it got me thinking more deeply about why?



The purpose of the Samaritans is to listen: to provide a sympathetic and empathetic ear when anyone feels they need to talk to someone but have no one else to turn to. I have been a volunteer for about six months and when I first started training an interesting question was put to us, how often, do we ask questions like “how are you?” or “Did you have a good weekend?” and not really care about the response. Such stock phrases are social niceties, not genuine enquiries of concern for the person's wellbeing. Furthermore, when talking to a friend about their problems, how often do we give advice on what to do in the situation from our own perspective and not our friend's? We don't tend to listen, rather we troubleshoot.

So, do callers to the Samaritans have less resilience? No, they are actually using the Samaritans as one of their strategies to try and cope with whatever issues they are encountering in their lives. The very act of calling us requires will and may require courage which is part of their resilience.

A hidden, aspect of this question is that many of the people who use the Samaritan's help line are suffering from mental health problems and it is questionable as to whether terms like ‘Resilient’ or ‘Not Resilient’ provide any meaningful insight into the psychologies of these individuals.

A fascinating paper by Wu *et al* (2013) considers Resilience as “the capacity and dynamic process of adaptively overcoming stress and adversity while maintaining normal psychological and physical functioning”, my preferred definition within this context. It identifies several internal aspects such as genetic, epigenetic, developmental, psychological and neurochemical factors that underlie an individual's susceptibility to psychiatric disorders in the face of stress and trauma.

This paper identifies resilience not just as the capacity to ‘pull your socks up’ but identifies that our internal systems develop and change based on a complex set of conditions, therefore changing our psychological and physical outputs.

A key condition identified by the paper is environmental factors, proposing that the way our lives develop physically alters our neurological pathways and our susceptibility to psychiatric disorders. This environmental condition ties in with the ‘Road to Resilience’ (page xx), identifying close relationships and a supportive network key in maintaining a healthy physiological state.

I would however like to add a final, more fundamental, note regarding the environmental factors that allow us to develop resilience. Close relationships provide us with meaning in our lives, from speaking with those who find there is little in their life to live for you find that many lives are devoid of any perceived meaning. Not believing that you have something to live for, something you are achieving in life or you want to eventually achieve in life, seems to damage resilience. Resilience is fuelled by wanting to live for something that is more than just living for yourself. Without that purpose our resilience is diminished at least temporarily. So having thought about the question through the writing of this reflective piece, perhaps there is after all some yes in the answer. Perhaps many of the people who call Samaritans are at a low point in their resilience because they cannot see a purpose now or in the future but they are drawing on the support of Samaritans to rebuild their confidence and resilience.

Source: Wu *et al* 2013: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3573269/>

Samaritans is a charitable social enterprise which began in London in 1953. It was founded by Chad Varah with the aim of providing a confidential service to assist those struggling to cope and considering suicide. His trigger for what has become a social enterprise of national significance, came following the funeral of a young girl who had just had her first period and was so afraid it was a sexually transmitted disease she took her own life. Chad Varah believed that the loss of this young girl's life was all because she felt she had nobody to talk to and he made it his life's work to change this.

New Forms of Education & Partnerships for Learning and Development

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Editor's Note People whose lives are disrupted often need help

A recurrent theme when people find themselves in situations of extreme challenge and/or complexity is the need to be able to find help. This can take the form of people, organisations, networks, communities or groups that provide advice, guidance and emotional and practical support. Significant others are essential in supporting and enabling recovery, and helping people discover and establish themselves in a new life. They help people understand and come to terms with the complexity of their situation and enable them to successfully navigate through the uncertainties, see things differently, resolve problems and eventually create a new life for themselves.

In many disruptive situations it is close family members - partners, spouses, parents, children or other relatives that help people get through a difficult situation. In other circumstances it's close friends and people who have been through similar experiences whose advice and support is welcomed.

We are fortunate in the UK in living in a society where people care about other people not just themselves and many individuals who have been through a difficult experience have been inspired to voluntarily help other people who are encountering a similar situation. People also are willing to donate to support the important work of a myriad charities or other not for profit organisations or social networks that individuals have

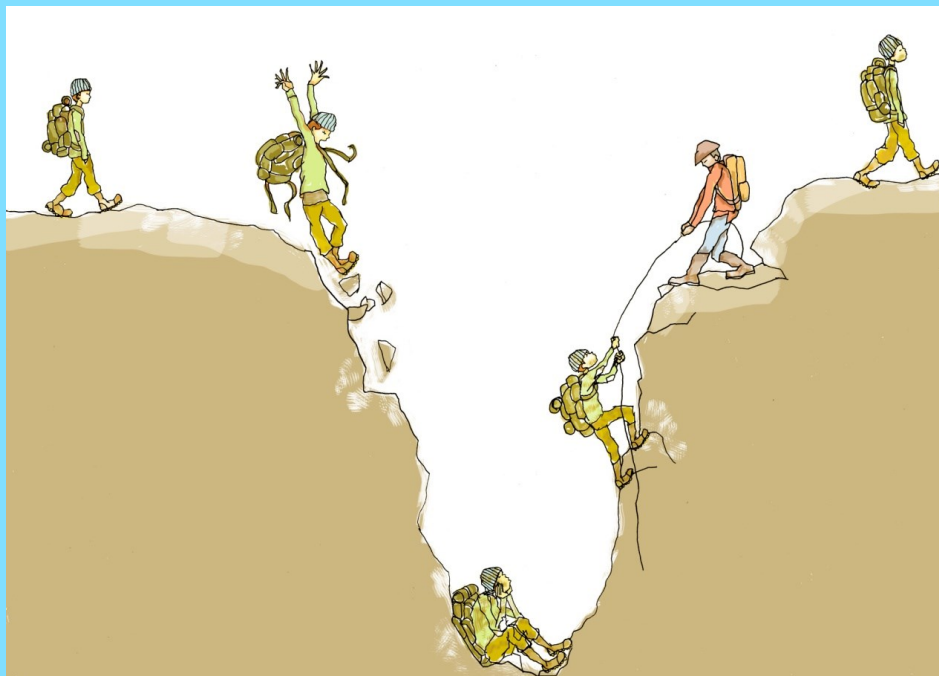
established to create a comprehensive self-help infrastructure of support for people whose lives have been disrupted.

The internet hosts the websites and forums of numerous charities and informal community groups whose purpose is to support and encourage people who have been through a particular disruptive experience. For example, parents who have lost a child or who have a disabled child, people who have or are being abused physically, emotionally or sexually, for families who foster or adopt, for men and women who are splitting up, for young widows and widowers, for people contemplating suicide, to name just a few. Such on-line social networks are a feature of the Social Age. Alternatively, significant others might take the form of face to face social groups like Alcoholics Anonymous, or church or other religious community groups, mother and toddler groups and many others.

Then we are fortunate in the UK in having a comprehensive state funded structure of support that includes a massive array of medical and other health and social care, and advisory services. As has been indicated by a number of contributors - disrupted lives are often complex - they may include a combination of factors like health, relationship, financial and employment that may require short, medium and longer term measures to resolve across a range of state provided services.

But where does education fit into all this? Education has two important roles to play. The first is in preparing people for a lifetime of complexity and disruption. We tell our children that they must work hard at school to gain the qualifications necessary to get a good job but we rarely tell them that in their lifetime they are likely to encounter all sorts of disruptions that will severely challenge them. To some extent our Lifewide Education mission is founded on the desire to encourage formal education to pay more attention to its responsibilities in helping to develop young people who are not only academically capable but who are also resilient, adaptive and flexible, resourceful, entrepreneurial and creative, who will be able to cope with the disruptions that life will inevitably throw at them. The hospitable, safe low risk environment of the campus is not a good place to learn and experience these things but by adopting a lifewide approach to education, universities, colleges and schools can draw into the educational and personal development process the wider life experiences of students where such disruptions abound.

The second way in which formal education can help is providing opportunity and support for those whose lives have been disrupted. Jan Gejel and Keith Chandler outline some of the ways that adult education can contribute to this goal.



HELPING PEOPLE TO FIX THEIR BROKEN LIFE

Jan Gejel and Keith Chandler

Significant change that disrupts the patterns, routines and relationships in our everyday lives, can be brought about through our own choice, 'If I do this I can see a better life for myself and family'. Or we may choose to disrupt our own life because circumstances dictate, 'if I don't do this something bad is going to happen to me and my family', or it can be forced upon us, 'I would never choose for this to happen to me or my family'. It is the latter context that we are primarily concerned with in this article. This is why we talk about "broken" life directions, "broken" careers, or even "broken lives".

People have always had to cope with forced changes that disrupt their lives, like losing a job, getting divorced, loss of a loved one or severe illness, the important question is how does society help individuals to make the changes necessary in their lives to find a pathway to a different and more stable life following such disruption. Life change is about the reality of an individual's life, not about individual preferences. In fact we could say that the reality produces life change.

Life change has become an important political, social and educational issue because the world is changing. For example as we saw in Lifewide Magazine issue 11 which explored the Social Age, there are many changes associated with the development of the internet and related communication technologies that are creating a networked world. This has impacted on society in many different ways for example the economy, use of technology, labour markets, career routes, social life and personal life have all changed dramatically. Because of "globalization": technology has made it possible for products to be produced almost everywhere in the world, and the same is true for research, education and many other things. And because workers are cheaper in one country than in another someone may lose their job as his company decides to move production to a country where labour is cheaper. This is the reality of the modern economy.

These fundamental changes have considerable impact on, for example, social and personal life. If your life direction is broken because of severe illness or family crisis, and you are forced to leave a job or career, you cannot simply expect to return to the job or career once you have recovered. What we have to do is find a new pathway by creating new opportunities for ourselves: new opportunities that we did not even think of before the life direction was broken. In fact, this is what life change is about.

What is 'forced' life change?

The deeper meaning of forced life change is that resuming one's normal life after a broken life situation is not an option – or, the option is so problematic that one chooses not to take this direction. In fact realising that one cannot resume one's previous normal life is a realisation that often grows out of trying to do this. Instinctively, when confronted with disruptive change, we try to recover and resume what is well-known and familiar to us, we use metaphors like 'picking up the pieces'. So, forced life change occurs when it is not possible or recommendable to resume or try to resume one's previous life direction.

Because of changes in society, an increasing number of people, especially people in mature ages such as 40 to 60, find themselves in broken life situations where resuming one's normal life is not possible. They reach a point where changing one thing in their lives is not enough. They face precisely what we call a "forced life change situation". They will need to find new directions that might include working life, social life and personal life altogether. They need to find entirely new directions and ways of being. Life change situations can be long and complicated, and this why they can produce "life stories", sometimes taking on the form of a personal novel or documentary. Telling stories about the life change you have experienced is a very powerful tool when working with your own or someone else's broken life situation. For the story teller, the process of telling their story can offer them important reflections on and insights into their own life and possible ways in which they might progress into a different future. For the listener, who is in a similar broken life situation, someone else's life story can unlock their own potential for a better future life.

The project website www.directlifechange.eu provides many life stories, in video and text that have been curated to provide resources for people who are trying to find a new direction in their life following a forced change.

One of the negative and serious consequences of recognising that returning to one's previous life direction is not possible is that one gives up and slowly falls into a state of passivity and even depression. In the sort of culture and social fabric that exists in many European countries now, this is definitely an option.

The challenge for adult education and educators

Disruptive life change, when it affects so many people, is a social as well as a personal problem that needs to be addressed by society. Education is one of the most important social vehicles for enabling people to develop themselves so that they can achieve more of their potential. We are not primarily dealing with young people here but with adults who have long since passed through our formalised systems for education. Rather we are concerned with the education and development of adults. So anyone who is concerned with the education and development of adults might ask, how can adult education contribute to the solution of this significant social problem? How can adult education teachers or trainers, help people who are in situations of forced life change? How can they offer assistance, guidance and help find the new directions? This is a big challenge and basically, we argue that current approaches to adult education are not designed to achieve this objective. Our Directing Life Change project argues that adult education needs to become able to create partnerships with the adults whose lives have been disrupted, to support and guide them to a new life.

Traditionally the role of adult education and the teachers working in adult education is to provide and deliver courses and offer education. We will come back to that in a moment. First, let us ask a more basic question that many people in forced life change situations might ask: why are we talking about “adult education” in relation to forced life change? What has “adult education” to do with serious life change, involving many different parts of one’s life? The answer is not so obvious.

Our most fundamental idea is that to avoid forcing adults in life change situations to exclusively react individually and on their own, there must be places, spaces or provisions in the community in which they live that can take up and work with life change in a collective, supportive, facilitative and constructive way. When we talk about “adult education” we use this term in the broadest way possible, in its most “holistic” meaning: provisions in the community offering systematic and qualified support, guidance and inspiration to adults with broken life directions. Therefore, when we use the term “adult education” we do not simply mean a traditional adult education institution offering courses for adults. Rather, we refer to any public or private institution, formal or not, offering such services in a systematic and qualified way, such as labour market offices, entrepreneurial centres, NGOs, adult education centres, community centres, etc. The important point is not the title of the provision or the provider, but the nature, quality and capacity of the support that is offered through whatever means to address the particular issue of a person with a broken life-direction. So the nature of the

institution or place is not important; what is important are the words systematic and qualified. Systematic means that the provision is able to follow the adults in need of guidance through all the phases of life change and offer what is needed along the different life change phases, and qualified means that the provision has the staff, tools, resources and capacity to do this in ways that clearly benefit adults. Changing roles of education, teachers and trainers

We said: life change processes can be very long and include many different phases. And we also said that such provision must be systematic and qualified. To meet these new demands, working with an increasing number of mature adults in critical life change situations, whether caused by unemployment or other factors in life, adult education must also go through “life change processes”, just like the adults. This is not to say that adult education or similar provisions should not continue to offer classes in English or computer technology, it simply means that those institutions must widen the scope of their work and create capacity to deal with more complicated life change situations. In fact, we believe that they should partner up with adults in forced life change situation.

What do we mean by “partner up”? We mean that the traditional roles of the “adult learner”, the “teacher” and the “institution” must also change. Traditionally an institution offers a number of courses to adult learners which might be repeated each year, in which interested adults can enrol. The institution offers, the adult chooses and teacher teaches as is the model in a school, university or college.

In more recent times, this scenario has been supplemented by what we call the empowerment approach. This approach has been pioneered with adult migrants, and has inspired other forms of adult education and learning. The basic idea in the empowerment approach is that the “learning” is not based on pre-defined content or themes, but on the interests and needs of the participants.

In this case, the teachers became trainers or coaches. Their primary role is not to transmit “knowledge”, but to work flexibly with the interests and needs of participants, and those needs might go in all sorts of directions. This implies that the trainer should be able to guide the adults to different resources in the community and to network those resources, which was definitely not the role of the traditional teacher.

The changing roles of trainers and coaches in connection with life change are not so much about “more”, but about “differently”. Traditionally, institutions offer something to the adults, the teachers teach what is offered and the adult learners receive what is offered and then are assessed to see if they have learnt what was offered. In life change situations

individual's life challenge is or how to help them resolve it. Furthermore such problems are likely to be complex and require action to resolve over a protracted period of time.

Therefore, what is needed are partnerships between the institutions, the trainers and the people in need of life change guidance; new forms of collaboration, joint ventures so to speak, in which all participating persons offer resources, generate ideas, take action and evaluate progress towards resolution. In this way individuals will themselves help create their own solutions and pathways to a new life and take ownership for their solution and develop the capacity to manage themselves towards achieving this goal.

The provisions must provide time and space for such unpredictable processes, the trainers must be able to listen to, understand and support any direction or action the adults might wish to include in their evolving life change – and the adults in need of guidance must learn to respect and understand that neither the institution nor the trainers can offer ready-made answers or solutions to their forced life change situation. Few institutions, few trainers and even fewer adults in life change situations are able to work in this way. But being able to work this way is actually an important part of the life change process itself!

The complexity of forced life change

But why are forced life change processes so complicated? No matter if the life change is caused by for example unemployment, severe illness or family crisis, at the end of the day, the problem will often relate to the question 'how can I create a new economy for myself that will sustain me and enable me to create a meaningful and fulfilled life in my new life situation?' Many factors contribute to the complexity of the problem of creating a new economy for oneself. Here are just a few.

- Qualifications for jobs are changing very fast; old qualifications are not enough
- Technology is now a feature of most jobs and if you do not have the basic knowledge and skill to use it you will be left behind
- There are in general less jobs and in particular less so-called unskilled jobs available; unemployment is increasing in many countries and there is greater competition for the fewer jobs by more people
- There is an expectation that people must be prepared to change their professional and even personal directions many times during a normal life: an ever changing mix of short-term jobs, project based jobs, self-funded jobs, unemployment periods and private initiatives, as the old "lifelong" public jobs are systematically disappearing

- More and more production and services are privatized, leading to more complicated and ever changing labour market situations
- More and more work is carried out in different forms of "projects", offering employment dependent on the project funding

Looking at all this, it becomes quite obvious why disruptive life change situations that are related to work or employment are complicated. The time has gone where someone who lost their job can simply up-skill themselves to get another job. The life stories in the project website offer many different examples of what such forced life change might look like, and the complications it entails and often long time spans involved in transitioning from one life to another.

All forced life change situations are different. All forced life changes include several problems and challenges at the same time. Simple examples might be: a severe illness, leads to depression, leads to loss of job, leads to economic problems and perhaps loss of home, leads to relational problems in the family; loss of job leads to economic problems, leads to health and social problems like clinical depression and family problems; a divorce leads to loss of family identity, leads to a depression, leads to loss of job, etc. Our GP surgeries are full of people whose mental and physical health is suffering because of forced life change so anything we can do to help such people will also impact positively on our systems of social and medical care.

These scenarios are typical of the vicious circle in which the problems escalate in forced life change. To a certain extent the circle is unavoidable. However, its consequences are not. The circle must and can be broken, and this is the objective of directing life change guidance.

Often it takes a long time before one recognises the consequences of the broken life situation. Instinctively we try to avoid what has already happened or try to repair it in whatever way we can. Long periods of struggling can result from this. After that, and having at last realized the dead-end situation, most people fall into some forms of helplessness, desperation or passivity. This is very understandable and natural. Nobody can be blamed for this. Then, there are very different directions: you remain stuck in your dead-end situation for a long time, or you try to work your way out.



Participating in new life changing processes

Directing life change guidance is precisely about preventing people from getting stuck in intractable situations or helping them to work their way out of a situation where they are stuck. Very few people are able to work their way out alone. This is why we have the obligation to offer these people collective time and space to fight dead-ends and to find the new directions. From an economic point of view, investing in positive life change directions makes good business sense for society.

One solution is to create forums and communities or 'collectives' in which people can work together to share and help each other resolve their problems. The sooner a person who is going through a forced life change joins such a collective processes the better. The life changer will clearly benefit from reflections and guidance among peers and trainers in the different life change processes. A collective forum can help individuals:

- understand their broken situation better, put it in perspective and enable them to share their experience with adults in similar situations
- work through the mental and social consequences of the broken situation, strongly supported by the sharing with other adults, including building up one's self-confidence through offering other adults support
- recognise the situation as it is and that the situation calls for life change in one or more respects
- to start looking at their life and slowly creating future scenarios, and share such scenarios with other adults' future scenarios
- to start working in a more focused way on developing and recognising their skills, talents, aspirations, dreams and un-recognized or unexpected resources, including seeing different actions or experiences as "resources" in a changed perspective
- to team up with other adults, exploring the identified or potential resources, talking to people in their communities
- turn these work practices and processes into increasing confidence in new directions, thus help breaking the vicious circle.

A forum for collective exchange and problem solving can also

- support concrete initiatives giving solidity and credibility to whatever new direction is taken, including cultivating personal talents, job search in new ways, learning activities, creating small business, etc.

and last, but not least:

- create strong and powerful community networks for community engagement

In the best cases, the collective forum will be able to continue to support the life changers through their initial new direction steps. Having been supported in the way the life changer will help support others who are in the earlier stages of life transition, by offering mentoring support to other adults in broken life situations, offering and sharing concrete and valuable experiences and growing themselves in the process.

Collectives

Collectives are key to tackling the complex personal and social problem of disruptive life change. In Issue 11 p of Lifewide Magazine Douglas Thomas and John Seeley Brown we considered the idea of collectives in the context of a new culture of learning in a world of constant change.

[The] core aspect of education in the new culture of learning presents a model for understanding learning in the face of rapid change. Teachers no longer need to scramble to provide the latest up to date information to students because the students themselves are taking an active role in helping to create and mould it, particularly in areas of social information. We call this environment a collective. As the name implies it is a collection of people, skills, and talent that produces a result greater than the sum of its parts. Collectives are not solely defined by shared intention, action, or purposes. Rather, they are [also] defined by an active engagement with the process of learning.

A collective is very different from an ordinary community. Where communities can be passive, collectives cannot. In communities people learn in order to belong. In a collective, people belong in order to learn. Communities derive their strength from creating a sense of belonging, while collectives derive theirs from participation. In the new culture of learning, collectives, as we define them, become the medium in which participation takes shape. They are content-neutral platforms, waiting to be filled with interactions among participants. As such they are well defined to facilitate peer to peer learning, their raison d'être.

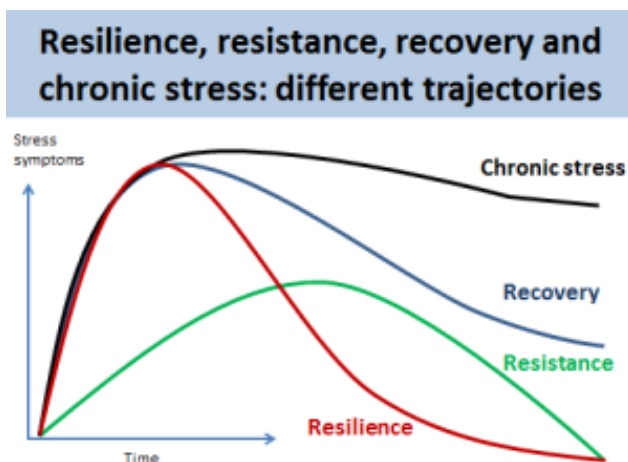
This concept of a collective for learning fits very well our concept of a collective for helping and enabling people to learn their way out of the forced life change they find themselves in. Collective means that you recognise you may not be able to solve the problem on your own, as the increasing complex and rapidly changing reality is a hard adversary. Collective means actively participating in working through your challenges in close collaboration with peers, and perhaps a life change team, trainers and coaches, and people and organisations in the wider community. Collective means being part of the collective resources of the collective - offering

support, dialogues, ideas, guidance.

When an individual starts to see the solution to their life change problem as a collective one is in itself an important accomplishment: it opens up a different way of thinking about their problem and especially about how solutions can be created. In fact, collectives enable individuals to co-create “smaller solution-creating communities” to focus on and help resolve more specific challenges. This means that individuals are not only working on their own solutions; they are at the same time working to create solutions for others. In participating in a collective an individual is also developing the awareness, values, willingness, responsibility and capability of working in a collective which can be adapted to many 21st century or 'Social Age' work situations.

Resilience is not the product of a simple equation.

Norris, Tracy and Galea (2009) chart pathways of recovery from stressful experience: describing resilience as a trajectory, they define it as demonstrating a sharp decrease after initially high stress reactions, in contrast to resistance (low and stable levels of symptoms), recovery (a slower decline of symptoms) and chronic stress responses (1).



Source of graph: Norris, Tracy and Galea (2009)

Sources:

1) <https://socialworkresearchnz.wordpress.com/2014/02/07/the-resilience-of-the-resilience-concept-do-we-mean-what-we-think-we-mean/>

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CREATIVE RESILIENCE



Linda Naiman is founder of Creativity at Work, and recognised internationally for pioneering arts-based learning as a catalyst for developing creativity, innovation, and collaborative leadership in organisations.

What is that quality of resilience that helps people bounce back from adversity and even excel?

Resilience is a reflex, a way of facing and understanding the world, that is deeply etched into a person's mind and soul. Resilient people and companies face reality with staunchness, make meaning of hardship instead of crying out in despair, and improvise solutions from thin air. Others do not. — Diane Coutu, "How Resilience Works," Harvard Business Review, May 2002

Creative resilience is your most important resource during times of crisis, change & transition.

Transition is the psychological process people must go through to come to terms with new situations. **Change is situational:** the new boss, new teams, new roles. It's the psychological aspect that's difficult to manage, and it is only after a psychological transition that people adapt to change. According to William Bridges, author of *Managing Transitions*, "It isn't the changes that do you in, it's the transitions."

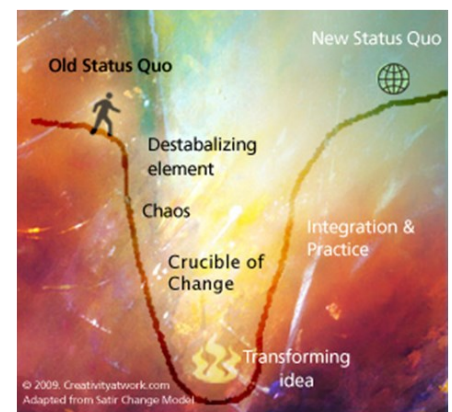
I don't believe we can experience a transformation without undergoing a psychological transition, and if we can cultivate resilience, we can proceed with a sense of adventure on what Joseph Campbell described as a Hero's Journey.

These 5 strategies for developing creative resilience will help you thrive during times of transition:

1. Develop a sense of optimism
2. Find meaning and purpose even in terrible times
3. Take control
4. Be creative
5. Improvise

Resilient people are optimistic, focused, organised, proactive, and flexible. To be resilient, learn to face reality with staunchness, find meaning in the hardship you are facing, nurture your creativity, and improvise solutions using available resources.

Source [Creative Resilience](#)





DIRECTING LIFE CHANGE PROJECT

Jan Gejel & Keith Chandler

INTRODUCTION

The Directing Life Change (DLC) project is all about enabling *people to cope with and adapt to change*: particularly change that has significantly disrupted someone's life. The European Commission funded project targets adults aged 40+ with life changes and / or broken career paths. According to OECD, this group of adults is projected to make up a third of the population in developed countries by 2025(1). Members of this group have the potential to contribute to their respective national economies and be significant consumers and users of services, and have the potential to participate in learning for a further 30+ years before they retire. The goal of the project is to demonstrate how such individuals could be helped and enabled to regain control of their lives, deepen their understanding and self-awareness and reveal and develop personal skills and competences so that they can more fully contribute to society.

The DLC project was truly international in its scope with **Idea Teams** from 8 partner countries -Austria, Hungary, Finland, Israel, Italy, Poland Spain and the UK participating. The people in these teams empathised with the participants in the project by drawing on their own life change experiences to find ways and means to gather practical and workable ideas, thoughts and activities to support and guide others with broken career paths.

The role of Ideas Teams was to draw upon their experience and talents to help those facing similar experiences and challenges. Each 'team' was made up of a core of adults over 40 who had undergone a career break or other life change. Some teams were supplemented with the support of a trainer and a community representative with other 'external people' brought in to support the process on an ad hoc basis. Collectively, the teams brought together a range of backgrounds and stories, not only empowering each other through common experience, but offering varied and contrasting solutions, working collectively as co-learners, co-contributors and co-developers.

The DLC pilot project involved a total of 50 participants aged over 40 from the eight partner countries who volunteered their narratives of life and career disruption and how they overcame, or are overcoming, adversity in their life.

DLC PROCESS

The DLC process focuses on what people want and need during their Life Change, not what others think is important. In their personal life change, people become the *subject for change*, rather than an object of change, finding routes, not only into paid work activity, but through volunteering in the community, offering mentoring support for others and/or taking part in learning and self development activities. Participants develop ideas, take stock of their situation and then seek to make personal change. In doing so, they move from **Crisis** (*I need to do something for myself*) working through **Reflection** (*I never knew I could do that*) towards **Exit Strategies** (*I now know what I need to do*).



The aspiration underlying the DLC process is to shift mindsets that are negative about the future towards fresh and more positive thinking about the future and the participants' ability to influence their own future, through reflection and the use of imagination to find solutions appropriate to the individual's circumstances. The goals are therefore to enable learners to:

- Regain control of their life after an enforced career break through being supported towards pathways that draw upon their experience, and which enhance and improve their existing situation.
- Deepen their understanding to better equip them to reintegration into society and enhance their status as active citizens.
- Boost their confidence and bring out their personal skills and competencies, dormant and perhaps unimagined until this point
- Engage and/or re-engage in personal development which might for example include non-formal and formal learning, entrepreneurial activity, supporting others and volunteering.

STAGES IN THE DLC CHANGE PROCESS

There are five stages in the process

Recognise : I've reached a turning point in my life which I want to do something about.

Commit: I am open to finding out more, to consider new directions and possibilities.

Explore: I want to know what I know well, what I'm good at doing and how I can discover some new choices.

Empower: I now feel able to move forward in a positive and challenging way.

Review: I realise it's important to keep looking back and reassessing in order to move forward.

Each person's circumstances, will and capabilities are unique so individuals move and evolve through these stages during their life change(s) at different rates, some take weeks, others take months or even years to progress through the five stages. The Life Story Summaries on the website show how different individuals have progressed or are progressing through the five stages in their Life Change(s) journey.

THEORETICAL BASIS

The educational basis on which the process is based is summarised in the figure below. The process is grounded in the ideas of great educational theorists like Stephen Brookfield, John Dewey and Jack Mezirow (1,2,3)

A model of the life change process - Perspective Transformation and Critical Reflection based on critical thinking from Dewey, Mezirow and Brookfield



INDIVIDUALS' NEEDS

When people are going through the DLC Life Change Process, they will have different sets of needs at each of the **5 Stages**. For example, some people need TIME to resolve things, some need quiet REFLECTION to consider their Life Changes, some, a bit of CREATIVITY to find new ways to get out of their situation, whilst others might need to be part of a TEAMS to discuss their changes and/or belong to a COMMUNITY in order to discover and pursue their purpose - to find a new DIRECTION in their life. These six change needs were identified from all the individuals who have taken part in the DLC Life Change process. We have shown each **NEED** as a **T-shirt**, inspired by the well known expression, *'I've been there, done it, and I've got the T shirt'*



LIFE STORIES








One of the approaches used was to accumulate narratives of people who had been through, or were progressing through significant disruptions and life changes using a standard template. 34 examples of life changing stories are offered as an inspirational and practical resource for other people involved in significant life change or coaches/trainers who are helping people to deal with life change. An example is given below. The interactive website has a clever way of displaying the life

stories of participants. This page <http://www.directlifechange.eu/process/matrix-structure/> shows a diagram which plots the Life Story Summaries of participants, against the two axis of the five stages in the Life Change Process and the Life Change Needs. Individuals are represented as male or female icons which link directly to the relevant life story. This representation demonstrates that each person is unique and has a different combination of Change Needs than others at the 5 stages of the DLC process.

To find out more please visit the Directing Life Change website <http://www.directlifechange.eu/>

Other sources

- 1) OECD (2010) Education at a Glance Available on-line at <http://www.oecd.org/education/skills-beyond-school/45926093.pdf>
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	Katharina's Story Female in her early 50's Profession : Kindergarten worker Lives in Feldkirchen, Austria	
Katharina lost the meaning of life after her six children left home and all her duties from the years before did not exist anymore. Loneliness, no challenges, no hobbies - she had two options: leave it like it was or make a change. It was her decision to make a change.		
Recognise		Unhappy at work she left her job - a major life change and emotional event. She felt helpless, believing she would never work again, but she recognised she needed help and direction from others was needed to be able to move forward positively.
Commit		Katharina knew she could not do it by herself so she got help. She always had the impression that getting help is a sign of weakness. It took her several attempts to call, to take courage and to make the step. From today's perspective it was the best thing she could have done.
Explore		She analysed her situation with the DLC coach, gradually gaining enough confidence to start talking about her problems with friends & family. Feedback was mostly positive, some critical, but it all helped. She now had the strength to cope with critics. Things began to change because she had changed. She could make new plans/goals.
Empower		Through this help she felt confident and empowered to complete her education, learning again how to study successfully after many years since school. "I am worth something and capable to reach my goals", she felt relieved and strong, full of energy - feelings that she had not had for years.
Review		It helped her not being alone, and there are thousands of people who are in the same situation. The loss of a job is not the end of the world. Have the courage to do something new. 'Jump over your shadow and be open to whatever may come'.

5) Mezirow, J & Associates (1990) Fostering critical reflection in adulthood: A guide to transformational and emancipatory learning. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

6) Mezirow, J (1997) "Transformative Learning: Theory to Practice." Transformative Learning in Action: Insights from Practice. New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education. 74 (pp.5-12) (ed: Cranton, P) San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

Editor's Note: New forms of Learning Partnership

Jan and Keith's descriptions for new forms of relationship between learners and their 'educational or life guides' in contexts of significant life change is not dissimilar to the idea of learning partnerships described by Marcia Baxter Magolda in Issue 10 Lifewide Magazine. Her longitudinal research study^{1,2} of the college and post college lives of her participants reveal key factors that help adults reframe their assumptions about knowledge, self, and relationships. In order to become fully independent authors of their own lives. While the context for the study was not significant life disruptions, many of her participants encountered such disruptions during the course of their lives. Her pedagogic approach is worth recounting for the particular context we are concerned with here.

Marcia's **Learning Partnerships Model**^{4&5} offers one approach to support adults' growth toward self-authorship. Three components of the model support learners' current assumptions. These include respecting learning thoughts and feelings, encouraging them to use all their life experiences as opportunities for growth, and collaborating with them to analyze and solve their own dilemmas. In addition, three components simultaneously challenge learners to expand their current assumptions. These include emphasizing complexity of work and life rather than simplistic solutions, drawing out learners' personal authority, and working interdependently to share authority and expertise to solve complex problems. In order to promote self-authorship, educators must engage learners in making sense of their experiences rather than just having the experience. Moreover, educators must work interdependently with learners to enable them to create their own meanings from their experiences rather than educators making sense of their experiences for them.



She likens the Learning Partnerships Model to a tandem bike ride in which the front rider directs the journey and pedals hard to make it happen while the back rider provides encouragement and emotional and practical support. In traditional classroom teaching educators tend to take the front seat rather than placing learners in charge of directing their own learning journeys. When learners take the front seat the experience is more likely to help them encounter the dilemmas and hard choices that necessitate them to develop their internal voice. Having a learning partner on the back helps them share their experience and reflect on, analyse, and make sense of it in richer and more complex ways. These six components, integrated into a philosophy of

learning and the educator-learner relationship, assist learners along the developmental journey to stand apart from their current assumptions and potentially develop more complex ones. This is likely to be particularly relevant in complex life change situations.

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BUILDING CAPACITY FOR SUPPORTING LIFE CHANGE IN ADULT EDUCATION: LEARNING PARTNERSHIPS

Jan Gejel and Keith Chandler



Editor's Note: *One of the big challenges to change in formal education is that traditional institutions for education - school, college and university were conceived and designed for a very different world to the world of today and tomorrow. In this article Guest Editors Jan Gejel and Keith Chandler consider how adult education needs to change in order to better support people who are in life change situations.*

Studies on the future of work⁽¹⁾ show that future career histories may increasingly reveal switches between employment and self-employment, and periods of continuing training and unemployment. If adult education is to help people with broken work lives and directing life change *it requires nothing less than a sea change in the approach to education*, says the European Commission. Sea changes don't come easy. In fact it requires a fundamental *re-thinking of the current approach to education*, as promoted by the Commission within the Europe 2020 strategies. Re-thinking what education is, for whom, about what and its general role in society.

This article argues that the development of Adult Education holds the most promise and potential for accomplishing the sort of sea change that will support and enable adults to make the life changes necessary when their lives have been disrupted.

We use the term "adult education" in a very broad sense, to include a wide range of institutions, such as adult education schools, open adult education centres, some forms of labour market services, open community centres, etc. The important thing is not the name of the institution or place, but the fact that the institution is working with mature adults in need of support and guidance in often complex labour market, social and personal situations.

Adult education has been around for more than 100 years and has gone through many changes, from enlightenment to

empowerment and recently moving towards vocational training close to labour market needs. However, it has always been *education*: basically offering classes and subjects, in formal or non-formal contexts, to adults in need of renewed educational input beyond or in preparation for further education or vocational training.

In spite of special pedagogical approaches linked to the nature of the adult learners (more experience than theory based), it has remained within the traditional paradigm of education; institution, classes, teachers directing learning. Bearing in mind Eickhoff's word about the increasing complexity and changeability of working lives, social and personal lives, and bearing in mind the massive impact from technology and globalization on jobs, people and communities, all educations and adult education in particular need to re-think their missions and mostly unquestioned axioms.

Why "adult education?"

Adult education, rather than higher education, has a



particular role to play because it addresses mature adults with educational and learning needs beyond the formal education system. Institutions that deliver adult education have developed educational strategies, didactics and pedagogies based on the nature and special characteristics of its adult learners. Furthermore, these institutions are

experienced in the integration of social, cultural and personal matters in the training or empowerment processes, and at least to some extent offer adults flexible ways of working, based on their complicated job and life situations, when compared to most higher education students for example.

Life Change Requires Institutional Change

The message from the Directing Life Change project is that life change demands institutional change. The traditional AE “institution”, its infrastructures, its administrative systems, its funding, its teachers and managers, and in general its mind-sets, are not fit for working adequately with the complex challenges of life change - based on rigid, formal and highly regulated rules. Such institutions were formed in the culture and thinking of the Industrial Age however, in the globalized, technological and rapidly changing world, of the Social Age, those structures are not working well anymore. The rapidly changing labour markets, job situations, the asocial and personal life of millions of mature adults urgently call for capacity building and dynamic change in adult education.

Directing life change to guide mature adults in broken life situations cannot be structured into tight schedules, class-



room lessons, rigid administrative practices or traditional teacher roles. Broken life situations include serious economic, job-related, social and personal problems, constituting a demanding challenge for the adults themselves as well as for the trainers. Working with such challenges can be

unpredictable, complicated, time-consuming and calls for the involvement of all sorts of resources that are not always readily available.

Who are the people involved in life change?

People who need guidance and support to work through considerable life changes are mostly mature adults experiencing a severe breakdown in their life, typically caused by the loss of their job, physical or mental illness or family crisis. This issue of Lifewide Magazine provides many examples of the sorts of situations that might affect such people. People in such broken life situations need to work with and find new directions for work, in their social and family life and often in their personal life as well. Such adults are in *forced* life change situations. They did not ask for it or expect it, and they are certainly not prepared for it. This often means that they and their family are vulnerable and their home and economic sustainability may be under threat.

People in forced life change situations are often mature adults, losing their job or falling seriously ill for short or longer periods, be that physical illness such as cancer or different

forms of mental breakdowns occurring more and more frequently across Europe. They are in need of qualified support and guidance working their way through many phases such as desperation, giving up, exploring their life, gaining self-confidence, building up hopes, joining supportive teams and hopefully finally taking action in their community to create their new directions.

Role of the Professional Supporting Life Change

The emerging shift from an “education” to a “life” perspective dissolves and disperses the traditional teacher role. The traditional role of teacher as instructor is replaced in the empowerment approach to adult education, by “trainers”, “coaches”, “mentors”, “guides”. Similarly, in a life change approach to adult education the professional requirement is for people who can facilitate, guide and coach people out of their challenging and disrupted situations.

The key limitations of current empowerment approaches to adult education in relation to the needs of people in life change situations are that they do not link personal and mental change to the economic and social realities of the individuals. The most important shift and capacity building needed by trainers in this field of work is the ability to link mental and personal change directly to taking action in the economic and social realities of individuals. What adults in broken-life situations need are professionals who can help them integrate real-life challenges, community action and personal capacity building. Perhaps, the most appropriate way of representing this professional facilitator -learner relationship would be a partnership for learning and action.

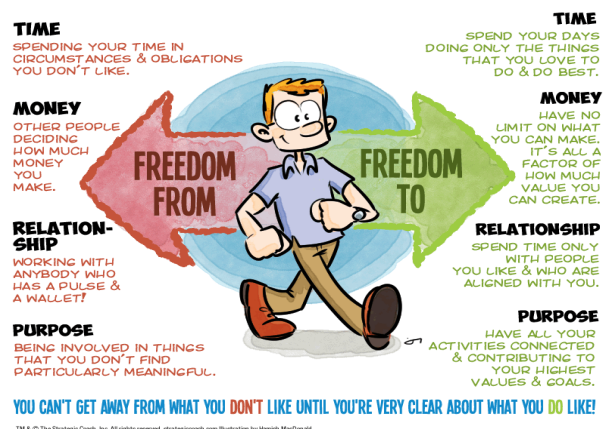
Such professionals are likely to have a number of qualities, attitudes and capabilities including:

Entrepreneurial Mindsets and Capabilities

Life change professionals need to have or to develop entrepreneurial mindsets. This does not mean that they should be business experts; it means that they should be



Entrepreneurial Freedom Comes From
Going In The Right Direction



adept at thinking creatively about new opportunities, be willing to take risks and be interested in exploring community needs and new opportunities offered through for example technology or changes in public service policy. The more the entrepreneurial mentality is based on practical experience the better, and the professionals should take active part and follow entrepreneurial initiatives among the adults with broken lives as closely as possible and learn from them.

Community Brokering

Life change professionals need to provide adult learners with access to authentic tasks, by creating links to the local community (business, local authorities, third sector). They need to act in the community and be in contact with players and stakeholders from different sectors to identify new opportunities of economy creation, social involvement or cultural engagement, and they need to be able to negotiate such opportunities with key players in the community.

Network Builders

Life change professionals need to be network builders. Life change work requires the trainer to create opportunities to bring people and institutions together, to link individuals to community needs to possible project partnerships, to build good relations with the public authorities, etc. Community brokering can lead to the creation of shared networks that can be mobilized in favour of initiatives taking in life change processes. Networks should include all sorts of private players, cultural institutions and social actors.



Opportunity Spotters

One of the qualifications of life change professionals is to develop a strong ability to spot opportunity, always asking questions like:

- *Why doesn't this work well?*
- *What could be done?*
- *How could it be done?*

- *Who could be involved?*

- *What could come out of it?*

Of course, such spotting relates strongly to jobs and economy, but also to social work, cultural work, sport and many other things.

Talent Spotters

Life change professionals should also be talent spotters - helping their learning partners to recognise their talents. Life change involves re-viewing and exploring what interests, dreams or talents might be hidden in the life stories; interests or talents that might be brought to life and taken further. Facilitating people in life change involves helping people to link their interests, passions and talents to further training, cultivation or economic opportunities, or very often a combination of these.

Pragmatists

People in life change situations often do not have the luxury of a long period of time before they have to be economically self-sustainable. This means that life change professionals must be pragmatic about the way they try to meet their partner's needs. This means that they should work to find the shortest way possible to what the adults need, not the longest and most complicated. Working close to real-life initiatives, partnering up with useful resources, inserting elements of learning when needed and relevant and engaging directly in the mission; all this helps the life changer and the trainer to take the most direct way to a new life, based on practical results and tangible progress. Such direct ways can furthermore create considerable self-confidence, pride and capacity to act in the adult life changers.

The Challenge to Professional Educators

These profiles of the attitudes, competencies and experiences needed to form useful and productive partnerships with adult learners involved in life change situations are not typical of present day teachers or even empowermental trainers and coaches.

So, how might such life change professionals be developed? The education system is probably not the right place for the training of life change professionals, as it would contradict the very core idea of life change capacity built on experience and partnering with the adult life changers. The open entrepreneurial mentality needed in directing life change should be co-created in the course of working with people in life change situations together with capacity building in trainer teams and mixed team of trainers and community resources.

Just like the life changers themselves, life change professional should learn as needed and develop new competences based on the variety of missions they undertake with life changers. So, the first way to “train” life change professionals is to involve adult educational staff, labour market service staff and NGO staff in practical life change processes, in which they learn side by side with the life changers.

The second way to develop professional capacity for supporting adults in life change is to recruit such professionals to create teams in the institutions composed of people from diverse backgrounds - both teaching and non-teaching

including entrepreneurs, private sector professionals, sport professionals, artists, or whatever. The point is not the profession in itself or who you are, but the experiences, contacts and resources you can bring to bear to serve the needs and interests of individual adult learners.

Source

This article is an edited version of a guide produced for institutions and adult education provisions working with adults over 40 in complicated life and labour market situations. The guide does not intend to instruct those institutions about what to do, but aims to offer hopefully useful inspiration generated along the European Directing Life Change project.

(1) Eickhoff Entrepreneurial thinking and action – an educational responsibility for Europe

LEARNING FOR DISRUPTED LIVES

Jenny Willis

As I read Jan and Keith’s article on supporting adult learners, my thoughts kept returning to my recent experience of supporting refugees to prepare for their citizenship examinations. Teaching comes in all forms, and during my career I taught in the secondary, FE and HE sectors, and for the Open University. This brief article illustrates the sorts of reality we as teachers may now have to mediate as lives become seriously disrupted.

In my part of Greater London, we have the largest Korean community outside Korea itself. For nearly a year now, I have had the immense pleasure of teaching some of the migrants’ children, ostensibly English language, but in practice a wide range of subjects and competences. It is a real joy to have such motivated and avid learners and I have learnt much about their community. I say community, but in fact the adults come from three distinct, and strictly hierarchical groups: the South Koreans, North Koreans and Chinese Koreans. A few months ago, I found myself thrown into the role of - teacher? mentor? tutor? - to some small groups of adults, tasked with practising oral English in preparation for the language examination required for residency in the UK.

This was a new experience, one for which I had not only had no formal preparation, but for which I was utterly unprepared. The first group arrived, parents in their mid-30s, accompanied by the mother and brother of one of the parents. The couple have five children in total, and, this being mid-morning, they were able to come to a lesson whilst the eldest three were in school. The 8-week old baby and his 3 year older sister were brought with their parents. Father is now in a wheelchair, following a serious racist attack in a local café; mother pushed him and carried the baby and various paraphernalia. Grandmother was immaculately dressed, looking much younger than her years, whereas mother was waif-like, undernourished and poorly clad.

Eventually, after introductions and stowing of pushchair etc., the 3-year old was settled at a table to amuse herself drawing, the parents took turns in nursing the baby and we set about the lesson, using hand gestures to overcome language difficulties and calling on the assistance of a bilingual colleague when this failed. Before long, the baby cried and was immediately, but very discretely, fed at his mother’s breast. I had never had such an experience over nearly 40 years of teaching! More was to come: as if on cue, the little girl was given a box of freshly prepared fruit to nibble on; a changing mat appeared and the baby’s nappy was changed and neatly disposed of. Throughout this, we practised the rote sentences they had previously learned.

So was established the routine of a real-life learning and teaching partnership in 21st century England. It was a greater learning experience for me, I am sure, than for the adult learners. It was a situation for which I had no formal preparation, so how did I cope? Undoubtedly there was a combination of attitudinal and professional skills involved. I absorbed the unusual classroom activities without moral judgement, as did I when I knew the answers my students were giving to certain questions were probably untrue – ‘What job do you do?’ ‘I am not working at the moment.’ An answer necessary if benefits were being received.

Clearly, experience of life and of teaching were also essential to my ability to deal with this new situation. Perhaps the most important thing for me, though, has been the insight I have been privileged to see into the living and working conditions of these people in their home country as well as as immigrants to the UK. It is a real tribute to them that the children they send for lessons are so motivated and (mostly) delightful. They all thank you for teaching after each lesson, and there is a sense of old world respect for teachers that is curiously incongruous with the informality of the adult lessons. A truly new example of 21st century learning.





MEN'S SHEDS: A SOCIAL INNOVATION TO HELP MEN WITH DISRUPTED LIVES

Norman is founder and leader of the Lifewide Education Project

Inspiring story

You can find inspiring stories about lifewide learning everywhere. In October I was visiting my mother in Australia who lives in a small coastal town over 200km south of Sydney. I love coming to her home which she has lived in for 28 years. It's very peaceful apart from the ticking clocks and the colourful and noisy parakeets, lorikeets and rosellas that fly around continuously. The time I spend here is always good for reflection especially when I take long walks along the local beaches. The place triggers memories of different visits we have made over twenty years as my children grew up and eventually visited their grandparents by themselves. In many respects this has been the family home for the third and now the fourth generation of the Jackson clan for we are many.

Whenever I visit Australia I'm always on the lookout for interesting ideas that I can relate to Lifewide Education's interests. I am never disappointed. On my last visit I discovered a local charity called the Dunn Lewis Foundation(1) that had been set up in memory of young people who had been killed in the Bali nightclub bombing doing a lot of good work to support young people and help them develop skills to gain employment but more generally to develop themselves as confident people.

This time I discovered 'Men's Sheds' because just across the road from my mother's house in Narrawallee sits the Ulladulla Men's Shed.

'A Men's Shed is a larger version of the typical man's shed in the garden – a place where he feels at home and pursues practical interests with a high degree of autonomy. A Men's Shed offers this to a group of such men where members share the tools and resources they need to work on projects of their own choosing at their own pace and in a safe, friendly and inclusive venue. They are places of skill-sharing and informal learning, of individual pursuits and community projects, of purpose, achievement and social interaction. A place of leisure where men come together to work.'

A Shed's activities usually involve making or mending in wood (e.g. carpentry, joinery, turning, carving, whittling, marquetry, furniture renovation) and may include activities as varied as bike repair, gardening, vehicle repair, tool renovation, upholstery, boat renovation, model engineering, milling, turning in plastics, etc. Reclamation, reuse and restoration will feature strongly – and some say that is true of the men too! Although Sheds mostly attract older men, some have included men of any age, women and young people. Whichever activities are pursued the essence of a Shed is not a building, which some don't have, but the network of relationships between the members'(3)



Ulladulla Men's Shed

The story of how men formed their own purposeful social groups around the idea of coming together in a shed to socialise and make things is a great story for the Social Age. The grassroots social movement began in Australia(2) in the mid 1990s when a group of men realised that it would be great fun to have a shed in which they could meet regularly to do something practical - especially to make or fix things. The idea quickly caught on and many sheds were established in local communities and by 2006 the government set up an organisation(1) to help coordinate and support the creation of more men's sheds. In fact the Men's Shed movement is now part of the Australian health infrastructure that supports programmes to improve men's health and well being. It's a great example of how a local grassroots idea, became a social phenomenon that eventually drove government policy.

**The value is in making friends, feeling useful,
making a contribution and learning new things**



The idea of meeting up with other men to do something of practical value, often making toys and furniture to raise money for charities, appeals to men both living alone or with partners and at all ages although the vast majority of 'shedders' are at or beyond retirement date. Many older men lose some sense of purpose with the loss of their work role, status, workmates, income etc and can find themselves disengaged from their community if the pub or sports is not their thing. The generality of community activities on offer do not appeal to men and with their own expectation of meeting their own needs then some level of social isolation can occur. Men with their own shed have often developed their skills and interests there but in a larger facility, with

better or more equipment, with skills you can develop with others and jobs you can do for the community a Men's Shed offers something new. Finding a way of working, alongside others and with a purpose in view but without imposed demands can be exactly what many men need.

And it doesn't stop at making things there are also activities such as making music and cooking. Like the Melton Men's Shed, 45km north-west of Melbourne, where every Tuesday men prepare and cook a two-course meal. It's part of a national trend where older men who have been looked after by wives who are no longer with them, can learning to cook for the first time.



Emerging global phenomenon

There are now more than 1,200 sheds in Australia and the scheme has gone global. There are nearly 200 sheds in Ireland and over 100 in the UK with a new shed opening every three days (4).

The growth of Men's Sheds is an emergent social response to the need for men, particularly over the age of 50, to make themselves useful by finding new purposes in life when they have experienced a significant life change such as retirement, loss of a partner or debilitating illness.



Social isolation, loneliness and stressful social ties are common amongst older men, and are associated with poor physical and mental health, higher risk of disability, poor recovery from illness and early death.

According to a 2014 survey by Age UK (4), more than one million people over 65 in the UK are often or always lonely, an increase of 38% on the previous year. Two-fifths of respondents said that their main form of company is the television. The UK is among the most socially isolated countries in Europe, according to research published in June 2014 by the Office for National Statistics. Asked

whether they feel close to people in their local area, 42% said they did not – the highest proportion after Germany. The Campaign to End Loneliness, a national network set up in 2011, believes the issue is a “public health disaster” waiting to happen. Scientific research shows that for older people, loneliness is twice as unhealthy as obesity, as it is linked to high blood pressure, strokes and a weakened immune system.

Older men use fewer community based health services than women, and are less likely to participate in preventive health activities. They also find it harder than women to make friends late in life, and are less likely to join community-based social groups that tend to be dominated by women. Finding acceptable social interventions for lonely and isolated groups of disadvantaged older working class men is a challenge: one that is being addressed by the Men's Shed movement.

A synthesis of research on Men's Sheds (5) points in particular to the health and well-being benefits of men coming together in a purposeful way. Participation in a Men's Shed, a community garden or other activity, is linked to older men's desire to engage with their peers in work-like activity. This gives them a sense of identity, self-esteem and value and provides a space within which they can re-create a sense of masculinity in older age. Overall findings from these studies indicate that Men's Sheds and other gendered interventions provide an array of benefits for older men including: learning new skills, sharing knowledge; personal achievement; community engagement; the opportunity to meet and interact with others. There is a strong association between having good social relationships through leisure and other forms of activity with good health. However, to date there is no robust measurable evidence that involvement in Men's Sheds has a significant effect on the physical health of older men.

Personalising this story

My father spent many years of his retirement, until he was well into his 80's, working voluntarily with a group of pensioners to make children's toys to raise money for a local charity that provided holidays for disabled children and their families. He also had his own shed (garage) full of tools neatly arranged and labelled on the walls and a heavy duty work bench where he made toys for the grandchildren and more recently great grandchildren - a dolls house for the girls and a garage for the boys. When he died six weeks ago my mother invited the men to come over from the Ulladulla Men's Shed across the road to help themselves to any of his tools. They had been so appreciative of the gift so I went over the road to introduce myself and say how pleased my dad would have been to see his tools being put to such good use. Apparently many 'Men's Shed's' receive donations of tools and equipment in this way - another great example of men helping other men even in their passing.



I met Barry who had started the project over 6 years ago - apparently the Ulladulla Men's Shed was number 35 in the whole of Australia. Barry had seen one on the north coast and decided it would be a good idea to have one in Ulladulla so he set about trying to raise awareness and money. The local council were not interested in supporting the project but a church was, and donated the land on which the shed sits. Over the last six years the project has grown and there are now over 100 men making use of the facility. On the day of my visit there were about 10 men busy working in the garden and workshops. Barry told me that they receive very little financial aid but people make donations which are tax deductible. Mostly though, the Shed survives on the money they raise themselves through selling what they make or grow in the garden. While it might be tough to sustain the enterprise it is not only sustaining itself but there are plans for extending the shed to accommodate more men. Having seen it for myself you cannot fail to be impressed by the power in the idea and the even greater power in the implementation of it.



Barry (left) & John Ulladulla Mens Shed 1

Relating this to the Social Age

So you might ask how does this relate to the Social Age? one of the themes Lifewide Education is exploring this year(6). In many respects the situation we are seeing in which men are physically coming together in the same space for companionship, to make themselves useful and to learn and be creative through the things they make, is more akin to the Manufacturing Age into which many of these men were born and learnt their values. It demonstrates to me the idea that each 'Age' of learning does not obliterate the earlier Ages, rather it subsumes and enriches it with new tools and approaches. I did not see or hear of Men's Sheds going digital but in my internet searches I discovered that there are opportunities for men to learn about computers and Web 2.0, and digital photography and in this way develop new skills that will enable them to participate in the

Social Age of learning. And thanks to 'my sisters dongle' I was able to sit in my mother's lounge in Narrawallee and discover lots of things about Men's Sheds that I never knew before. In checking my Twitter feed I discovered a blog by Steve Wheeler (7) that explained the theory of constructionism - a cognitive theory that relates to learning by making things and this seems like a useful theory within which to view what goes on inside Men's Sheds. The culture of learning we associate with the Social Age is all about participation and what Men's Sheds is all about is encouraging men to participate in their own self-determined projects within what Douglas Thomas and John Seeley Brown call 'collectives' (8). It's also about co-creation and the bounded spaces of a Men's Shed is full of creativity and co-creativity. It is in the sense of belonging and participation in a 'collective' for the purpose of creating and co-creating in order to contribute to society and to personal wellbeing where Men's Sheds intersect with the Social Age.

Acknowledgement

A big thank you to Barry Wilford for inspiring me with the story of the Ulladulla Men's Shed.

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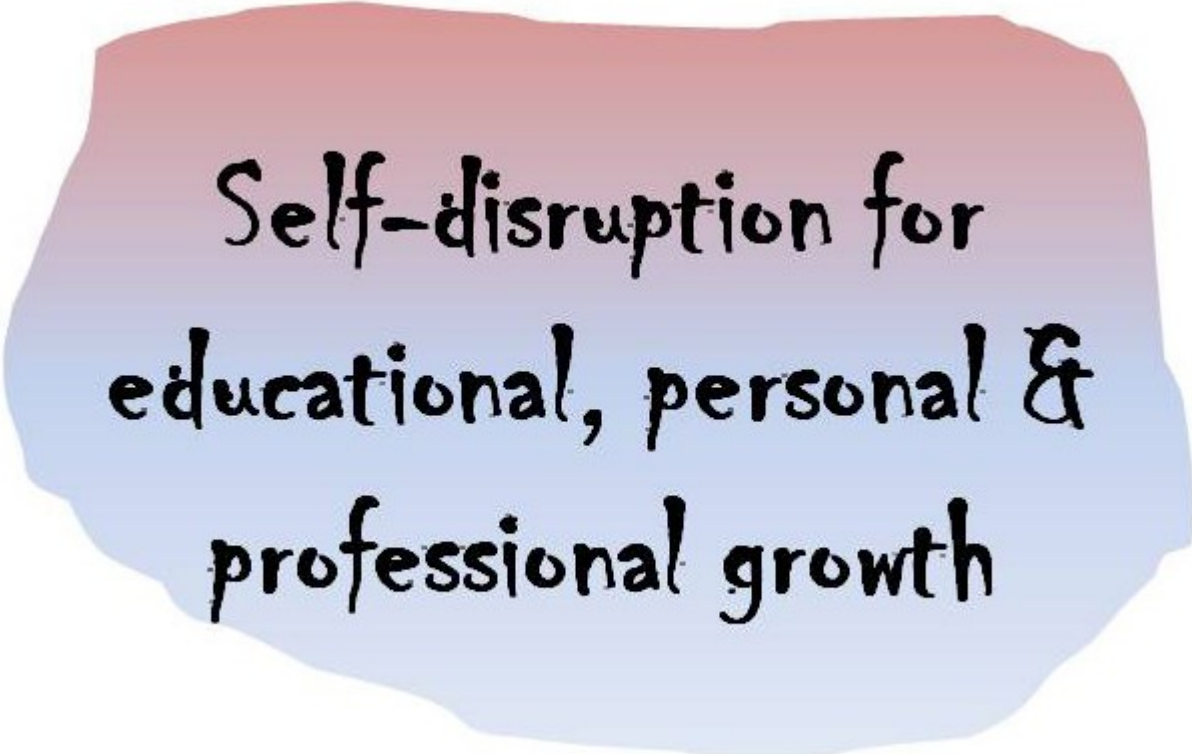
<http://www.newcultureoflearning.com/>

MEN'S SHED IN THE UK

There are several Shed videos on You Tube. Try this as an example <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WE0PPZLSIAs&feature=relmfu>

Westhill Mens Shed produced a useful video to get support for starting a Shed see <http://youtube.com/watch?v=U6co7KAY90c>





Self-disruption for educational, personal & professional growth

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Editor's Note: Self-disruption for educational personal & professional growth

I recently came across a paper that described a research process in which a group of people were invited to identify seven significant events in their life then construct a narrative of their life using these events as a structure. Inevitably, events that were chosen were times of significant change. I tried the same approach and came up with seven significant disruptions each causing me to adapt and alter my intended pathway and in some cases causing me to change the direction of my life from what I, and my family, had anticipated. But most of these change points were not forced in the sense of me being coerced into them or imposed on me by life circumstances. Most of them, particularly in the earlier part of my life related, were brought about by an opportunity that I did not create for myself, but once accepted I tried to make the most of it. Here is one example.

When I was 10 I failed my 11+ school exam so I went to a Secondary Modern School. In my first year at the School I did very well coming top of the class so I was given a chance to sit the 12+ entrance exam to the Grammar School - only six people in the whole town had this chance. But I did not want to take the exam, I was doing very well at my Secondary School academically, socially and also playing a lot of sport which I enjoyed so why should I disrupt my life and abandon what was for me a good life? My parents sent me to the local vicar who I knew very well as I had been in the church choir and he persuaded me that I should at least take the exam. When I went for the exam we had a class taught by the Deputy Head Master and he said a few words of encouragement that gave me the confidence to get involved in his class. I was successful and passed the exam

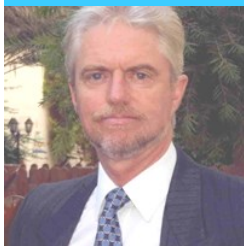
When I look back it was like a journey. The process I had gone through, the relationships that helped me think about the situation from different perspectives, and what I did to give myself the chance, all convinced me that it was worth giving up my existing good life and friendships and starting again at the bottom of the Grammar School. The opportunity and the process I went through disrupted my life and led me to make an entirely new pathway without which I would not be here now writing this!

I have experienced this general pattern of self-disruption many times since then - every time I have thought about and gone after a new job, or made a career change or been considering a new challenge that I know ultimately I will benefit from. In this next article, Lifewide team member Lorraine Stefanie describes and reflects upon the value of an experience she has recently had which involved disrupting her own life in order to grow as a person.



DISRUPTING AND REBUILDING A PROFESSIONAL LIFE

Russ Law



Russ Law began his professional career as a school teacher in Yorkshire before going to the Middle East to work as a teacher and eventually becoming head of a big international school. He now enjoys coaching and assessing professionals aspiring to become head teachers, passing on his knowledge and experience to the next generation of school leaders. He is a founding member of Lifewide Education and a member of the core team.

I suppose I should state at the outset that what follows deals with events and processes largely due to my own instigation when I, with my family's support, decided to resign from my role as a head teacher at a large international school in Saudi Arabia, and give up the rich and fulfilling expatriate life we had chosen to live in the desert kingdom, to return to the UK and start a new life. This was undoubtedly an act of self-disruption for me and my family, since no one, or no circumstance, forced me/us to do this and we could have continued in this situation until I chose to retire. The article describes something of the process I went through, and how I learned to change and adapt to a new professional life. While acknowledging that the transition to another life was equally challenging for my wife and other members of the family, in this article I've deliberately focused on myself.

Background

Both my wife and I qualified as school teachers and after a few years of teaching in the north of England, we decided to go on an overseas adventure. We got teaching jobs in Tehran, with a two year contract. Sadly, our entry to Iran in 1978 coincided with the revolution and our school closed down less than six months after we arrived, with most of the pupils and staff having left the country. My wife and I accepted the offer of an airlift by the RAF to Cyprus, and proceeded home. Being jobless, we found it hard to get rented accommodation at first, but eventually we readjusted our lives and obtained temporary posts for the rest of the school year, before embarking on phase two of our overseas adventure to work in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

Life there was full of contrasts and contradictions - enough for another article altogether! When we'd completed our first year at one school, we moved to another that was just getting under way, which catered for expatriate children from many countries. This phase of our dramatically different professional life was fascinating in the way it required new and largely unconscious learning. We brought our previous knowledge, experiences and interests with us as we engaged with the professional and social dimensions of our existence,

applying old things in new ways, to achieve great outcomes. For example, we could apply our professional perspective to a new and fresh context; I could have a bash at learning some Arabic, being interested in languages; a love of music and theatre brought the chance to lead school activities, as well as opening up social links and new relationships. For example, I first met Norman Jackson while playing football while my wife was rehearsing for the Christmas panto. Such is the chance way in which relationships often form.

We had already learnt a lot about people, and how they functioned under stressful situations. Now we learned more, including how they dealt with new cultural challenges and opportunities; we personally learned about ourselves as we managed life as "strangers in a strange land". This was intended to be a short-term period of life overseas; but apart from a year back in England studying in the early 1990s, moving house and having our second child, we ended up spending more than two decades living and working in Jeddah.





subsequent Gulf Wars, 9/11 and numerous terrorist incidents and scares, we found that some hitherto solid fellows were not so solid, whereas others proved stalwart allies in managing the fears - even hysteria - of members of our community.

Eventually, we decided to stop putting off our return to the UK. Two of our children had already done so for their sixth form and university education, having found life in Saudi too restrictive by this time. We missed them, and my parents were getting quite elderly. So for these personal reasons we decided to leave. The fact that I was professionally and personally bound to give a year's notice meant that once the decision was made, I could start to manage the process of self-disruption by means of conscious and unconscious transition.

We experienced huge, life-changing events during our time in Jeddah. Our three children were born and enjoyed a wonderful school and home environment, with loads of other children and opportunities in the core and wider curriculum, as well as interesting travels and adventures near and far. The climate was roasting most of the time, but conducive to outdoor activities, especially swimming, in the pool or the sea. As adults we went exploring, as well as indulging in a great range of expat activities. It was fulfilling, as teachers and school leaders, to be able to craft and develop the extended impact of school life and values on a growing population of international children, including, eventually, some Saudis - male and female - without the constraints imposed by the whims of successive Secretaries of State for Education and Ofsted.

On the other hand, we were always mindful of the fact that we lived about fifty miles from Mecca, and were operating within a bubble inside a severely conservative and authoritarian political environment. There were many cultural risks and occasional clashes. A policeman guarding the check-point on the road around Mecca spat in the face of our friend who was driving, and manhandled his wife. Another policeman, in Jeddah, saw me struggling to push my car over a ramp where I'd managed to get it perched like a seesaw, and approached me looking serious. I expected to be penalised for driving across a building site, but was instead helped by the application of another shoulder to nudge the car onto a flat surface, an encounter that concluded with a "shukran", a smile and a handshake. During the big crises of the first and

Disruption

The transition from Saudi to the UK was not a sudden crisis, requiring rapid accommodation mentally and practically. However, the requirements were significant in relation to what we needed to do in order to fashion our new lives. Both my wife and I were too young to give up work and we were not wealthy enough to do so anyway. So we both set about finding jobs - quite a challenge given I had not had to do this for over twenty years.

Emotionally, this was a time of very mixed feelings. There was uncertainty and anxiety, balanced by some anticipation of relief in relinquishing the burden of responsibility for such a large community of families. At the end of every school year, when everyone had left the premises, I would sit for a few moments in the deserted school, and sigh with relief that another year had passed with no disaster occurring "on my watch". Even though plenty of things would inevitably not have gone like clockwork, if no child had come to harm through accident or failure on our part, it was something to cherish. There were many friends, colleagues and associates to say goodbye to, which was clearly going to be sad; but there were also others whom we looked forward to reconnecting with. I recall jogging early in the morning or in the evening, and going into a trance-like state! I never plug my ears into music when running, and the imagination and deeper brainwaves seem to work better like that. There was a sense of unreality about this final year that stood in between a hugely familiar and rewarding past and an equally huge but largely unknown future.

I was looking at the prospect of giving up a whole set of routines, human interactions, and fulfilling experiences across the whole lifewide spectrum; what would replace these, and how long would it take? How well I was equipped for the change only time would tell.

Rebuilding my Professional Life

Rebuilding is a process, and it took me a couple of years to fully come to terms with my new situation. Below I try to sketch the process I went through and some of the learning I needed in order to change.

I hadn't got a plan to take on a headship in the UK, and actually was quite vague about the next steps. Looking back at emails from that time, I notice that I'd considered a variety of options: consultancy, supply teaching, teaching English as a foreign language, to name three likely possibilities. I needed to discover some specific pathways.

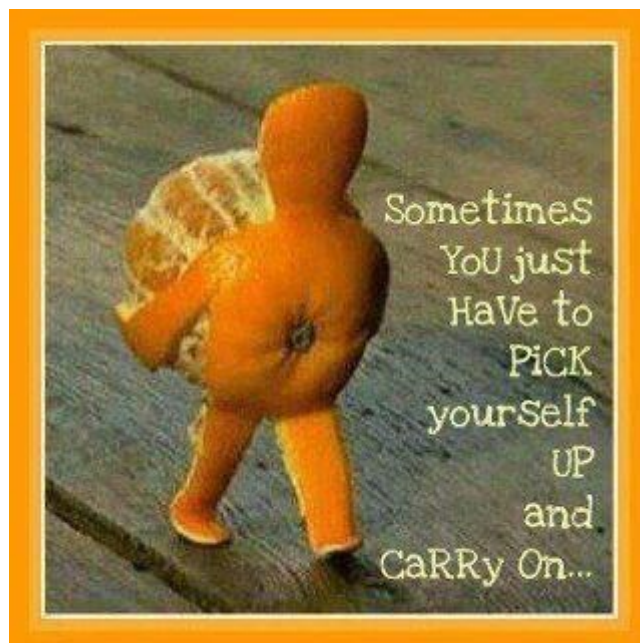
Discovery: I had taken the precaution of studying for the England-based National Professional Qualification for Headteachers (NPQH). This was useful in acting as an endorsement of much of the work I'd been doing anyway. It also opened up some links that were to prove crucial to my future, and for which I remain grateful to this day. I attended training sessions online, joined an online group of people tutored by a facilitator from the Institute of Education in London, and began to satisfy the requirements of professional exchanges and the collation of documentary evidence for assessment. I travelled to Bahrain for one of the final interviews, and went to London for a day of face-to-face assessments. Having satisfied the requirements for this qualification I attended a residential experience with other graduates at the National College for School Leadership in Nottingham. Other participants kept asking me for practical guidance, thinking that I was one of the tutors, being older than most, and more formally dressed. This gave me the idea that I could perhaps work as a tutor for the programme.

However, I had discovered that there existed a wide zone of self-doubt about my credibility and currency, and I needed to find ways of reassuring myself and possibly others, as I approached the team at the Institute of Education at the University of London. (This boldness had been encouraged by my NPQH tutor, Jacqui Brown, who had been a headteacher overseas herself.)

I've mentioned some key people who helped in the process of coping with disruption. On the emotional and practical fronts, it was massively important to have the backing of my wife.

Among other things, she began supply teaching, and we were able to deal with the business of engaging with our children's UK-based education in an active, challenging but fulfilling way, forming a great team. The children and old and new friends helped, by giving a new context of belonging and purpose. In other ways, I found myself being helped and encouraged to expand and develop my thinking about educational and social values, and to put pen to paper - or fingertip to keyboard. This process had started before leaving the Middle East, and those responsible will recognise this reminiscence of mine.

Contrary to my expectations, the programme director for the NPQH at the IoE, the late Jeannette Maddox, was pleased to be able to add a new ingredient to the team of consultants! She encouraged me to do an additional qualification, which wins the prize for the longest title of any I've known: The Graduate Certificate in Education Leadership and Development Consultancy. This served to equip me with a range of current thinking, terminology, practices and concepts, as well as placing me a step closer to a role of responsibility involving interesting people. Then, gradually, by working alongside an excellent range of new colleagues, and by demonstrating my competence in assessing, tutoring and supporting those on the programme, I began to renew my confidence in my own capability. I had to do some revision as well as new learning to achieve this.



Revision: Part of the induction and quality assurance process of this new work required me to revisit my earlier years as a teacher in the UK, and to revive my reserves of resilience professionally. Everything I did seemed to be QAed by someone, and followed by a conversation about what had gone well, and “even better if...” (EBI). Although this took me back to the nervous days of teaching practice, it also served to ratify, both formally and informally, a range of relevant skills and qualities needed for the new work. I had studied for a Masters in Education some years earlier, and so could also draw on my learning from that in relation to curriculum studies. The learning at this point was often characterised by adaptation.

Adaptation: There wasn’t a problem in adapting to the climate in terms of weather, but society had moved on, and so had I. One area in which I had a good start was in relation to the multicultural nature of London, and my awareness of, for example, religious sensibilities. Ironically, after leaving the twitchy and increasingly troubled Middle East, taking a route home through Syria, Lebanon and Egypt, we had found ourselves in the aftermath of 7th July 2005. My colleagues habitually referred, in a school context, to “parents and carers”, and some described their spouses as “partners”; the terminology of education was different, too, with “phases” meaning not the broad categories of primary/secondary/tertiary, but simply age- or year-groups. Accountability was everywhere. Prescription without consultation abounded. The standards for teachers and leaders, as approved by the National College, were worded in unfamiliar ways (and still are, to an extent). But my experience of school leadership had equipped me with a range of habits and approaches that I gradually realised were typically those used by coaches, such as listening, eliciting, affirming and challenging in a constructive style. Meanwhile, there was also a wider process of re-anchoring.

Re-anchoring: This was predominantly going on at a family level, with children’s transitions to new schools and social circles, and my wife also teaching (at a school near the old mosque in Woking!) Meanwhile, we all had the chance to return to friendships that had been more intermittently engaged in during our time away. It was a time for comparing and contrasting the near and the far, the new and the past, and finding some stability and equilibrium in terms of values, attitudes and behaviours. The girls were inclined to look critically at the attire of their contemporaries in Guildford on a Saturday

night, for example. We all experienced a dramatic and exciting wealth of new associations - of people and ideas. It was inspiring.

Association and Inspiration: The concepts of lifewide and lifelong learning were incredibly resonant with not only my own situation at the time, but also with the thinking behind the programmes I was working on. Self-directed learning, in the models of Kolb, Boyatzis and others, was something I was professionally advocating and supporting, as well as living in my own experiences. Being lucky enough to work part-time for a while in the creative context of SCEPTRe, at the University of Surrey, where Norman was actively promoting the best forms of teaching and learning at HE level, I could bring together my own ideals, ideas, experiences and purposes on a daily basis. This was effectively turning the earlier “disruption” into the kinds of reaction and opportunity that arise when different elements are stirred up together. It wasn’t predictable, but it was genuinely open learning.

Open Learning: I’m still learning. As a coach in several educational programmes, the habits of reflection, improvement, development and supervision are well established for me. Every time a new version of the NPQH comes along, or a new set of Ofsted criteria, or a new set of curricular prescriptions from government level, I need to become the keenest of self-directed learners. As a lead assessor in professional qualifications, there is a moral and practical responsibility to assess fairly and accurately at all times. This can be hugely challenging, and to achieve this I have relied on two driving factors: my own determination, and the examples of others. I didn’t think it would be possible to assess and draft feedback on so many activities in such a short time at assessment centres; but now I know I can do it - and survive the rigours of moderation and QA! Insights, techniques and collaboration have been the ingredients to deal with a range of learning needs.



What I had to learn in order to rebuild my disrupted professional life

Based on my experience of rebuilding my professional life I can draw a number of conclusions about the process I went through to re-create myself and rebuild my professional life. I deliberately choose the word re-creation because it involves bringing many new aspects of myself into existence.

- New purposes: What do I get up for in the morning?
- New ways of spending and organising one's time: What are my priorities, in work and play and obligation?
- New roles and identities: Today, am I an ex-headteacher, a coach, a facilitator in a training session, an assessor, a parent, a school governor, or all of these?
- New knowledge - particularly relating to regulation and quality assurance in educational establishments
- New biographical narratives for the "back story" of one's life: People are rarely very interested in hearing "Tales from Arabia", or "When I was a Headteacher..."; when introducing myself to new groups at training or facilitation days, my spiel goes "I'm Russ Law... I was born in London, but my teaching began in Yorkshire before I went to the Middle East to work... To cut a long story short, I ended up as head of a big international school... Did the NPQH and now enjoy coaching and assessing in various programmes, especially the NPQH". Depending on the situation and how much I feel it's necessary to present credentials more fully, I might add that I'm a school governor, and that my wife's a teacher, as is one of my daughters. This amounts to the creation of a real, authentic, but essentially new *identity*.



Before concluding, I'd like to look again at the emotional side of this self-inflicted disruption. Some people are unfortunate enough to experience injuries so bad that they require a "significant lifestyle change"; I have been lucky enough to be able to construct my own changes. When I examine the emotions involved in my experience, I feel the need to ensure that I don't do a disservice to those who have had to cope with the disruption of serious trauma. My experience and that of damaged servicemen, or of those facing the consequences of accident or illness, begin at opposite ends of the spectrum of disruption. There are zones in between where they may overlap, and perhaps another article will explore the ways in which some of the processes I've described might apply in graver conditions.

Around the time approaching the relocation to the UK, there were oddly combined feelings: fear, excitement, worry, pleasurable expectation, relief, anticipation, confidence, pride and self-doubt, for example. Nowadays, ten years on, not a day passes without some remembrance of the time in Saudi. As others have also mentioned to me, there's often a sense of poignant, wistful but not unpleasant recollection. When people ask if we regret leaving, or if we miss those times, the answer is simply that we recall them with love and joy, but know that they are the past. So, no regrets. Those years feature frequently in our dreams, too - sometimes in disturbing and dramatic sequences that could merit some interpretation in their own right. But I don't yearn to be that double-decker bus any more - the one in my Saudi dream with the entire school on board, while the steering failed and the vehicle began to wobble madly...

So, to conclude, I can summarise by saying that the learning that arises from disruptive change amounts to something that draws deeply on the past, including the shared past, as well as the shared present, in order to fuel the process of creating a new identity and a new future that is equally - perhaps even more - important.

DISRUPTING YOUR LIFE CAN HELP YOU GROW

Lorraine Stefani



Lorraine is Professor of Higher Education Strategic Engagement at the University Of Auckland (UOA), New Zealand. Her expertise in organizational change and development has led to consultancy roles in many countries including Switzerland, Hungary, Hong Kong, Australia, South Africa and most recently, Saudi Arabia. She is just completing a sabbatical from UOA and this article captures some of the enormous value in her experience.

Most of the articles in this issue have focused on disruption that is forced upon us or emerges in a way that we cannot control through the circumstances of our life. In this article I want to describe my experience of temporarily disrupting my own personal and professional life in order to develop and grow in ways that would not be possible if I stayed within the life I had. It is an example of how, if we can live with the uncertainty and risk caused by self-disruption we can not only grow through the experience but potentially change the direction of our future life and the impact we might have on the world around us.

A period of sabbatical is a luxury afforded to academic staff working in universities in some parts of the world. I am fortunate to work at a research-intensive, high performing university in New Zealand which grants sabbatical, or more precisely, Research and Study Leave, to academic staff fulfilling the application criteria. The Research and Study Leave period is generally six months but in exceptional circumstances, an applicant may be granted a shorter or longer time period. My application fell into the latter category and I was granted two consecutive six month periods of Research and Study Leave. I feel enormously privileged and grateful to have been given such an opportunity. But it does require some courage and risk to move out of the known and venture into the unknown.

A sabbatical or Research and Study Leave period is a time for renewal and rejuvenation. Used well, it is an opportunity for mental and physical renewal and exploration of creative pursuits. In applying for Research and Study Leave, the university requires quite detailed information on the goals of the applicant, expected tangible outcomes, benefits to the awarding university, personal and professional development. The Leave is a luxury but certainly not a holiday! For an academic with a purpose it provides an opportunity to take some risks and to be creative - to create a new life very different to that which currently exists.

In my case my overarching goal at the outset of my leave was to carry out research on leadership in higher education with the longer term aim of publishing a single authored book on this topic. This was a new research focus for me. Leadership in higher education is an under-researched topic. As universities are constantly being challenged to change and almost re-invent themselves to align with shifting conceptions of the purpose of higher education, it is time to explore leadership in higher education, to take our role as role models seriously and to understand how to build leadership capability and capacity, as a critical aspect of our social responsibility.

Suffice to say that I have lived up to my expectations of tangible outcomes in the form of publications, manuscripts submitted, work in progress. I have been prolific in peer reviewing for several journals. I have been offered and accepted invitations to co-publish and co-edit chapters and books on the topic of Leadership in Higher Education. I was fortunate enough to be given permission by my Dean to attend a Leadership Development Programme offered by the Centre for Creative Leadership. I have pushed myself way beyond my comfort zone in giving keynotes and presentations at conferences that are new to me. I was voted on to the position of Vice President of HETL, the International Higher Education Teaching and Learning Association (www.hetl.org), I have given seminars at several universities in the UK. I have networked extensively through email, social media, Skype and met with senior managers of universities.

From my viewpoint the opportunity to embrace my own lifelong and lifewide learning in this way, is a treat, a challenge and a privilege.

I feel a sense of pride in my achievements. I have pushed myself forward professionally and personally and I have extended not just my individual professional impact but also as an ambassador, the reputation of my university. I can lay out the tangible outcomes of my Research and Study Leave easily. What it is not possible to quantify are the intangible benefits of time out from routine, high pressure, constant small but time consuming demands on a daily basis. There is no doubt in my mind that disrupting my life in order to create a different life has been one of the richest and most productive periods of my professional life but a sabbatical is also a significant challenge that affects all aspects of one's life.

A truly lifewide experience

My partner and I, born and bred Scottish, decided to locate back to the homeland for the duration of my R&S Leave. Despite having been back and forth many times in the decade we have lived in NZ, it was a shock to see, feel and live the impact of the austerity measures brought in by the UK government in the wake of the Global Economic Crisis. We had to fit ourselves back into the new milieu of our old neighbourhood; live the challenge of an overcrowded area with tensions between the dominant population and new immigrants from Eastern European countries. It was thrilling to be in Scotland at the time of the Commonwealth Games, an event which without doubt captured the nation, and for which Glasgow, the host city, put on its Sunday best for the duration of the event and showed the very best it has to offer in hospitality, good humour and excellent sportsmanship.

It was astonishing too to be in a small country seeking its independence from the rest of the UK; to see the wholehearted re-engagement in politics and the political process across all ages from sixteen upwards, with an 85% turnout for the referendum vote. No matter that the YES campaign lost, the referendum itself changed politics not just in Scotland but across the whole of the UK.

Being interested in leadership in general, who are our role models, what characteristics do good leaders display, it has been a fascinating experience to watch leadership in action in all different contexts. Re-familiarising ourselves with the current state of political play in Scotland and across the UK, comparing how the UK is faring in comparison to cities in Europe has felt like a lifetime's learning. However well one keeps up with the news not only at local level but also international events, it is a shock to the system to come back to the Northern Hemisphere and be so exposed to the horrors of world events which are reported on much more extensively here than in New Zealand. Such an experience of coming 'home' has re-enforced my understandings of cultural differences and nuances, and the shifting cultural psyche.



While one is liberated from routine while on sabbatical, the potential of and for learning is incalculable – it is lifewide, it is looking outside of the relatively safe haven of academia and our professional or discipline based knowledge and learning. It is akin to seeing life in the raw! A sabbatical period is time to see and experience the world through different eyes and lenses.

Just occasionally in life, an opportunity comes along that could not have been predicted but which will have lasting insights, impact, challenges and learnings and I was lucky enough to be offered such an opportunity. I had not long commenced my research and Study Leave when I was asked if I would consider locating to Saudi Arabia for a period of time to work at Princess Nora University (PNU) in Riyadh.

I had been to Saudi Arabia many times before but not to live life there, working, socializing and learning. It was an extraordinary opportunity albeit I appreciate not all women would necessarily think of this as an outstanding opportunity. My Dean and I agreed I could take on this consultancy role and that time spent at PNU would be added on to my research and Study Leave.

Living and working in Saudi Arabia gave me incredible insights into the status and the challenges for universities in Saudi Arabia. I learned so much more about Islam and the Islamic culture. I also learned that much of what we take to be and assume to be repression of women, is seen very differently by highly educated Saudi Arabian women, but I also did learn much about the dis-satisfaction of women regarding the right to vote, the right to drive and freedom of movement.



I learned a great deal about intercultural competence, what it really means – and I question whether or not we do a good enough job of supporting students and indeed staff in developing this complex skill or attribute.

By reading the English versions of newspapers in Saudi Arabia, I learned more

about relations between countries and cultures in the Middle East. I could feel strongly the rigid hierarchy of power relations. I could begin to understand why it is so difficult for smooth political relations between the West and the Middle East.

I also saw up close and personal, the impacts of the financial squeeze on universities and how the Middle East is a magnet for the Education Business, not necessarily always in the best interests of Saudi institutions, often simply financial transactions. I made many friends in Saudi Arabia and feel greatly privileged to have been asked to support Princess Nora University, Saudi Arabia's first and the world's largest women only university, in its endeavour to set up a Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching, and to support the University in strategies for building leadership capability and capacity.



What difference has this disruption made to me?

I am now coming to the end of my sabbatical period and I'm bracing myself for re-entry into my university. I am disrupting what has now come to be familiar and moving back to a former life that although familiar, I know will not be the same. I am different and I know much will have changed in my university. My role and responsibilities will be different, there will have been procedural changes, staff changes, budget cuts. But, I am also returning with a plan of action, and many new ideas to offer my Dean and my Faculty. Furthermore, I have formed new relationships that I will continue to develop and utilise in my future work.

Personally and professionally I am not in any doubt that I have grown as a person. I hope that my learning, my publications, my tangible impact will be of value not only to the university, but also much more widely than that. In the less tangible and measurable aspects of sabbatical leave, I hope I will add value to the university, bring my enhanced sense of mindfulness and being mindful, and my global knowledge and understanding to bear on my work on leadership in higher education.

I have crossed boundaries again in my career having been a biochemist who changed career to academic developer and am now transitioning into leadership in higher education and what that means at institutional level. It is my challenge to blend together the discourses of leadership and higher education and contribute to a new narrative for a new era of higher education.

My batteries are re-charged. Family and friends have been visited. I have different perspectives on the world, more insight into the actual scale of the current challenges and what it will take to effect significant global change. Disruption has brought not destruction but renewal new enthusiasm for what lies ahead notwithstanding the challenges that might present.

I am grateful to the University of Auckland for the support provided for my Research and Study Leave. I wholeheartedly recommend sabbatical time and fully believe that the added value for the institution is significant with measurable and immeasurable components. From my viewpoint the opportunity to embrace my own lifelong and lifewide learning in this way, is a treat, a challenge and a privilege. The personal and professional development and new relationships and opportunities that have emerged through disrupting my life, to me is worth its weight in gold.

DISRUPTING HIGHER EDUCATION TO ENABLE CREATIVITY TO FLOURISH

Lifewide Team member and educational disrupter Chrissi Nerantzi invites readers to join her open learning ecology aimed at exploring perceptions of creativity. It's really an invitation to disrupt your life by giving yourself the space to get involved in something that has the potential to disturb assumptions and offer new perspectives that might be utilised in professional academic practice.



The Value of Disruption

Disrupting the status quo in order to do something that is new and significantly different to what has been done before is an important objective of creativity in the work environment. Sadly, universities don't like disruption, in fact they are positively risk averse: so all too often, even if we have a good idea, we play safe and shy away from possible criticism and carry on doing what we have always done because it's easier and we are less likely to get criticised. Trying to be creative in order to innovate involves courage and conviction, energy, effort and time, quite apart from the ideas and vision that drives the process.



Because of these organisational cultural pressures, I fear that for many academics, the excitement of learning and the excitement of teaching and helping others learn is not always visible. But does it have to be this way? What are the consequences for us, our learners and our society as a whole if we do not take the risks associated with disrupting ourselves and what we do?

I am an academic developer, a role which contains within it the seeds of educational disruption - in order to advance understanding and practice! Disruption and continuity mostly sit side by side in the fast changing world we live in - we need both incremental and step change if we are to survive and prosper. But those seeds for disruption have to be planted and helped to grow. I try to fulfil this role by teaching on programmes that lead to teaching qualifications in Higher Education, further CPD programmes, facilitating workshops and open courses but also through supporting individual colleagues and teams. At the heart of my approach is building relationships and trust with colleagues and working in partnership through modelling practices, immersion and co-creation. This, becomes a powerful vehicle for change. A while back I asked a new colleague what he loves about his job as an academic. The answer came as no surprise to me. He said research. My response was "you will need to learn to love teaching too". And my big question is how can we achieve this. How can we help academics use their love for research and experimentation and learn to love teaching? Is the answer in the question perhaps? If academics use their curiosity to make new discoveries through experimentation and research, what stops them using their curiosity to create stimulating, playful and imaginative learning experiences for them and their students?

I wanted to find out so I developed a special 'Creativity for Learning' unit for the Postgraduate Certificate and the Masters in Academic Practice within the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching at Manchester Metropolitan University. Its purpose is to introduce academics to the concept of creativity through immersion into playful approaches to learning and development. While some might not recognise the value of creating such a unit and would argue that creativity needs to

underpin all our activities and a programme more holistically, I went ahead with the creation of this unit to explore if it could act as a 'greenhouse' for growing creative action within an academic community by providing a safe and collegial space and unzip academics' minds and provide food for thought around how they could make changes in their practices to awaken their own and students' creative curiosity and discover fresh excitement. By giving participants the permission, freedom and encouragement to experiment I will be interested to see what emerges and if they change their understandings and conceptions of what creativity means to them in the context of their own learning and teaching when they disrupt their own practice.

An Open Learning Ecology

In addition to running the course internally within MMU we are also offering an open version linked to this through the Peer to Peer University (p2pu) in collaboration with Lifewide Education. We decided to do this as it will encourage others to join in and therefore extend and enrich our conversations and debates around creativity in Higher Education even further. The Creativity for Learning in Higher Education open learning ecology within p2pu is currently under construction and there will be multiple exciting ways to get involved, share experiences and make new discoveries. Have a look at <https://p2pu.org/en/courses/2615/creativity-for-learning-in-higher-education/> to get a taste of what is going to start unfolding from the end of January 2015.



Collaborative inquiry

As my questions around conceptions of creativity in the context of learning and teaching are important and fundamental for current and future practices, I teamed up with Professor Norman Jackson who has spent many years trying to understand what creativity means in higher education and encouraging universities to do more to nurture students' creative development. Much of this work is now available as an open resource on his new Creative Academic website <http://www.creativeacademic.uk/> & @academiccreator

Norman has influenced my thinking and practice and provided a window into the world of creative and playful teaching that underpins my teaching philosophy and practice. This project will help us gain a deeper insight into the conceptions of creativity as expressed and lived by academics and also provide a useful vehicle for my own further professional development through collaborative research.

The Creative Academic project aims to explore conceptions of personal creativity in the context of learning and teaching in higher education. The project will investigate:

Creative Academic

professional identity.

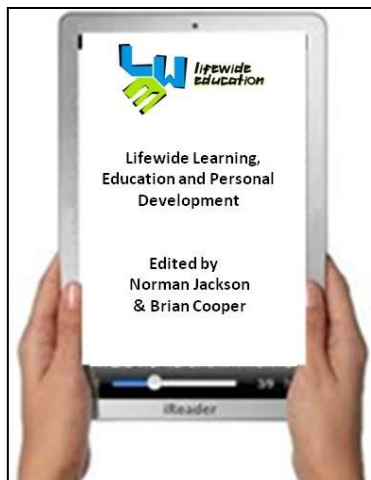
- 2) The beliefs, attitudes and values of higher education teachers in respect of their understandings of what creativity means in the context of their teaching, their curricular designs and students' development.
- 3) The ways in which higher education teachers encourage students to use and develop their creativity.
- 4) The extent to which understandings and meanings of creativity are enhanced or changed as participants try to implement their creative ideas.

While part of the project will be conducted with colleagues in my own institution and help us gain an insight into our evolving conceptions of creativity as we engage in the Creativity for Learning unit, the collaborative inquiry is also open to any higher education teacher who wants to participate. You can join us by registering your interest and completing the on-line questionnaire at <http://www.creativeacademic.uk/questionnaires.html>

LIFEWIDE EDUCATION'S E-BOOK PROJECTS

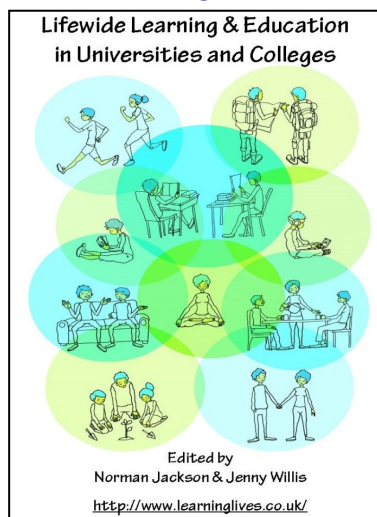
Lifewide Education is involved in developing and curating knowledge that is relevant to developing deeper understandings about what learning and developing in the Social Age means. Our three on-line books are published under Creative Commons Licences.

Lifewide Learning, Education and Personal Development aims to advance knowledge and understanding



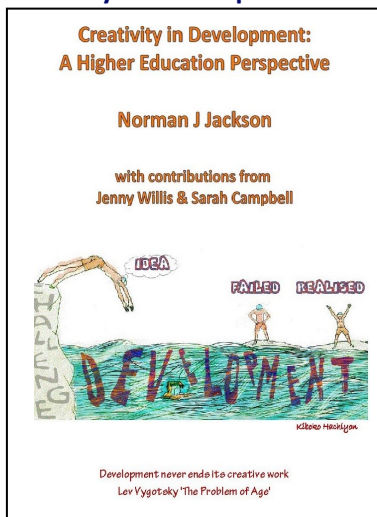
about how and why people learn, develop and achieve through their everyday experiences. The book brings together research studies, biographies and scholarly essays that provide new perspectives on 'lifewide learning, personal and professional development' and extend our understanding of how people learn and develop simultaneously through different parts of their lives. The book aims to strike a balance between academic, scholarly and research-based contributions, and contributions authored by people who do not count themselves as academic but who can provide real-life stories that reveal their personal perspectives on lifewide learning and development. <http://www.lifewideebook.co.uk/>

Lifewide Learning & Education in Universities and Colleges recognises and celebrates the many different ways



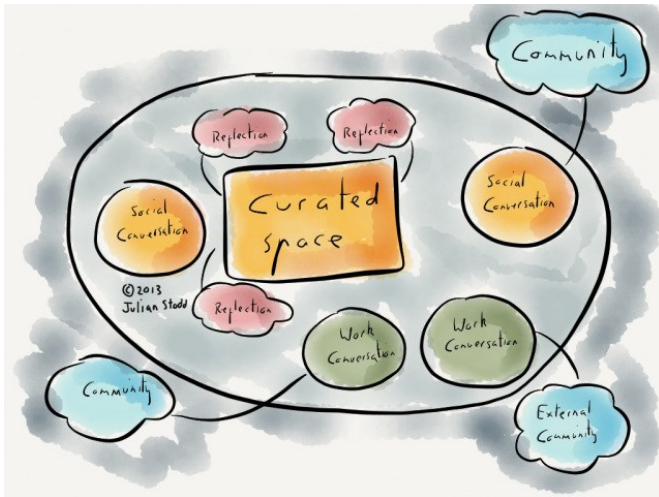
in which universities and colleges are providing their learners opportunities for a more complete, lifewide education by encouraging, supporting and recognising learning and personal development gained outside as well as inside the academic curriculum. The sixteen contributions provide descriptive accounts of institutional schemes and other strategies for supporting and recognising learners' lifewide learning, development and achievement, together with the findings of research and evaluation studies aimed at understanding how students are learning developing through their lifewide experiences. By sharing their knowledge, practices and insights contributors are helping to establish a new field of study, support a community of interest and practice, and encourage the further development of institutional practice <http://www.learninglives.co.uk/e-book.html>

Creativity in Development: A Higher Education Perspective examines the role of creativity in developmental



processes. This is a matter of interest and concern to everyone involved in the ongoing development of themselves and the development of educational practices, policies, resources and infrastructures that impact on students' learning and development. The multiple perspectives offered in this book have been gained through surveys and interview-based studies. Its value lies in the creation of a more comprehensive picture of this phenomenon amongst people involved in the development of educational practices. Four chapters have been published to date <http://www.creativityindevelopment.co.uk/>

CREATIVITY IN DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH PROJECT



A CURATED SPACE TO SUPPORT COLLABORATIVE OPEN LEARNING FOR ANYONE WHO WOULD LIKE TO SHARE INSIGHTS ABOUT THEIR CREATIVITY IN THEIR OWN DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESSES

HOW IT WORKS

You chose a development process you are involved in: it can be happening in any aspect of your life. You create a narrative describing the process and identify within it examples of your own creativity using your own meanings. You share your insights with other participants and then turn your narrative into a chapter for our book which curates the stories of embodied creativity. To find out more or to join the process

visit <http://www.creativityindevelopment.co.uk/>

HOW A UNIVERSITY DISRUPTED ITSELF!

The aim of this book is to make better sense of a long, complex, messy, change process through the stories of the people who were involved.

Between 2009 and 2012, Southampton Solent University (UK) engaged in an unprecedented and highly complex strategic initiative which ran across the entire institution, its structures, processes and systems; it aimed to produce a fundamental shift in institutional culture. Such an all-embracing approach is rare in universities.

Over fifty participants were interviewed during the course of the study and their uniquely personal perspectives have been woven into a compelling story of organisational change. This book describes their ingenuity and effort in bringing about change that they and their organisation valued.

The programme of organisational change is seen through the eyes of people who were immersed in the process. Their perspectives and feelings will resonate with anyone who has tried to bring about significant change in a university. Universities are inherently creative places but too often there is a pervasive inertia that prevents ideas from being turned into new and better practices. This programme aimed to stimulate the creativity of staff and create an organisational culture of innovation.

Conventional project planning techniques were deliberately avoided and replaced with an approach based on complexity theory, recognising that the process of change requires constant adaptation, acceptance of non-linear progress and subversion of conventional management discourse.

Offering an unusual example from the higher education sector, this study is a distinctive contribution to the extensive literature on organisational change. Learning gained from participants is related to theories and research from this wider literature. The study proposes a holistic and integrated approach to change which might offer a more culturally relevant and sustainable model both for higher education and for those sectors of industry and commerce from which much change management practice has conventionally been drawn.

The book will be of particular interest to senior managers and anyone leading significant change or encouraging innovation in teaching and learning in a university.

'Tackling the Wicked Challenge of Strategic Change: The story of how a university changed itself' is published by Authorhouse. It can be purchased on-line at: <http://www.authorhouse.co.uk/>





"the whole of life is learning therefore education can have no ending" Eduard Lindeman

Lifewide Education is a not for profit, community-based, educational enterprise whose purpose is to champion and support a lifewide approach to learning, personal development and education. We welcome everyone who is interested in the ideas and practices that we care about. To join us please visit the [community](#) page.

GLOBAL COMMUNITY



NEWS, EVENTS & PUBLICATIONS

Disrupting Universities
Chrissi Nerantzi

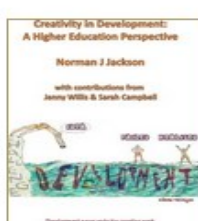
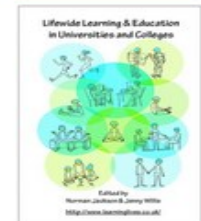
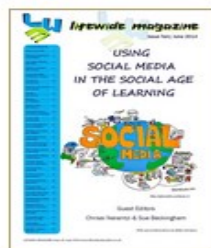
Benefits of career sabbatical
Lorraine Stefani

New Perspectives on Social Learning
Norman Jackson

The next issue of Lifewide Magazine will be published in mid December on the theme of Life Disruptions if you have a story you would like to share please contact Jenny Willis the editor

RESOURCES PORTAL

click on image to access



Issue 11 Lifewide Magazine Guest edited by Julian Stodd explores the idea of the Social Age and the new culture of learning that is emerging [read our blog](#)

Issue 10 Lifewide Magazine Guest edited by Chrissi Nerantzi and Sue Beckingham explores the theme of Using Social Media to support learning, development and achievement

LEARNING LIVES CONFERENCE 2014

Encouraging, Supporting & Recognising Lifewide Learning in Universities & Colleges Video resources and ebook

Send a link to your followers



On behalf of the Lifewide Education team Jenny & Norman would like to wish all our readers a very happy and healthy Christmas and we look forward to your continuing support in the New Year

Jenny & Norman

Lifewide Magazine Editorial Team

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LIFEWIDE MAGAZINE

Issue 13, March 2015

Exploring Creativity & Being Creative

We welcome contributions from members of the community. Please send your ideas to the Editor: jjenny@blueyonder.co.uk

Deadline for receipt of articles:
20/02/15

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