

Role of lifewide learning in becoming a creative professional: University of Surrey Case Study

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Summary

This article is one of a complementary pair (see also Willis 2010a) which report the findings and implications of research into how students in creative arts subjects learn to become creative professionals. The research was undertaken as part of the Creative Interventions Project: a collaborative National Teaching Fellowship Project led by the University of the Arts, London which examined creative arts student experiences of work-related learning activity in the public and third sectors. It set out to explore how such experiences contribute to students' employability skills and their development as a creative professional (Ball et al 2010).

In this article, I propose that the diverse individual, industrial and political needs for creative professionals can be brought together at a time of economic constraint by focusing on Maslow's (1954) higher needs, where self-actualisation and intrinsic rewards are paramount. She argues that this calls for critical reflection on experiences and externalisation of personal values. Her research has shown that, whilst students recognise their professional development in the formal context of their programme of study, they fail to appreciate the extent of learning achieved through their informal, life-wide experiences. There is evidence of rich experience which can be explored through a structured process of awareness raising and critical reflection thereby supporting individuals' ontological and practical (employment) needs, and assisting employers in their graduate recruitment. There are many initiatives in UK universities aimed at recognising students' extra-curricular achievements through a process of reflection, leading to an award separate from the degree. The chapter illustrates the benefits of such schemes through a case study of one level 3 student who piloted the University of Surrey's Lifewide Award in summer 2010. This develops the propositions advanced by (Jackson, 2010a and b) for developing both professional and creative capability through lifewide education.

Key words: creativity; lifewide learning; professionalism; self-actualisation; values.

Introduction

In a companion article (Willis 2010a), I examined creative arts' students perceptions of creativity and professionalism, as they emerged through a study of undergraduates at the University of Surrey and Guildford School of Arts, conducted in the Spring of 2010. In the conclusion to that chapter, I considered the differing values surrounding creativity at the individual, industrial and political levels, and we suggested that professional learning acquired in informal, extra-curricular (life-wide) contexts was undervalued. It was proposed that schemes such as the Surrey Lifewide Award (Jackson, 2010a), provide a framework for raising students' self-

awareness and engaging them in critical reflection, and may be an important means of enabling students to recognise and articulate the professional values and capability achieved through experiences beyond the curriculum.

I will begin with a discussion of the individual, economic and political value of creativity, couched against Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs. I argue that self-actualisation is essential to the motivation of productive and socially aware professionals. The key dimensions of creativity as they emerged from students' evaluations are reviewed, and their perceptions of how well they are able to learn to be creative professionals in three domains: through their programme of study (the curriculum); in their discipline-related hobbies and activities (the co-curriculum); and in their life-wide experiences (the extra-curriculum). The discrepancy between students' (low) rating of life-wide (extra-curricular) experiences and their rich narrative accounts of their own experiences provides the base for considering how many UK universities are accrediting extra-curricular experiences through an award separate from the degree.

This leads on to an examination of the Surrey Lifewide Learning Award, currently being piloted to illustrate the way in which students might be encouraged and helped to reflect critically on their experiences, plan future professional action, and express their learning cogently when applying for graduate employment. The case of a recent graduate is used to illustrate the way the scheme works.

Creativity: harmonising expectations

Creativity for individual, social and economic health

Creativity is recognised as an important contributor to individual well-being, 'equipping people with the skills they need to live full lives' (Bentley and Selzer 1999:9); to social well-being, as an element of common culture (Williams 1963) and to industrial innovation (Smith-Bingham 2006). Jones (2009) and Pope (2005) provide historical accounts of the changing expectations surrounding creativity, and an expanded discussion can be found in Willis (2010b).

The impact of economic recession on HE and the Arts

Only eight years ago, a government initiative was hailing the role of creativity in individual motivation, leading to empowerment, and thus potentially personal and national wealth:

Creative learning empowers young people to imagine how the world could be different and gives them the confidence and motivation to make positive change happen. This helps young people to engage with their education and to achieve. (Creative Partnerships Programme 2002:4)

But since then, the world has undergone a cataclysmic economic recession, and the UK has elected a new government, intent on addressing the nation's debt. The situation calls for prioritisation of values as every aspect of public funding is affected. Speaking recently, the Business Secretary admitted:

What we have is an urgent problem. Like the wider public sector, universities are going to have to ask how they can do more for less. There will probably be less public funding per student; quite possibly fewer students coming straight from school to do 3 year degrees; greater contributions from graduates; more targeted research funding. Perhaps all of these. (Cable 15 July 2010).

Ominously for Higher Education (HE), he continued:

The truth is that we need to rethink the case for our universities from the beginning. We need to rethink how we fund them, and what we expect them deliver for the public support they receive. (ibid)

If HE is subject to cuts, how much more vulnerable are the Arts? In vain may the Arts Council remind us that

Arts investment plays a vital role in the journey from talent to the creative industries, which are fundamental to the future competitiveness of British business and are seen as our best route out of recession. Between 1997 and 2006 the creative economy grew faster than any other sector, accounting for 2 million jobs and £16.6 billion of exports in 2007. (The Arts Council, 2010)

and allude to one of the present government's ideals, the 'Big Society':

Arts leaders and organisations occupy a major place in the 'Big Society': as civic leaders they contribute to the cohesion of their local communities, civic pride and quality of life. (ibid)

For many, funding of the Arts may seem a luxury that is misplaced at a time of economic austerity. 'Let's cut the arts budget' was the paradoxical call from one playwright (Ravenhill 26 July 2010), who believes the arts could actual flourish with less public investment, 'but only if politicians are more pragmatic, less driven by dogma.'

The problem for HE is further exacerbated by the nature of its outputs: students acquire far more than discipline knowledge and practice, but much of this is unquantifiable. As the Business Secretary acknowledged,

To people who have benefited from a university education, or supply it, the case for universities may be self-evident. But the greatest gifts bestowed by universities — learning how to learn, learning how to think; intellectual curiosity; the challenge and excitement of new ideas - are intangible and difficult to quantify. (Cable 15 July 2010).

We seem, then, to be caught in a dilemma: individuals, business, HE and government recognise the value of creativity to their respective agendas, but how can they continue to support initiatives designed to enhance it when financial resources are scant and competition with other sectors intense? In order to answer this question, let us return to students' own perceptions of being creative professionals, as found in the research (Willis 2010b).

Students' perceptions of creative professionals

The research focused on undergraduates in the creative arts, hence cannot yet claim to have representative findings. The author is currently engaged on a parallel study of undergraduates in other disciplines, which will reveal the generalisability of these data. With this proviso in mind, how do students conceive their development as creative professionals? They were asked to rate, on the scale 1 = of very little significance to 5 = very significant, a series of dimensions which might contribute to their development. Table 1 summarises the twelve elements rated most highly.

Table 1 Students' perceptions of the most important elements of creative professionalism

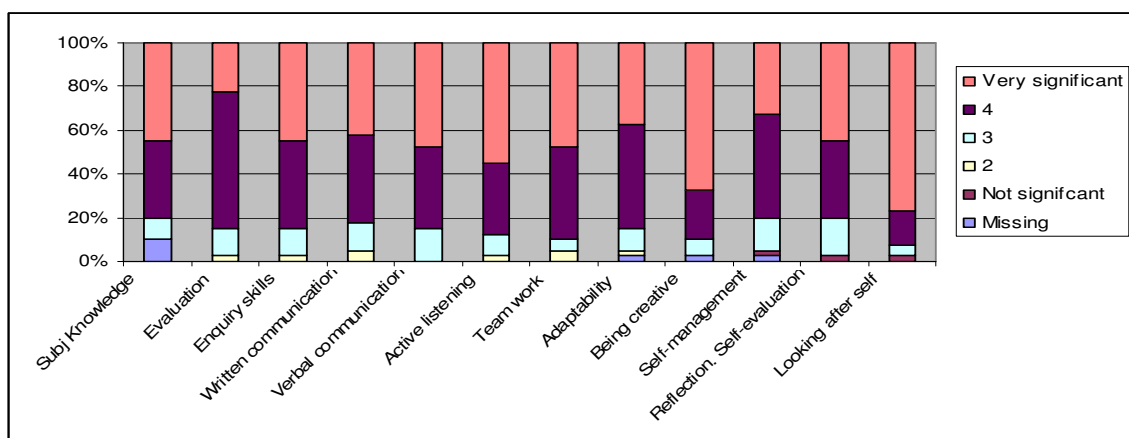
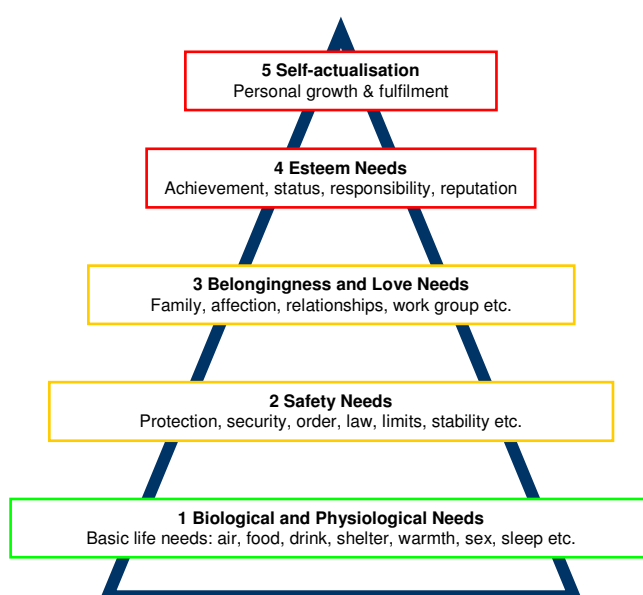


Figure 108 The 12 most significant dimensions of professionalism for respondents
 list offers a mixture of generic skills, which can be developed and some of which can be evaluated (e.g. written and verbal communication), cognitive skills, and dispositions. This poses a challenge – these things are difficult to evaluate, may be innate, and may not manifest themselves until triggered by circumstances in the future, but they are valued by both students and employers.

HE and Maslow's hierarchy of needs

My proposition is that Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs offers a helpful model against which to analyse the competing values. Figure 1 reproduces his model, moving upwards from our basic, biological and physiological needs through five stages to the highest level, self-actualisation. The stages have been numbered and colour-coded to indicate their degree of necessity from mere sustenance of life to contented living. Hence level 1, green, is essential to physiological existence, levels 2 and 3, yellow, are desirable for collective cohesion and well-being, and levels 4 and 5, red, are desirable for individual psychological well being.

Figure 1 Maslow's Hierarchy of needs



If we locate the different values attributed to creativity within this triangle, political and industrial concern regarding financial stability and group needs falls at levels 2 and 3. From the individual perspective, our creative arts students are focussed predominantly on level 5 (Willis, 2010a): they are more interested in intrinsic rewards than those associated with status and money.

A prerequisite of boosting graduate rewards at levels 4 and 5 is that individuals recognise their own values and experiences, and are able to articulate them clearly. This means broadening their perception of where their learning takes place and what the university experience is all about. Reflecting as he received an honorary degree this month, a former editor of *The Guardian* summed this up well:

University isn't a mere staging post to a well-paid job (so you can pay old father Whitehall back). Nor is it just an investment in Britain's future, so we can compete with Beijing by 2020. It isn't wholly a practical slog, either, a skill box of computer or engineering skills. University is an experience, often a life-changing one (...) If you're lucky, you've learned how to think – the best boon of the lot. (Preston 26 July 2010).

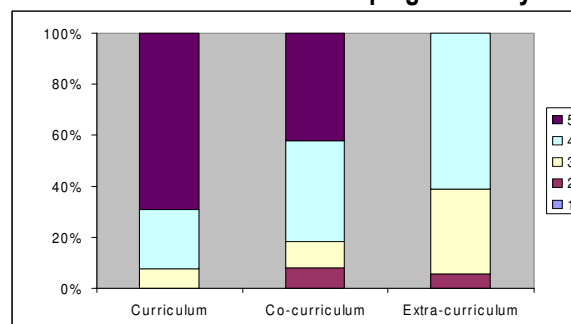
This brings us back to our findings from the creative professional research described in Chapter D4.

Learning to be creative professionals

Perceived domains of development

When students were asked to rate their creative development through the curriculum, in their co-curriculum (discipline-related hobbies), and extra-curriculum (life-wide experiences), there was a marked difference between the domains. Table 2 shows that none of the respondents acknowledged development at the highest level (5) in their extra-curricular activities; the domain receiving the greatest proportion of top scores was the curriculum, whilst the curriculum and co-curriculum were rated almost equally if scores 4 and 5 are combined.

Table 2 Domains of developing creativity



One explanation is that respondents simply fail to appreciate the degree of learning that takes place in informal contexts i.e. they take for granted much of the important learning they gain because the way it is gained is not through formal education. To test this hypothesis, let us consider some of the extra-curricular activities in which respondents are engaged. The list includes:

- studio and recording work
- teaching
- entering competitions
- joining ensembles, societies, clubs
- member of local and national orchestras
- volunteering e.g. at a festival in the USA; charity work e.g. for elderly
- ran own business/company; set up own group/team
- other performance training
- student representative in department
- part-time work involving social interaction and management
- participation in performances (theatre)
- practicing other forms of creative art
- keeping abreast of local and national tours
- getting to rehearsals on time
- psychology of learning – exercise and healthy living
- music arranging and transcription
- choreography for other companies
- mentoring

Performance in such roles clearly extends experience gained through the programme of study, so implicitly involves further learning. Do respondents really not recognise this, as their questionnaire responses would suggest? Perhaps their narrative comments can help us.

Informal learning through co- and extra-curricular activities

One student was completing her finals when interviewed. She talked enthusiastically about the variety of employment she has experienced, and, as her words show, she has identified some of the learning experiences, her own needs and values, but she does not analyse the learning derived from these.

Each year's been different. The first year I worked at HaHa's as a waitress and bar staff, but the hours working till 3 in the morning didn't work with my course even though it was only like a couple of nights and once in the week, it was too much for me because of the physical demands. And then I worked in Nando's waitressing for a bit, and I enjoyed that – they were really flexible with my hours and they fed me, so that was good (*laughs*). At home, I've done a lot of well, administrative roles since my placement, actually – worked for an IT department, like scheduling things for the council, things like that. And then this year, I haven't been able to do as much as it's my final year, but what I did do is teaching. So I taught a couple of times a week, so I'd get about £40 or something, which was enough to tick me over. I'm well into my overdraft now, but I'll just have to work this summer and it should be fine. I've lived out of my overdraft each year, then paid it back again. (A, Level 3 Dance)

The student is typical of many in having a rich bank of experience but under-estimating or choosing not to represent its learning value. Some, students though, are beginning to analyse their development, as this final year student reveals when recalling how he dealt with having to teach his mother's friend's sons:

The 8 year old, for instance, he was just very disobedient. And not being very authoritative, I couldn't really, and plus I'm not his parent, I couldn't shout at him or anything like that. And yet he was throwing things about, jumping across the sofas when I was trying to teach him. His parents forced him into it. And I guess the other thing that I really kind of learnt from teaching was how to try to inspire students, and how to, even if they don't initially have much enthusiasm, try to build enthusiasm for the. (...) for instance with that kid, I um, I was asking him what his favourite music is, if he has any favourite bands, sort of thing, and so, for instance, he said Gorillas, so I looked out some Gorillas tracks and tried to transcribe the notation by a few songs and tried to simplify them to the level of music I was teaching him, and then, yeah, trying to teach him his favourite songs. And that kind of worked a little bit. (O, Level 3 Music)

Speaking of her decision to stand as the student representative for her course on the staff-student committee, this first year student shows insight into her motivation and by implication the intrinsic rewards she enjoys, but again, she stops short of reflecting critically on what she has learnt from this experience:

I kind of saw it is a challenge. I hadn't gone in for anything like that at school but I'm on quite a small course, so I thought I'd like to have a go at it. I know everyone on my course and I get on with them, so it's quite easy to talk to them about what they want or whether it could be different. (...) I've found that *everyone* in the department is so friendly, it just feels like you can talk to them normally. It's not as if I'm going to talk to a lecturer, to a senior member of staff. ... a lot of people I've spoken to have said it's like the musical family, kind of thing, you definitely get that more in music where they like cross the years. (E, Level 1 Music)

The three examples illustrate the range and complexity of experiences undergraduates have in addition to their academic programme, but none of them elaborate the professional development that has ensued. We have suggested that this is because the learning is informal and hence under-valued by learners. The research statistics appear to confirm these differences in perception. Taking just four of the dimensions perceived to be of most significance to their professional development, Table 3 compares the proportion of respondents giving the top ratings for impact on their professional development in their programme of study and their life-wide experiences.

Table 3 Perceptions of professional development in and beyond the curriculum

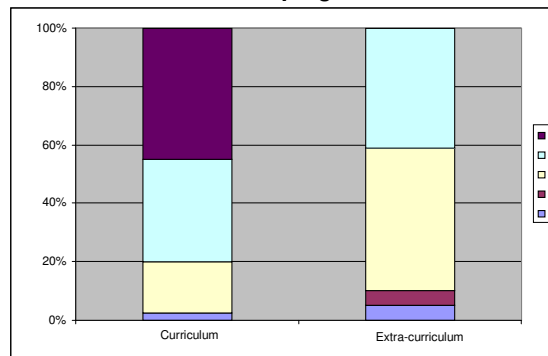
| Dimension of development | academic curriculum | extra-curricular |
|--------------------------|---------------------|------------------|
|--------------------------|---------------------|------------------|

| | | |
|--|-----|-----|
| Creativity | 90% | 55% |
| Team work/interaction with other employees | 90% | 45% |
| Active listening | 88% | 45% |
| Verbal communication | 85% | 45% |

Critical reflection

These figures show a significant difference in respondents' appreciation of learning in each domain. An explanation can be found in their evaluation of where they develop their ability reflect critically. Table 4 shows their scores for development through the curriculum and in their life-wide, extra-curricular, activities. Whilst 80% of respondents awarded the top two scores within the academic curriculum, none rated the extra-curriculum at level 5 and only 59% awarded it level 4. Once again, we recall the narrative evidence and suggest that the experience is there, but perhaps students need to have a framework within which to reflect on their informal learning and also university recognition that these ways of gaining learning are important and valid.

Table 4 Developing critical reflection



It seems that students may be failing to appreciate their professional learning acquired in informal contexts. If so, they are constraining their personal development. In order to do justice to their experiences, they must be able to express what they have learnt, how they learnt, how they felt about their experiences, and so on. In other words, they need to reflect critically. This will provide them with an internal model of reflection essential to adaptation to the fluctuations of modern employment. Beyond this ontological value lies a practical one: critical reflection enables us to articulate our experiences and values, thus is an important step towards preparing for graduate employment.

This was the implicit message conveyed by one respondent who, focussing on the domain of creativity, declared

I believe that creativity can be applied to a huge range of other contexts, you just have to find a way of transferring such creativity successfully, in a way you have to be creative in how you transfer such creativity for it to be successful. (R02)

The notion of creativity being synonymous with success recurs throughout the research, bringing us back to the very heart of the work: creative professionals are self-fulfilled, contribute to the success of industry and in turn national well-being. As educators, it is our responsibility to maximise opportunities for students to achieve these goals. Barnett (2010) reminds us that it is no longer sufficient to focus on the formal curriculum:

Now, in an age of liquid learning, students are as much as if not more in the world than they are in universities; and many of their extra-curricula experiences are yielding experiences of significant learning and personal development.

If the current system fails to teach them how to appreciate their extra-curricular development, we must look for ways to address this lacuna.

Life-wide learning

In April 2010, SCEPTRe hosted a conference which brought together academics, students, employers and HE administrators to share experience on the theme, 'Enabling a More Complete Education: Encouraging, Recognising and Valuing Life-Wide Learning in Higher Education.' <http://lifewidelearningconference.pbworks.com/> Some 22 universities presented the award schemes they have developed. Before examining our case study, let us remind ourselves of the background to today's broader vision of HE and graduate profiles.

Personal Development Planning and Progress Files

In 1997, the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (Dearing 1997) called for a Higher Education Progress File. This led to Personal Development Planning (PDP) aimed at student reflection and personal target setting (see e.g. Ward and Jackson (eds.) 2001). In another change, universities were to provide a transcript detailing the broader student achievement, in order to assist employers in differentiating between applicants with the same grade.

By 2007, Burgess was promoting a Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR), which would comprise:

1. Information identifying the holder of the qualification
2. Information identifying the qualification
3. Information on the level of qualification
4. Information on the contents and results gained
5. Information on the function of the qualification
6. Additional information
7. Certification
8. Information on the national HE System

It is component 6 which allows institutions to recognise learning achieved beyond the curriculum. Whilst they may be awarding some form of accreditation for this, most would agree that the primary value of such schemes lies in the process of reflection and career planning that they entail. However, Dearing had foreseen that profiling might render degree classifications obsolete:

We expect that employers will always want some form of brief indication about the achievement of students, especially when they are overwhelmed with applications. We do not, therefore, recommend the early withdrawal of the degree classification system. However, we do hope that as the Progress File approach is adopted nationally – including the development of transcripts – and its utility is confirmed, the present classification system may become increasingly redundant. (Dearing 1997, 9.52.1)

Parties recognise that the degree is no longer a guarantee to graduate employment, and this industrial recruiter, speaking at the SCEPTRe conference, expresses a common response to profiles:

Higher education is encouraging and recognising more experiential learning – giving students the opportunity to complement their academic studies with formally assessed extra curricular activities. This appeals to employers. Not only do we find more rounded individuals, capable of relating to a variety of people and situations, willing and able to multi task, to manage the scarce resource of time, we also find people who are appreciative of their opportunities. Furthermore we have a reliable assessment that validates references on the CV which all too often can be a generous stretch of the real experience. (Watkins 2010)

Surrey Lifewide Learning Award

Jackson (2010a and b) provides a detailed account of the rationale for, and structure of, the Surrey award and full information can be found on line at www.surreylifewideaward.net . Briefly, its aims are summarised as follows:

The Surrey Lifewide Learning Award encourages you to make your education more complete through the things you do on or off-campus in addition to your academic programme. ***It is this 'whole life' or 'lifewide' learning that enables you to become the person you want to be.*** (...)

Achievement of the award can be highlighted in your CV but more importantly, it is the new self-awareness of your own skills, qualities, values and dispositions that make you the unique person you are, that will ***enable you to present and market yourself in the competitive world of job seeking.***

The author's emphasis points to the dual ontological and professional benefits to be derived from the scheme.

At the time of writing, the award is being piloted and constantly refined, so elements may change. Currently, participants are given a framework of reflection and analysis comprising six types of activity, expected to take approximately 150 hours to complete. These are:

1. Self-evaluation questionnaires
2. Life maps which provide a visual way of representing personal learning environments
3. Personal Development plan
4. Reflective diary / portfolio
5. Reflective summary account
6. Updated CV

Students are likely already to be involved in extra- and co-curricular activities and it is estimated that completion of the award may require as little as 50 additional hours of work dedicated to thinking about their learning and development. Flexibility is built into the scheme, allowing individuals to work on line rather than attend sessions, and to compile either an electronic or a shoe-box, hard copy, portfolio. They work at their own pace and submit their enhanced CV, a 2000 word summary account of their personal and professional development and their portfolio of evidence (including any external certificates). The Lifewide Learning Award Board evaluates submissions and may make one of four decisions ranging from approval to unsuccessful, without opportunity for resubmission.

Case study for the Surrey Lifewide Learning Award

The subject

D was a 3rd year Music student, soon to take his finals, when he completed the creative professional questionnaire. He subsequently took part in the interview and film stages of the research, and features in a filmed workshop which demonstrates the outcomes of this research (Willis 2010c). He also volunteered to pilot the Lifewide Learning Award process. Although D's trial of the Award entails retrospective reflection, his enhanced ability to articulate his learning shows the potential for such a structured framework to enable students to assemble their views and express them more clearly.

Pre- lifewide award views

In the questionnaire

D was one of 40 respondents who completed the on-line questionnaire in March 2010, where his qualitative responses singled him out as someone who should proceed to the audio-interview stage. He had varied work experience and his written comments indicated an ability to reflect on his learning, as these remarks illustrate:

Q1, his career ambitions:

The aim is to work within the music industry either composing or producing music. Last summer (2009) I worked for two months at two small studios both run by self-employed professionals, and it seemed both a lucrative and varied environment to work in.

Q4, the qualities/dispositions/capabilities required for success in his field:

Self-discipline and self-motivation are the biggest two. The majority of music jobs are self-employed or within a small business - it appears to be the case that the people who do well within that environment are highly motivated and strive to achieve their goals.

Q11, the transferability of creativity:

Working with audio - editing, mixing, creatively using the software to interesting and novel ends - I believe this is all transferable as it usually implies a level of abstract thinking and problem-solving.

At audio interview

Given D's apparent insight into his values and learning, it was somewhat surprising to find his comments at interview to be ironically dismissive. For instance, when asked to define creativity, he scoffed 'if you create something, you're creative, aren't you – I don't know!' A very engaging young man, he seemed almost too relaxed, often criticising his shortcomings without showing any concern to address them:

I meet the deadlines but not in as timely a fashion as I'd like. I'm doing okay sort of marks, so can't be too bad. (...)

I seem to waste a lot of time quite easily. (*wasted?*) I think so, yeah. You know about Facebook and everything, but I don't just sit on Facebook, just the internet in general is incredibly good at wasting your time. Although I enjoy wasting it on the internet I don't think it's .. most of the time it's not very productive. That's just one of the things. Obviously, I watch quite a lot of TV programmes and play a lot of games and things, they also eat up a lot of time.

Contrary to his earlier astute understanding of creativity, he now claimed

For me personally, I can't really say that I am particularly creative outside of music – I'm quite a bad cook and I don't really like writing – I don't mind writing, but I wouldn't take pleasure in writing for the sake of writing.

And as regards his professional aspirations, he responded

I just kind of hope I land on my feet and I'll get something doing, I'll end up doing something I enjoy. And that's kind of all I really want to do – not, not hate my job, really.

There were, nevertheless, occasional glimpses of the perception he had revealed in the questionnaire, as when he discussed the difference between absolute and relative creativity:

I think creativity is quite, I dunno, I think it's quite a personal thing. And I think the meaning of it is very subjective depending on what you want it to mean. Because, I mean, as we've been learning, everything throughout our course, everything's appropriated or borrowed from areas. You've various influences which ultimately make up what you create. (*Nothing entirely novel!*) No, I think especially now, I think you'd be hard pressed to find and come up with a completely new concept that noone else has thought of, especially in the world of music. I mean, you can expand and you can vary quite a lot of ideas, but I think at this stage, coming up with something completely different is going to be quite a big, you know, quite a big challenge and something hard to do.

How, then, can we account for the differences in the quality of his replies? Perhaps the spontaneity and openness of an interview conversation made it difficult for D to rally his thoughts as cogently as he had when responding to closed questions and having time to reflect upon his answers before committing them in writing?

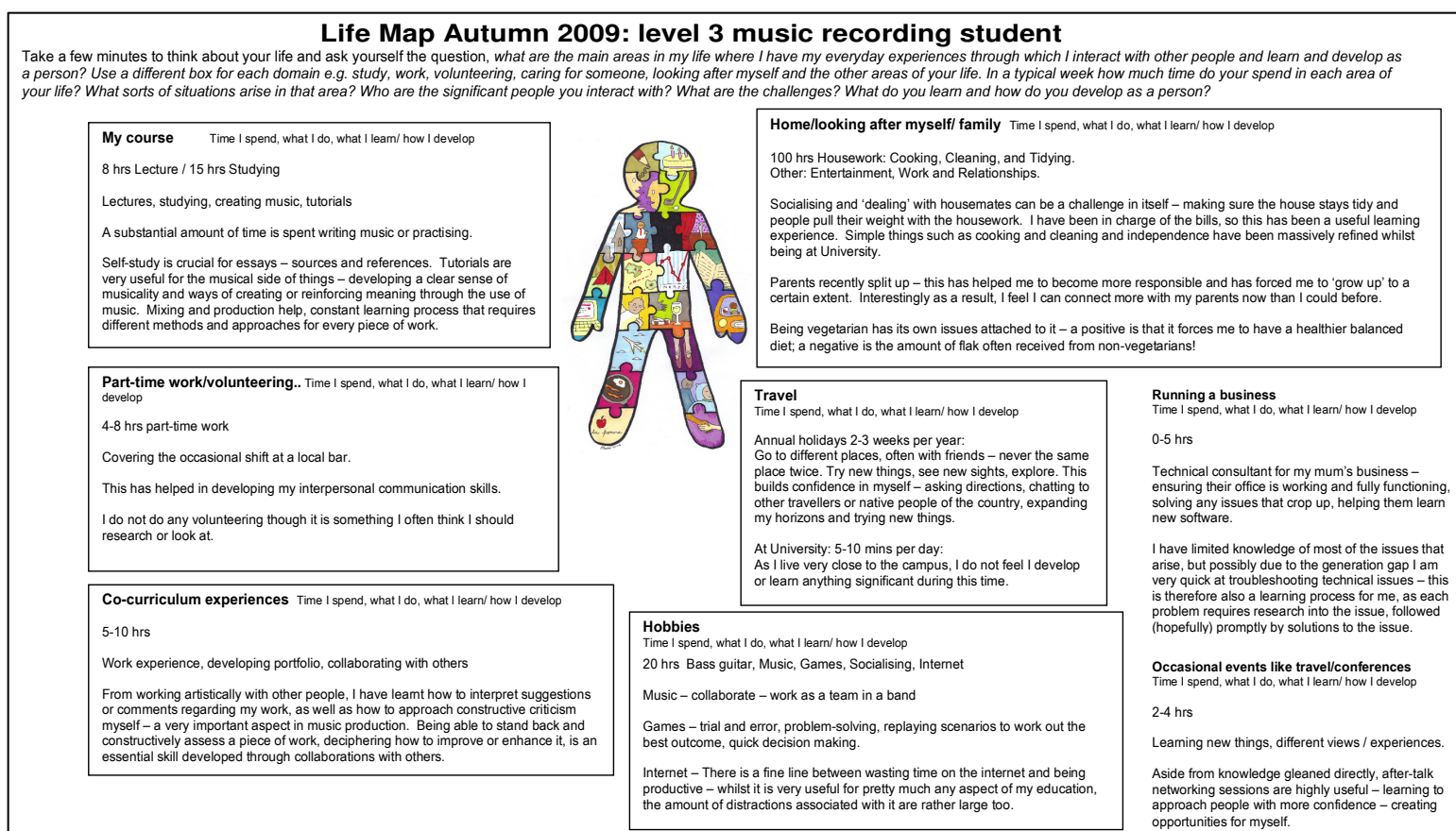
He was more comfortable and articulate when dealing with a familiar theme, hence a more confident reply there. But the reality is, if he wished to be successful at graduate selection, he would need to have a much more incisive approach to interview and be prepared to speak positively.

We would interview him a second time, this time on camera, but that would be after he had had the experience of reflecting critically within the framework of the Surrey Lifewide Learning Award. Let us now examine some of his products for that award.

Lifewide Learning Award

A first task for those participating in this scheme is to produce a map of their lifewide experiences at a particular stage of their undergraduate career. This involves reflecting upon all activities engaged in over a typical week, quantifying the time spent on each, what they learn, how well they interact with others and so on. D's map is shown in Figure 2, below.

Figure 2



Here, D reverts to his initial thoughtfulness. His notes are comprehensive and reveal his sense of humour without undermining the quality of his reflection.

Personal and professional development plan

Having made explicit the opportunities they have in their lives for learning, students translate their life maps into a personal and professional development plan in which they record experiences, rate their performance and identify actions, with timescales, for enhancing their capabilities. The seven dimensions of the plan relate to the aspects of professional development that we have seen, through the creative professional research, are of greatest significance. They are:

- Managing myself

- Being able to deal with and create situations, solve problems, work with challenge and take advantage of opportunity
- Being creative, resourceful and enterprising
- Being a good communicator
- Being able to work with and lead others
- Behaving ethically and with social responsibility
- Career Development

Table 5 shows D's responses to two of these capabilities.

Table 5 Extract from D's personal development plan

| Capability | Recent & current activities/experiences that help me develop and demonstrate these aspects of capability WHAT? WHEN? WHERE? | How would you rate your overall performance? <i>Lots of scope for improvement</i> <i>Okay – but could be improved</i> <i>Completely satisfactory – cant imagine how I can improve</i> | Additional activities I can undertake in the next 6 months to help me develop and demonstrate my capability WHAT? WHEN? WHERE? |
|--|---|--|---|
| Managing myself | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finding work experience in two London-based studios over summer. • Organising a trip around Europe for Easter. • Actively seeking collaborations with other musicians. • Prioritising coursework – setting myself early deadlines to ensure everything is completed to a high standard. • Ensuring I eat a balanced vegetarian diet. <p>Practising bass regularly – constructively finding and working on weak areas to improve my playing.</p> | <p>Okay.</p> <p>When I set my mind to something and have the focus and self-motivation to achieve my goals, the results are usually pretty good (for example attaining a 1st). However, building up this momentum and drive is not always an easy thing to do, and with more motivation I feel I could have created and participated in a much wider range of activities, which would have enhanced My learning.</p> | <p>The final semester of the year will also be the most challenging, with all of my final-year projects coming to an end.</p> <p>I believe that once my degree is over I will have the time, but also the pressure and motivation, to actively seek assignments and work for myself. Similarly, I have planned to engage in a wide range of sports and activities over summer, as I feel that I have somewhat neglected my physical fitness during my time at University.</p> |
| Being able to deal with and create situations, solve problems, work with challenge and take advantage of opportunity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are many examples from my work experience placements from the summer. • Working for my mum's business often involves creative thinking and problem solving. Attending seminars and conferences related to my course, initiating conversations with other attendees in an attempt to build up a network of contacts within the industry. <p>Applying for schemes such as the Life-wide Award hopefully demonstrates an out-going and constructive attitude to personal development.</p> | <p>Okay.</p> <p>Critically speaking, I would say that I have engaged in less situations that I have found through my own impetus, and instead have participated more in situations that 'found' me instead.</p> <p>However I would stipulate that this is simply because this is the way that university is tailored –the University hand-feeds us opportunities to an extent, so perhaps once I have finished my course I will be able to create my own opportunities more.</p> | <p>Similar to the above – finding work within the music industry is all based on networking and who you know, as well as being in the right place at the right time.</p> <p>Once my degree is over, I will have the time to begin to exploit some of the contacts I have built up during my course. Finding this sort of work requires some abstract thinking and innovation in order to get oneself noticed.</p> |

His answers reflect the honesty he displayed at interview, but without the self-denigration: for example, to counter his suggestion that opportunities had 'found' him, he hastens to explain that this is because of the way in which his course is structured, not through his own lack of diligence.

Reflective essay

As noted earlier, applicants for the Surrey award must produce a 2000 word reflective essay. The final paragraph of D's need only be compared with his initial interview to demonstrate the extent of his development as a result of reflecting critically within the award framework. He expresses his learning humbly but confidently, revealing an individual now capable of succeeding if interviewed by an employer:

There are many opportunities that I have missed or perhaps not even been aware of – if I had known then what I know now, I could have better organised my time to accommodate and arrange as many opportunities as possible. One of the issues of completing these tasks is that, due to the retrospective nature of the assignment, I

cannot build on my experiences or attempt to rectify any issues mentioned within this discussion. However, I feel that by being more aware of my situation and learning experiences, I will be able to take this knowledge forward into the future, helping me to attain the experience, learn the skills and essentially become who I want to be.

Interviews

To witness D speaking for himself after experiencing the Surrey Lifewide Learning Award Process, his video clips can be viewed at the following sites:

Work Experience: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VdWu2uD6R9c>

Creativity: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ilxjBX3FMr0>

Motivation/qualities: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ddlvd2WrSSM>; and
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h4mBtz48OV0>

Readers may not be surprised to learn that D was awarded a first class honours degree!

Conclusions

I began this discussion with the proposition that students do not fully appreciate or value the learning gained through their everyday lifewide experiences. This emerged clearly through the research into creative professionals (Willis 2010b), as did a discrepancy between students' perceived learning when rated in a questionnaire and expressed in written or verbal narrative. It is inferred that perceptions of capability developed through everyday life experiences can be changed if students are encouraged to engage in formal educational processes that raise self-awareness through the production of personal maps and narratives and the processing and reflection that attends such processes.

The research also revealed that intrinsic rewards are more important to the students concerned than are extrinsic rewards. If this reflects the norm, more attention should be given to recognition of achievement in terms of self-actualisation suggesting that motivation and commitment is being maintained focusing on Maslow's higher needs.

The Surrey Lifewide Learning Award (and similar awards elsewhere Ricketts 2010) provide a framework within which students are able to reflect critically on their co- and extra-curricular experiences. The dual benefits of these schemes address the two issues for this chapter: they help individuals to appreciate their learning acquired informally. This entails both recognising its value, and deriving from this greater feelings of self-worth. This in turns inspires confidence. From the cognitive perspective, through analysing and planning their next steps, students are better prepared for graduate recruitment processes.

The case study of D illustrates how the very rich experiences engaged in whilst an undergraduate can be undervalued and under represented. By engaging in the structured process of recording, analysing and evaluating his experiences, and seeing that through this activity the university was valuing his learning, he was able to recognise, articulate and value the full extent of his development, and plan for his future – not only professionally, but for his broader self-realisation. This is the outcome that is intended from the process that is supported by the award.

My hope is that this case study will encourage readers to value the breadth of experience, learning and dispositions that graduates bring to the world, and recognise the importance of schemes such as the Surrey Lifewide Award in externalising their achievements and potential.

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