



Ecology of Lifewide Learning & Personal Development

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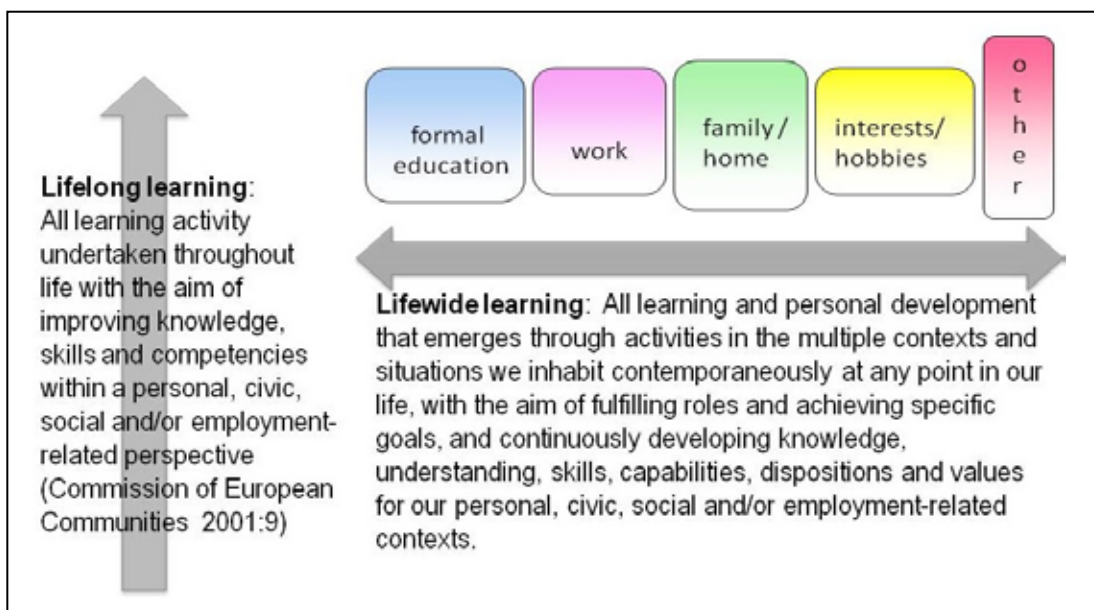
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Presentation and other resources at:

<http://www.normanjackson.co.uk/brighton.html>

Lifewide learning: Everyone who works in higher education is familiar with the concept of 'lifelongness', the journey we make through the sequential stages of our life beginning as a baby, progressing through childhood, teens to adulthood, middle and old age and eventually death. Viewed at this scale, for most people, formal education occupies only a relatively small part of their lifelong learning activity. The vast majority of their lifespan pre- and post school, college and university, is conducted in the domain of informal experiential learning and personal development. It is ironic that one of the most important things higher education can do to prepare adult learners for learning in the rest of their lives is to pay greater attention to the informal dimension of their learning lives while they are involved in formal study in higher education. By equipping them with tools that enhance their self-awareness, by encouraging attitudes that view life experiences as opportunities for learning and development and by valuing and recognising learning and development gained through life experience, universities and colleges can greatly enhance individuals' preparedness for learning through the rest of their life.

Figure 1 Concepts of lifelong and lifewide learning, personal development and achievement



'Lifewideness' adds value to 'lifelongness' by recognising that most people, no matter what their age or circumstances, simultaneously inhabit a number of different spaces – like work or education, running a home, being a member of a family and or caring for others, being involved in a club or society, travelling and taking holidays and looking after their own wellbeing mentally, physically and spiritually. We live out our lives in these different parallel spaces so the *timeframes* of our lifelong journey and the multiple *spaces and timeframes* of day to day existence across our lives intermingle and accumulate and who we are and who we are becoming are the consequences of this intermingling.

Inclusive concept of learning & development: The important characteristic of lifewide learning is that it embraces a comprehensive understanding and practice of learning, development, knowledge and knowing

and achievement. Lifewide learning includes all types of learning and personal development – learning and development in formal educational environments which is directed or self managed, and learning and development in informal (non-educational) situations. It includes learning and development that is driven by our interests and its intrinsic value, as well as our needs, and learning which just emerges during the course of our daily activity. To be a competent lifewide learner requires not only the ability to recognise and take advantage of opportunities and the will and capability to get involved, it also requires self-awareness derived from consciously thinking about and extracting meaning and significance from the experiences that populate our lives. It is the understanding of what it means to be a lifewide learner that individuals use in future imaginings, decision making and activity and it is this consciousness that lifewide education seeks to develop: what Rogers (2003) calls *learner conscious learning* within task or experience-oriented learning situations.

Lifewide education embraces and recognises these forms of learning, development and achievement. It holds the promise for a more complete and holistic form of education in which people combine and integrate their learning (both formal and informal), their personal or professional development and their achievements.

Europe's Future of Learning Foresight Study incorporated the concept of lifewide learning into its central learning paradigm (Redecker et al 2011). 'The overall vision [of learning] is that personalisation, collaboration and informalisation (informal learning) will be at the core of learning in the future. These terms are not new in education and training but they will become the central guiding principle for organising learning and teaching. **The central learning paradigm is thus characterised by lifelong and lifewide learning and shaped by the ubiquity of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT).**

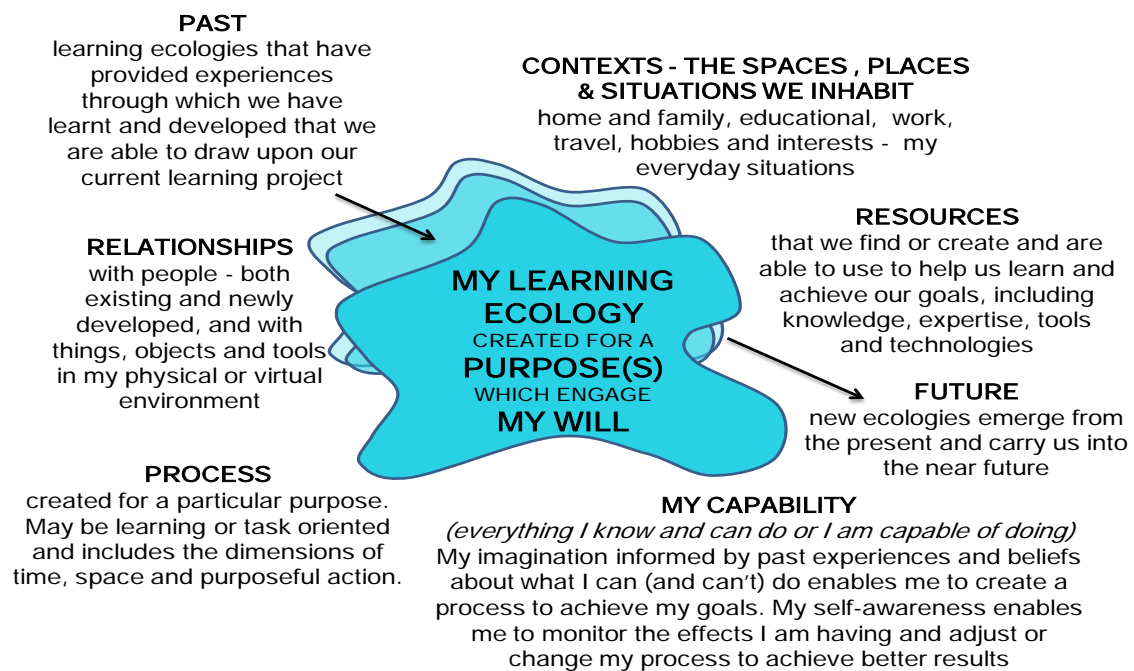
Ecologies for learning and development

An individual's learning ecology comprises their processes and contexts, relationships, networks, interactions, tools, technologies and activities that provides them with opportunities and resources for learning, development and achievement. Organised educational settings provide ecologies for learning into which learners fit themselves but outside these settings self-created learning ecologies are essential to the way we learn and develop in work, family and other social settings. The ability to create our own processes for learning and development is perhaps the most important capability we need for sustaining ourselves in a complex, ever changing and often disruptive world and for maintaining our sense of wellbeing.

The illustration is heuristic rather than hierarchic. It represents the integration and interdependence of *context, relationships, resources, (the most important being knowledge and tools to aid thinking and action), and an individuals will, knowledge and capability to create a learning process or learning ecology for a particular purpose.* Such actions may be directed explicitly to learning or mastering something but more likely they will be primarily concerned with performing a task, solving a problem, or making the most of a new opportunity. The ecology we create to develop something like a new educational course is the living vehicle for our creativity. The evolving ecology is itself an act of creation which can be defined using Rogers (1961) concept of creativity. It is our self-determined and self-expressed process for achieving tangible proximal goals, within which we create our novel relational products [*including our own development*] grown out of our individual uniqueness which has been shaped by our past histories and imaginings of a different and better future, and the materials, events, people and circumstances of our life. We can give meaning and substance to this abstract idea and representation by creating a narrative of a

developmental process (what we did and why we did it, when and where and how we did it and who we did it with).

Figure 2 Components of individual's learning ecologies (Jackson 2013a & b and 2014)



Our learning ecologies are the means by which we connect and integrate our past and current experiences and learning. They embrace all the physical and virtual places and spaces we inhabit and the learning and the meaning we gain from the contexts and situations that constitute our lives. Our learning ecologies are the product of both imagination and reason and they are the vehicle for our creative thoughts and actions. They are one of our most important sites for creativity and they enable us to develop ourselves personally and professionally in all aspects of our lives.

Eco & Ecosocial systems

The fundamental paradox of ecosystems is that “change is essential, and yet stability is necessary....novelty and change coexist in a context of persistence and stability” (Holling 2000, 5). The ecological metaphor argues (Holling 1995; Gunderson and Holling 2002) that nature is a resilient entity that is constantly evolving going through periods of rapid and profound change, followed by readjustment or collapse, and reorganisation for renewal. Resilience refers to the ability of individuals, institutions, and natural systems to absorb perturbations (i.e. retain key controls on functions and structure even though composition may change) and adapt to change (i.e. self-organise, build and increase capacity for learning and adaptation). In the case of humans, this includes the capacity to anticipate and plan for change and personal development.

Jay Lemke (2000) describes the important features of ecosocial systems:

- the different contexts and communities in which individuals co-exist in relative stability and inter-dependence
- a set of overlapping but distinct spaces/places each with its own rules, affordances and constraints
- a self-regulating system that consumes, recycles [and creates] resources

- an organisation in which change occurs over time, modifying individuals and inter-relations, without destroying the overall cohesion and balance – ie the ecosystem is both adaptive and resilient to change

The significant difference between human and other ecosystems lies in our ability to learn and develop ourselves, and our ability to develop the world around us. Our resilience and the resilience of the habitats we inhabit depends on our ability to learn, adapt and innovate. Some of the words and ideas that might be associated with the ecological metaphor in the context of learning, personal and professional development include: Organic, natural, growing, developing, creating, becoming, flourishing, fertilising, nurturing, connecting, reacting-interacting, adapting, evolving, emerging, collaborating, co-operating, resilience, persistence, environment - resources, processes, energy, culture, forces and flows.

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LINKS TO FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION ABOUT LIFEWIDE LEARNING & EDUCATION

- <http://lifewideeducation.co.uk/>
<http://www.lifewidemagazine.co.uk/>
<http://www.lifewideebook.co.uk/>
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