

CHAPTER C2

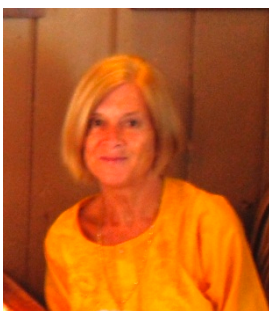
Lifewide Learning Survey of Everyday Learning and Development

Jenny Willis

SUMMARY

This chapter examines the data collected through a small-scale qualitative investigation of the everyday activities engaged in by lifewide learners in an 'average' week. For a single week in November 2012, respondents kept a log three times a day in which they recorded their activities, their reasons for undertaking them, their resultant learning and what they found meaningful. Central to the study was the question of self-determination: our freedom to choose what we do and how we do it, and hence who we are and can become. Data are analysed against the theoretical conceptualisations of Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers, and in the context of neuroscientific evidence that our actions may be less self-determined than we might like to think. We conclude that this group of lifewide learners provides compelling evidence of holistic self-actualisation, which warrants further investigation in order to validate emergent findings and to compare lifewide learners with a control group.

BIOGRAPHY



Jenny Willis' career began as a linguist teaching in Inner London comprehensive schools during the 1970s and 80s, a period of continuous radical change for education. She was Deputy Head of a comprehensive school as the 1988 Education Reform Act brought further important changes for the curriculum and management of schools. She later taught for the Open University, pioneering distance and on-line learning pedagogy for languages. She then undertook a PhD in socio-linguistics at the University of Surrey, where she also worked part-time as an Assistant Registrar. This enabled her to pursue research into professional training, which led to her gaining a Fellowship at the Surrey Centre for Excellence in Professional Training and Education (SCEPTrE). In 2009 she became an independent consultant and researcher. She continues this work as a member of the core team of the Lifewide Education Community. Jenny is a published author, editor of Lifewide Magazine and a Fellow of the Royal Society for the Arts.

INTRODUCTION

Lifewide Education is committed to developing deeper understandings of how we learn, develop and achieve through our daily lives and how these processes relate to the person we are and want to become - our evolving identities. Questions of why? what? and how? we do the things we do and how new learning needs emerge and are addressed (Cowan 2013) by shaping the things we do are important. As are the personal ecologies we develop to enable us to learn, develop and achieve in the many contexts that form our lives. This rich and evolving detail is often overlooked when we think and talk about learning.

One way of gaining a deeper understanding is to record our daily life and draw out of this record what is significant and meaningful to us in the context of learning, developing and achieving. Two members of the Lifewide Education Community (LEC) team began to examine this phenomenon by completing a 'day in the life' diary recording activity, the outcomes of activity and what was meaningful, every hour. The results were sufficiently interesting to warrant extending the approach over a week. Members of the LEC and other interested parties were invited by email and through the community website to take part (Box 1). Those who agreed to participate were asked to keep a log of their activities three times a day, for seven consecutive days, explaining what they did and why, and what they learnt and found meaningful from their experiences. To assist them, a simple *pro forma* was provided (Appendix 1).

Box 1 Email invitation to participate in the survey

SURVEY OF EVERYDAY LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

Lifewide Education is conducting a survey of the sorts of things people learn every day. For one week Nov 19th-25th we are inviting members of the community to keep a log of their activities and what they 'learnt' from them. Ideally these will be 3 x 5-10min entries each day corresponding to morning, afternoon and evening periods. Each entry will address the questions (a) what have I done? and (b) what have I learnt from this activity? All responses will be collated to see what comes out, and the results will be written up as an article in Lifewide Magazine.

All responses will be treated confidentially.

This chapter describes the results of the exercise which was conducted during the week of 19-25 November 2012. It should be viewed as a small scale pilot study aimed at developing a simple tool and methodology to record and make sense of personal learning with some tentative interpretations based on the small number of responses received. As such it provides a stepping stone to more substantive surveys.



SURVEY

Respondents

A total of seven returns was received, clearly skewed towards those who had time for the exercise, being retired or semi-retired. One of these returns was completed two weeks after the others, due to illness, but was accepted as the respondent's weekly routine follows a regular pattern so would have been similar had it been made at the same time as the other logs. Although participants were asked to keep their log for a week, the duration of those submitted varied from four to seven days.

Timing of the exercise would never be ideal for everyone: David entitled his log 'The not particularly memorable week of 19-25 November', whilst Peter acknowledged that his attendance of a residential conference that week impacted on his activities. Sally had just undergone a surgical operation and regretted the 'Loss of my independence and [being] unable to follow normal routine'. Perhaps this atypicality is, itself, indicative of the variability of most of our lives, especially those who are formally retired but continue to be actively engaged in voluntary enterprises.

There was a balance of three female to four male respondents. Their ages ranged from mid-teens to an octogenarian, and occupations included one student, one employee and five people who are retired and working in a self-employed or voluntary capacity. For the latter reason, findings cannot be assumed to be normative.

Bias is also possible insofar as several respondents were aware of the sort of data sought, and may, unwittingly, have written logs to meet this brief. Peter and Sally were particularly susceptible to this.

Anonymity was promised to respondents so, while the identity of some will be transparent, all have been given a pseudonym in the following account.

Format of individual logs

Although a *pro forma* was offered in order to facilitate completion of the log (and to aid analysis!), some respondents chose not to use it. One who preferred a narrative account attributed this format to his unfamiliarity with such an exercise:

This exercise, to record and analyse my activities for a week, is very foreign to me. I tend just to get on with things and not be introspective about why. (David)

In fact, David was highly analytical. He began by differentiating between three types of activity:

- *Things I must do; eg having an income, paying bills, filing my tax return, shop for food*
- *Things I ought to do; e. housework, gardening, walk the dog*
- *Things I want to do; eg volunteer work, keep in reasonable shape, keep my boat in reasonable shape*



After an introductory page in which he set out his usual activities, he logged his daily actions, initially briefly, but, as he became more comfortable, at greater length and in more depth. Peter did use the *pro forma*, but concluded his log with a six-page analysis of how he had divided his time between work, family, 'down time', travel and chores. He ended with a list of learning outcomes and discussion of the scope of such logs.

Rab has extensive experience of critical reflection and supporting others in this process. He, too, opted for a straight narrative account, but he adhered strictly to the daily log of activities followed by analysis of what he had learnt. Still, he felt moved to apologise that:

I don't seem able to keep a log of this type without writing in "stream of consciousness" style. (Rab)

Always the motivator, he concluded that the exercise had enabled him to confirm aspects of his learning and work habits, thereby reassuring the researchers of the value of the exercise.

Dawn was unable to keep the log for a week, but it was noticeable that as the days progressed, her entries increased in length and she became more confiding. Having recounted the administrative tasks she was required to do as part of her work as an NHS doctor, she vented her frustration:

Complete waste of time and energy that I could have spent actually learning something new or doing something pleasurable. (Dawn)

Sally recognised that she, too, had altered her approach to the log as the week passed by. On the penultimate day, she observed:

I also think the way in which I have used the log has changed as the week has progressed: now it is more like a diary in which I am expressing more intimate thoughts, as opposed to purely analytical examination of what I did. (Sally)

Even the youngest respondent showed evidence of discovering something about herself during the period of the log. No-one suggested that the exercise had been pointless. Peter summarised what more than one may have been feeling:

So was it worth it? I think it's helped me appreciate the value of this sort of tool and reflective process to helping people appreciate their learning and development in their everyday lives. I now think that the process and outcomes could be usefully integrated into the Lifewide Development Award. (Peter)

Individual accounts

An exercise such as this gives us a precious and privileged insight into the world of diverse people. Each story is valuable in its own right and it is impossible to do justice to these logs in a short chapter. Nevertheless, before we extract some common themes and draw conclusions on the nature of learning we derive from everyday living, let us take a brief look at the seven respondents' experiences.



Dawn

Dawn is the only respondent working as an employee (for the NHS), which role she balances with related consultancy work and her domestic life. She reveals nothing about her personal circumstances other than in this clue, when she meets with a builder to plan work:

Hoping you are making the right decision especially when there is no one else to discuss it with.

This absence of an adult partner with whom to share and who might offer affective support is potentially important.

Dawn spends a significant amount of time on paperwork, which we have already seen is a source of irritation to her. She refers to completing 'necessary' tasks, 'breaking the back' of work, and one senses her plodding dutifully through the administrative jobs that take her away from other aspects of being a doctor. On the final day of her log, she confides that:

Governments tend to want to standardise things and tidy them into neat pigeonholes but life doesn't work that way.

In this context, she criticises the electronic GP appraisal system for the way in which technology can waste time. However, she reveals a positive use of technology as it allows her to participate in a video conference, which teaches her that:

Access to healthcare is completely different in remote and rural places and solutions that were working in Glasgow and Edinburgh are completely unsuitable for Highlands and islands.

Other work-related activities include meeting with her accountant and dealing with tax. When Dawn reflects on her clinical activities, her emotions emerge: after surgery and visits to elderly patients she records:

*Reflections of getting old and the sadness of losing cognitive function.
Intimations of the future and mortality*

This sensitive dimension of her personality is present in most of what we might term her family and down time activities. She accepts a late invitation to supper and reflects:

The value of friendship is immeasurable and irreplaceable

Work and tasks can and should be put off when something better is on offer but they are still there the following day!

Similarly, she makes time to have coffee with a neighbour since it is:

Good to have good neighbours and important to keep in touch



In a rare moment of relaxation, she watched a television programme and comments wistfully on:

How people's aspirations and dreams can sometimes work and sometimes not.

What, in short, does Dawn's log reveal? Her life is consumed by work, some of which she enjoys, other aspects of which frustrate her. She greatly values human interaction and is willing to prioritise this over apparently more pressing tasks, but we sense a gap in her social contacts. Her relationship to technology is ambivalent, but it clearly features strongly in her life.

Mina

Mina, aged 14, is our youngest respondent, though she reveals a maturity beyond her years. She attends school and lives at home as a member of a complex, extended family. The activities she recorded largely related to her academic work, her relationships with friends and family, and some individual 'down time'.

Mina analyses her response to different school subjects, revealing her enjoyment of a challenge:

I did find maths interesting if difficult and also chemistry as these are subjects I want to continue.

In contrast to this, she shows some resistance to losing control over what she studies, commenting:

I didn't enjoy Spanish or English much as I was made to do these subjects.

A visit to the library proved enlightening, but Mina shows maturity in resisting the temptation to be side-tracked into doing something she might prefer to that which is necessary:

I found out about books that sound good and disturbing at the same time. Found a book I want to take out of the library but need to wait for the right time otherwise it will distract me

Her self-discipline also enables her to distinguish between enjoyment and development, as she comments here:

Really enjoyed history because I like the stories but didn't learn anything new.

Relationships are important to Mina. Each morning, she records having breakfast, which is a social occasion, as when her father tests her on her revision. Lunchtimes are spent with school friends and dinner is a family activity followed by either shared experiences such as watching a video or on-line shopping, or by independent down time with a book or her iplayer.

One evening's discussion over dinner leaves Mina feeling 'upset and disappointed' when she is forbidden from visiting her undergraduate sister for the weekend as she needs to concentrate on revision for tests. On the Sunday evening, she admits 'staying at home to revise has paid off.'



Mina's log speaks of her enjoyment of food and the physicality of horse-riding, consistent with her age and stage of development around Maslow's d-needs. There are glimpses of her progressing to the higher level needs, though, as when she wonders about a TV programme:

Liked the Young Apprentice - want to find out if any come from deprived background.

Rab

Our oldest respondent is Rab, a 'retired' academic now in his early 80s. An experienced critical analyst, his log is a precious gift to researchers. He did not use the *pro forma*, preferring instead to address each of the research questions through a daily narrative. He apologises for this, explaining:

I don't seem able to keep a log of this type without writing in "stream of consciousness" style. I hope it is of some use

The record is rich and manages to respond to the questions without seeming to require Rab to deviate from his normal activities and reflective habits.

Rab's age is paradoxically both significant and irrelevant to how he spends his time. On the one hand, his body is rebelling against his tendency to push it as if he were still a young man, debarring him from some activities which he might have chosen to do. Hence he begins his log after the original date, observing:

Too badly bruised from my fall down the stairs a week ago at X Station to go to church.

And later records another fall, with his characteristic jocularly:

Fell downstairs on way to get breakfast. Good news is that bruising is on the other side, and there is no bleeding. Bad news is that I got away to a slow and dismal start as the next paper for review is competing to be the worst I've ever had.

Unsurprisingly, his entry for the following morning reads 'Slept in; got up cautiously.' Yet, despite his age and retired status, Rab's days are full to bursting with academic support as a critical friend, reviewing papers, and supervising research students. He is constantly analysing what he learns from his interactions, seeking to pass on his discoveries, as in these examples:

*Involvement for a critical friend is to have sound ideas and content to work on, and simply assist the writer to show better what they know and think, in a form which pleases them but which does not lessen them, because it's **their** content, just re-ordered and linked. In such circumstances, what both of the students seemed to need was reassurance, in a situation where they judged their draft to be much poorer than it was, and gave themselves little credit for what in it was worthwhile.*

I suppose I had an empathic glimpse into the mindset of a young student who has been procrastinating for weeks, eventually found herself way behind schedule, saw disaster facing her, and willingly sought and accepted first facilitative help, and finally a bit of direction.



Did a bit of thinking about the difference between modesty and naivety on the part of ('young') people.

Meanwhile, Rab ensures that he shares household chores with his wife, cleaning downstairs in preparation for her group meeting, writing Christmas cards, shopping, visiting an elderly lady in need of pastoral care. For relationships are important to him, so he makes time to keep in touch with people and is proud of his family's achievements.

Technology is omnipresent in Rab's daily life, but he, like other respondents, has an ambivalent relationship with it. Email brings a constant workload: 'the e-mails have been piling up; some are on my conscience' but ever the problem-solver, he sets about dealing with them: 'it cheers me up and encourages my motivation to prune what can be deleted.' Without such technology, he realises he would not be able to continue his academic work so easily - he is dealing simultaneously with scholars around the world.

When he goes to buy a new phone, he is seduced by the new gadgetry, but realises:

I'd get frustrated with my ineptness, as I do on my Mac. So we went into another shop and got something more sensible.

The most vivid example of Rab's struggle with technology is when he is unable to log into a system to upload a paper. He tries repeatedly with his Mac and PC, failing and regretting 'Two wasted hours! Precious hours.'

We catch a brief glimpse of some 'down time' when Rab admits 'Watched TV a little - and shouldn't feel guilty about that.' But he clearly does feel guilty, and his life appears to revolve around finding meaning and sharing it. He is relentless, and highly self-critical:

My whole forward planning has got very untidy since I fully retired. And now that I am on a contract for doctorate supervision, I need to get myself together.

David

As we noted above, David expressed discomfort with the reflective process, but approached the log in a highly structured manner, identifying the things he must do, which are essentially survival activities (eg shopping for food, paying bills); the things he ought to do, which are maintenance-related (eg housework, walking the dog) and those he wants to do, which include voluntary work, physical fitness and his love of sailing.

He recognises that his priorities have changed since he was an 'employed wage slave' working to support a family and thus tolerating unstimulating activities. Later, he reflects, self-employment

demands self-motivation. It was self-evident to me that I would be more motivated by doing things that I would enjoy and be reasonably competent at

and he therefore began to undertake more voluntary work. Now that his youngest child has gone to university, he is able to engage more in what he chooses to do:

Family responsibilities will always be a priority, but the actual demands (currently) take less time. Voluntary work now plays a significant role in my schedule, and I'm looking



at further extending this activity. My responsibilities have become less determined by others and more determined by myself - an attractive proposition which I'm still getting to terms with.

When he moves on to logging his activities, it is clear that David devotes a great deal of time to helping others in a variety of voluntary roles, from Remap, a charity which supports disabled people, to acting as a handyman for the National Trust. In each of these activities, he is able to use practical and creative skills, whilst helping others. Likewise, he uses his intellectual skills to contribute to Lifewide Education's e-book.

He reveals himself to be a lifewide learner in his 'down time' activities: he is learning to play the piano, and recently, stimulated by an archaeological news item, he put himself through a course of history:

*I found this item rather intriguing, and it made me recognise just how little I knew about the kings and queens of England. In an attempt to improve upon this situation, my summer holiday reading included a potted history of the English monarchy - more than 1200 years of good and evil in roughly equal measures. (...)
A result of this reading was a determination to visit Winchester, Hampton Court and Westminster Abbey - key sites in the history of the monarchy*

Reminiscent of Rab, he is almost guilty for taking time off for such activities, describing this as 'a self-indulgent day'. Conversely, he is quite happy to leave his tax return for another day! Relationships feature strongly in David's log: he attends a weekly Royal National Lifeboat Institution pub quiz; he has meals with family and friends. Belying the cynicism he often claims, David recalls the recent death of an old friend and neighbour, whose widow he and his wife helped by making their holiday home available to her. He concludes:

We were delighted to be able to provide some help to her at this difficult time.

He freely acknowledges the significance of social contact: 'place is important, company is more so.'

David uses humour to conceal his discomfort. This is most evident in the 'lessons learnt' that he extrapolates from each log, as for instance, when he says of entertaining his friends to dinner, 'plan your work and then work your plan.' He is philosophical about his less-than-perfect abilities, saying of his badminton playing 'accept the fact that you're not as good as the others and enjoy.' This is perhaps reflective of his stage of life, when he does not need to be competitive in order to be self-fulfilled. As he comments in the log:

I don't think I learned a lot of lessons today. It's OK not to!

Lance

Lance has rejected retirement in favour of self-employment, largely related to coaching and mentoring educational managers. He comments: 'I love coaching. It often feels as if I've been coached.' This captures both his main activity and his critical reflection on all that he does. He acknowledges his good fortune in being able to choose much of what he does:



I have become used to determining how I spend most of my day. I don't have total freedom, of course, because most of the paid work I do has to conform to responsible standards of consistency and structure. But I don't think I could conform to anyone else's demands.

Like other respondents, he is aided by technology. After one webinar session on new forms of assessment, he reflects:

Just confirmed that I'm still learning, and that the power of the group is considerable when it comes to gathering both consensus and breadth of knowledge from experience. There's also something here about reassurance and alignment, and self-regulation and moderation of judgements. And the changes of viewpoint I'd had had come to be shared generally, which was nice...

But also in common with other respondents, Lance is frustrated when technology fails:

Found that IT had betrayed me (and others) yet again, with important online documents having vanished

though he is keen to develop new skills and persistent:

Learned heuristically how to upload an image from Whatsapp and send it in an attachment by email.

Reminiscent of Rab, Lance wants to pass on his learning, and has a new idea:

Am formulating a little concept of gathering "jewels of human interaction".

Much of his time is spent on scholarly activities, be it writing a chapter for the e-book, keeping abreast of educational news in the Times Educational Supplement or other Lifewide Education inputs. Some activities entail travel, which time he uses purposefully, others are conducted from home. Other tasks relate to management of his affairs, not least his tax, which is a source of considerable irritation: 'Dealt with some outrageous errors by HMRC - or rather tried to.'

Like Sally, Lance struggles with assembling a piece of furniture. It is another opportunity for him to learn about himself:

The combination of mental application to new challenges and the physicality of the work was absorbing

He makes time to look after his health, doing 'routine exercises for mobility and basic fitness' and enjoying a (thoughtful) jog:

Reconfirmed that I feel better for a jog, and worse without one, which will be the case for the coming couple of days...

Interacting with people in both professional and personal relationships is important to Lance.



He 'does' lunch with his father, listens empathetically to his wife's account of her day and plans a Christmas quiz for his extended family.

Lance provides his own summary of his ideal self and daily activities. As we have seen in this brief insight, he would require a mixture of interpersonal contact, intellectual and creative stimulation:

Reconfirmed that for a really rewarding day, ideally, there would be some purposeful interaction with other humans, preferably within an agreeable atmosphere, and that I would complete some concrete physical and cognitive or creative tasks.

Sally

Although Sally claims that her recent surgery has led to 'loss of my independence and unable to follow normal routine,' one senses that her main activities (academic work and interpersonal relationships) are largely unchanged and it is only those activities that are 'necessities rather than positive choices' (household chores) that have been affected.

She, too, is retired but her life revolves around academic work, mostly related to Lifewide Learning, the rest devoted to mental illness. None of this is paid work, yet she is constantly under self-imposed pressure to meet the demands of others and her own expectations. Indeed, towards the end of her log she notes:

Certain themes seem to recur: guilt and obligation are more important than I had realised.

Like Rab and Lance, she relies heavily on technology and bemoans her

Frustration of technology when it doesn't work - I kept losing what I had created

and she was 'irritated that technology seems to have failed' when she sent an important email from overseas. She, too, has an ambivalent relationship with technology, enjoying learning to use new devices despite frustration. Success motivates her, but creativity lies at the root of her enjoyment as she acknowledges:

I enjoy the artistic challenge of creating something visually attractive as well as the intellectual level of input

before going on to imply her guilt at indulging her pleasure:

As always, creativity brings me self-fulfilment so I enjoy the hours and challenges they posed. I recognise my tendency towards obsession, as I want to go on.

When, like Lance, she succeeds in assembling a piece of furniture, she nuances her success:

I gained a sense of achievement in working out how to do the job, but I know it could have been done better. I feel inept.



She hereby reveals discrepancy between her actual and ideal selves.

The other priority for Sally is her social interaction. She admits:

I have learnt over the years the importance of supporting close members of one's family.

Her evenings are taken up with daily phone calls to her elderly, widowed father, which she harshly attributes to being 'aware of my responsibility and his age' but which are patently more important than she allows, and with her husband, who commutes weekly to his place of work. At a time of family bereavement, she regrets the distance between them, and their reliance on phone calls:

Another reminder of the limitations of technology and the importance of physical human contact.

In fact, much of Sally's time is spent helping others, both practically (eg teaching a retired friend to use a computer; designing her husband's new website) and emotionally (eg through making an album for her bereaved niece whose father has just died). Once more, though, she questions her own motives:

Was I coping with my own grief through this practical exercise? I would like to hope my objectives were more altruistic.

Whereas other respondents' relationships are through close membership of extended families, Sally's involve more distant friendships, such as those she has developed with familiar charity shop volunteers. She observes:

These are strange relationships, reminding me of how bonds are formed when you find yourself in a common situation, such as being in hospital. They bring out the best in human nature.

Like Dawn, Sally is apparently often alone. We may attribute her self-denigration to limited opportunities for her to derive self-esteem or receive esteem from others, important needs in Maslow's model of self-actualisation.

Peter

Peter's log runs to more than 7000 words of detailed reflection and analysis. He was clearly treating the process as a way of learning about it. It is impossible to examine these adequately here without giving him disproportionate space. Instead, we start from his own summary of the week, and relate it to the log alone, excluding here his conclusions on the potential use of such a tool for other purposes.

According to his calculations, Peter is active 16 hours a day and during the log week, spends in excess of 50 hours on work - related activity, despite being 'retired' and most activities being voluntary, social enterprises. He explains that in addition to his regular activities he attended a conference and therefore,



This week I spent considerably more time on LWE work. Also includes six hours for this exercise.

Reminiscent of other respondents, he is able to select his activities, always seeking achievement:

I'm usually happy doing the work I chose to do and always seem to find something fresh. Much of what I do is aimed at achieving something I think is worth achieving

He enjoys recognition by others, recounting:

I asked people to say why they'd chosen this workshop and perhaps six people said they'd heard me speak once before and wanted to hear me again... I was quite touched...

and resents wasting time:

I felt I had wasted an hour arguing and, reflecting on my breakfast conversation I didn't feel very happy about it so by 10.00 my mood not positive at all.

The incident he refers to related to technology, his knowledge of which he, too, enjoys developing whilst he is frustrated by its obstacles. As these comments reveal, Peter is comfortable discussing his emotions and uses the log in a similar way to Sally.

After work-related activities, Peter devotes most time (24 hours) to his family. This includes sharing meals, discussing and helping solve personal problems, providing practical support for his daughter and grandchildren, the latter bringing him much pleasure in return.

Relationships with others are also important to him. He experiences nostalgia for his working life, saying of the conference he attends:

the very act of participating in this event gave my life meaning and the relationships I renewed or began will be very important

and acknowledging a rare regret for his loss:

This was fundamentally about renewing relationships that had once been very significant and reminding myself of what I had been missing by not interacting with these people.

Peter's 'down time' stretches to 18 hours. Some activities are solitary occupations such as reading or listening to music, others social, such as watching a DVD or TV with members of his family, always 'for pleasure and education'. Like Lance, he is stimulated by programmes that enhance his knowledge:

I learn specific things about the site which I don't remember, but more generally I learn about our heritage and I enjoy and find it fascinating to see how they find and make sense of things and put the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle together.



Chores are 'horrible but necessary' and Peter admits to being less competent than his wife, but he finds strategies for distracting himself whilst carrying them out, and we sense his satisfaction in completing a job: 'I am thoroughly cheesed off by this stage but the job is almost done.'

INTERPRETATIONS

Any interpretations drawn from such a small and self-selected sample must be tentative, especially when most of the respondents are intrinsically interested and involved in lifewide education. Accepting these biases, and for the purpose of demonstrating the technique, we might consider the processes and outcomes of everyday activity using a variety of theoretical lenses. In this essay I will focus on the idea of self-actualisation.

What is self-actualisation?

Dictionary definitions of self-actualisation refer to establishing oneself as a *whole* person, and developing one's abilities to the *maximum*. This is clearly consonant with lifewide learning principles. The term itself was coined by an organismic theorist, Kurt Goldstein, in his 1939 work, *The Organism: A Holistic Approach to Biology Derived from Pathological Data in Man*. Implicit in the concept of holism is a linking of body and mind, issues which have preoccupied philosophers throughout the millennia, from Plato, through René Descartes in the 17th century to the late 19th century psychanalysts (Freud, Jung, Adler etc), on into 20th century behavioural psychology (eg John Watson, BF Skinner) and eventually by the 1950s, humanistic approaches to individual potential, growth and self-actualisation. Two theorists are of particular relevance to this study of everyday life, and call for brief introduction: Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers.

Abraham Maslow

Abraham Maslow had been instrumental through his 1943 paper 'A Theory of Human Motivation' and subsequent book, 'Motivation and Personality' (1954), in defining self-actualisation. He wrote:

What a man can be, he must be. This need we may call self-actualization...It refers to the desire for self-fulfillment, namely, to the tendency for him to become actualized in what he is potentially. This tendency might be phrased as the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming.

(Maslow, 1954)

He brings us back to the notion of maximising our individual potential and our ongoing quest to become ourselves, based on a clear assumption of personal choice and individual responsibility. The question of free will is important, and remains contentious, drawing as it does on our deepest values. It is an issue we consider in our interpretation of respondents' logs.

Maslow's theory of a hierarchy of universal human needs is usually envisaged as shown in Figure 1, though this was not his depiction. The model identifies four fundamental 'deficiency



(d-) needs' (physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem by others) that must be met before we can be motivated to aspire to the higher needs (self-esteem, self-actualisation) as we move up the pyramid.

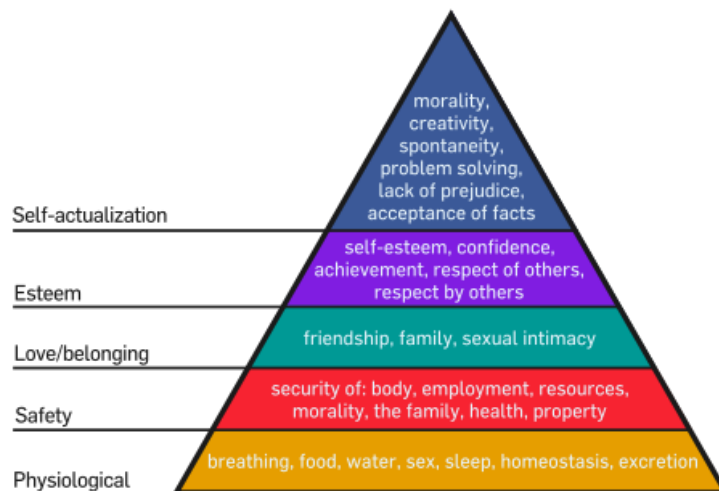


Figure 1 Hierarchy of Maslow's universal human needs

Needs co-exist but one may dominate at any stage. We can illustrate this by a true story. In 1972, a plane crashed in the Andes. The 45 passengers were students and young rugby players, who would have been well advanced into their needs for esteem and self-actualisation. Tragically, 12 died in the crash, and more gradually perished in the -30°C temperatures. Survivors' immediate needs were thrown into the yellow level: how to breathe in a high altitude, keep warm, eat and drink. So extreme were the circumstances that survival demanded cannibalising their dead companions. The considerations in the blue and purple zones eg morality and respect of others, were overridden at the time by basic survival instincts. Amazingly, 16 people did survive, and only last year, celebrated their thirtieth anniversary of the event. They were able show respect for their dead companions and receive respect for overcoming the horrific circumstances, once more attending to the higher needs of Maslow's model.

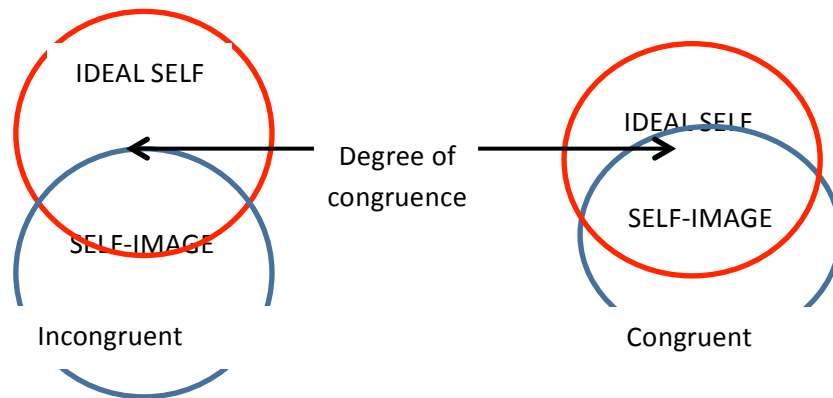
The model assumes that human development moves from concern with oneself, to the second person perspective, then to that of the third person. This hierarchy has been criticised for its ranking of needs (eg Wahba and Brudwell 1976) and for its ethnocentricity (eg Hofstede 1984). Studies have also questioned the importance of sex in our dispositions, and posited differences according to age (eg Goebel and Brown 1981). Meanwhile other researchers (eg Cronberg 2010, Villarica 2011, Tay and Diener 2011) have confirmed these universal needs. The Andes story seems to demonstrate the model's validity.

Maslow's theory has been taken up in the fields of *education* eg motivating students, and helping them plan their own work; in *therapeutic settings*, helping patients to understand personal and other people's needs eg for love or self-esteem; and in *management* eg the importance of motivating staff and giving positive feedback. It is a useful framework for our analysis of everyday learning.

Carl Rogers

The second theorist whose work on self-actualisation (1951, 1959, 1961) is pertinent to our survey data is Carl Rogers. He highlighted the need for an environment which is conducive to genuineness, acceptance and empathy in order for us to achieve our primary goal, which he believed to be self-maximisation for human survival. Whilst he agreed with much of Maslow's thinking, he preferred the term 'self-actualising' to emphasise the ongoing nature of the process.

Figure 2 Rogers' conditions for self-actualisation



Rogers focused on the self-concept, which comprises our ideal self (who we aspire to be), our self-image (our actual self), and self-esteem, which reflects the degree of congruence between our ideal and actual selves. Positive regard by others is also important to the fully functioning (self-actualised) person. This is not to say that we ever achieve full congruence, rather that the pursuit of the ideal is what makes us dynamic, ever-developing individuals. Figure 2 illustrates the difference between a person whose self-image and ideal self are largely incongruent and one where they are strongly congruent.

Rogers' thinking was applied to a form of *psychotherapy*, Person-Centred Therapy, where the patient/client is responsible for determining what is wrong with them and how to address it, changing the roles of therapist and patient/client and raising once more the question of personal responsibility. Maslow and Rogers are helpful in their identification of characteristics which contribute to a person being healthy - achieving or working towards a sense of self-actualisation. If we tabulate these, we can see the extent to which the two agree, and we have a point of reference for discussing our respondents. Table 1 shows how these characteristics align.

Table 1 Characteristics of self-actualising individuals, from Maslow and Rogers

MASLOW	ROGERS
Naturalness/spontaneity Resistance to conformity	Freedom of thought, spontaneity
Independence	Follow own instincts
Intense mystical experiences Objective perception of reality Acceptance of self	Live in every moment
Empathy	
Commitment/dedication to work	
Democratic	Openness
Creativity	Creativity

When viewed in this way, key characteristics are: spontaneity, independence, enjoyment of life, openness and creativity. We shall be seeking evidence of these in our respondents.

Do we really have free will?

These characteristics assume freedom of will and personal responsibility for our actions, but ironically, science has come full circle and we might once more consider the validity of this assumption. Are we, after all, mere products of evolutionary selection, pre-programmed to behave in ways most likely to result in individual, hence human, survival? Scientists' views on this are as divided as are those of laymen.

Geneticist Richard Dawkins' *The Selfish Gene* (1976) coined a term that neatly describes the theory that we are no more than organisms, and each organism is nothing more than a machine created by genes in order to enhance their replication. Writing in 2002, Robert Winston argued that evolution is an incomplete explanation of human instinct, and proposed that evolutionary biology and religious belief in divine creation can co-exist, supporting the view that we are responsible for the decisions we take. Biologist Paul Ehrlich's work (2000) concludes that our human capacity to create moral systems is evolutionary, but the nature of those systems is not genetic: it is bound to our cultural environment.

Neuroscientist V S Ramachandran is widely celebrated for pioneering work which, paradoxically, re-established the body-mind focus. From mapping the brain's zones thought to control specific function, Ramachandran has identified a sensory map that may be responsible for a rudimentary consciousness. His work on mirroring proposes that the source of our ability to empathise lies in our unconscious imitation (mirroring) of others and projecting on to them the emotions we feel. If such 'higher level' capacities of human behaviour are neuronal, we return to the issue of intentionality and free will.

Matters become further complicated by research using neuroimaging technology which has shown that the body acts before the conscious thought related to that act is triggered in the brain. This leads some scientists eg Benjamin Libet (1985), Susan Blackmore (2005), to conclude that, if unconscious brain processes have already taken place and initiated action prior to consciousness of an intention to perform the act, volition (free will) is eliminated.

But to end this section on a positive note, atheist philosopher Daniel Dennett offers reassurance that free will *is* possible, notwithstanding the evidence of neuroscience. Dennett (2012) argues that Man distinguishes himself from other living beings in that we not only formulate reasons for our actions but reflect on them after they have taken place: 'We don't just act for reasons, we represent those reasons to ourselves.'

Inevitably, any selection of theorists is subjective, and, if viewed through a different lens an alternative interpretation would be found. The issues we have chosen to focus on here are the characteristics of, and conditions conducive to self-actualisation, as envisaged by Maslow and Rogers, and the potential for self-determination as a consciously willed process.



Interpreting accounts of everyday learning, development and meaning-making

Although a small sample, some patterns do appear to be emerging through the logs which begin to reveal the characteristics of lifewide learners. Whilst all respondents are involved in activities that relate to Maslow's d-needs (eg eating, family, friends) their desire for further intellectual growth, enjoyment of achievement, creativity and objectivity place them in the zone of self-actualisation. Technology plays a significant part in enabling them to connect with others, be it for work or pleasure, and it is a source of great irritation when it fails or the user is unable to fathom it. Irrespective of their ages, all respondents have embraced these new tools. In this, they confirm Rogers' and Malsow's characteristics of self-actualising individuals (Table 1 above).

We saw that holism was indicative of self-fulfilment. To what extend do our respondents attend to both their mental and bodily health? Table 2 summarises their profiles, as recorded in their logs. It may be that in the period of the log, individuals did or did not engage in physical activities that are a regular feature of their lives: we can only report on the evidence presented in the logs. The ticks indicate that the respondent's log includes activity of mental or physical activity.

Based on this evidence, all respondents are engaged in addressing their intellectual needs, but two, Sally and Dawn, do not seem to take part in any physical exercise. *Is it co-incident that these respondents also showed incongruence between their actual and ideal selves? Or should we conclude that the absence of physical activities from their lives has a negative impact on their sense of fulfilment?*

Table 2 Respondents' attention to their holistic needs

	Mind	Body
Dawn	√	
Mina	√	√
Rab	√	√
David	√	√
Lance	√	√
Sally	√	
Peter	√	√

Characteristics of self-actualising individuals

The logs have revealed respondents' passion to learn new things, analyse their findings and pass on to others what they have learnt. Despite occasional difficulties, most appear to have achieved Rogers' balance between their self-image and their ideal self, and are seeking further development not to fill perceived gaps, but rather for enhanced learning. For this reason, they present as contented, empathetic individuals engaged in a constant process of self-actualising.

The most 'rounded' respondents are those who have a variety of interests, including intellectual, sporting, creative, social, voluntary and so on. This reminds us of the characteristics of self-actualising/-actualised people, as drawn from Maslow and Rogers (Table 1). We can now evaluate each person against this set of five characteristics. Again,



we must adhere to the evidence contained in the logs, and ignore any other personal knowledge we may have of an individual. Table 3 presents the findings.

As before, a tick indicates that evidence of the characteristic is found in the log. Brackets show that there are some limits on the degree to which the individual displays this eg Dawn provides little sign of creativity, but that may be that the period of the log did not include such activity, whereas another period might have looked quite different.

Table 3 Characteristics of self-actualising individuals evidenced in respondents

	Spontaneity	Independent	Live in moment	Openness	Creativity
Dawn	√	(√)	(√)	√	(√)
Mina	√	(√)	√	√	√
Rab	√	√	(√)	√	√
David	√	√	√	√	√
Lance	√	√	√	√	√
Sally	√	√	(√)	√	√
Peter	√	√	√	√	√

Table 3 suggests that David, Lance and Peter's accounts of their everyday activities through which they are trying to accomplish the things they have to and they want to accomplish are consistent with their attempts to actualise themselves. They have revealed a diversity of interests and joy in pushing themselves into new experiences. If we turn to the remaining respondents, can we deduce anything of significance for self-actualisation?

Mina's independence has been curtailed, largely due to her young age: she does not have freedom to determine her school curriculum, and must respect her parents' wishes. She is philosophical about this, though, and there is no sense of imbalance between her actual and ideal selves. She accepts that her parents have her best interests at heart, and works stoically through the subjects she would prefer not to have to study.

Dawn's independence is constrained by the system within which she works. As we have seen, she does experience frustration between the actual and ideal professional she would like to be. She feels helpless to act against the NHS system and her personal values are undermined by those of the organisation. Her empathy with patients also leads her to envisage possible future scenarios, taking her away from living in the immediate moment.

Rab also has a tendency to live in other time zones. He is constantly making comparisons with past experiences and trying to formulate understanding that will improve future experience. This does not cause imbalance between his actual and ideal selves, but it does led him to be harshly self-critical and determined to derive learning from every event. By contrast, Sally spends much time reflecting on the past, regretting opportunities missed or inadequately seized. This results in incongruence between her actual and ideal selves, which is manifested in her self-doubt and self-criticism.

We can therefore conclude that respondents do display Rogers' and Maslow's characteristics of self-actualising individuals, but that there can be an imbalance between their actual and ideal selves if one or more of these characteristics is impaired.



Positive regard

Our introductory section noted Rogers' belief that positive regard is necessary for a person to be fully functioning. This calls for an environment of acceptance and empathy, reminding us of Ramachandran's theory of mirroring the assumed feelings of those around us.

The impact of external obstacles is evident for all respondents at some point in their logs. Several rail against the tax system and make critical political comments, but these are passing irritants. They are superseded by respondents being able to attend to other, more satisfying, activities. In this context, we have speculated on the importance of close social contacts with whom we can share our frustrations, and who can perhaps see things more clearly than we do in the heat of the moment. Sally and Dawn are often alone and so are unable to express their disappointment or frustration in this way. They are the two respondents who show incongruence: *does this mean that our ability to balance our actual and ideal selves is impeded if we do not have a supportive social network?*

If this hypothesis is correct, it would suggest that Maslow's hierarchy of needs is correct in recognising the need for a sense of love and belonging before an individual can progress from first to second and then third person concerns, towards self-actualisation and balance of their actual and ideal selves.

Free will?

We raised the question of freedom of will when so much of who we are is biologically determined. What can we learn in this respect from our respondents?

Clearly, they all believe they are making personal choices in how they spend their time. They are consistent with Dennett's view that we differentiate ourselves from other animals in that we not only have reasons for our actions but we present these reasons to ourselves and in the process make them meaningful. As reasoning individuals, respondents have acknowledged the constraints imposed by aging bodies, the responsibilities they have and the advantages arising from being retired from paid employment. Within these boundaries, *they believe they are following their free will.*

The conclusions drawn do however, raise some factors which may be beyond our control. First, our two main exceptions are both women. *Does this reflect a greater tendency for women than men to experience incongruity? Or are they more critical and honest in revealing such conflicts?* A far larger study would be necessary to test the significance of sex in this matter.

The second issue is the age of our respondents: most are in mid-late life. *Can we fairly attribute their self-actualisation to the factors discussed, or is it merely the result of maturation and coming to terms with mortality as we grow older?* The response we give to this question is inevitably subjective.

What we can conclude with certainty is that respondents' daily lives are taken up with highly complex, intellectual, physical and creative activities, and they gain much satisfaction and enjoyment from these and their interaction with family and friends. Whether this is unique to lifewide learners must remain a question for future investigation, and warrants a larger scale inquiry.



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