# Q-Life

# Life Skills to Flourish

*A tailored approach to developing resilience and total well-being*

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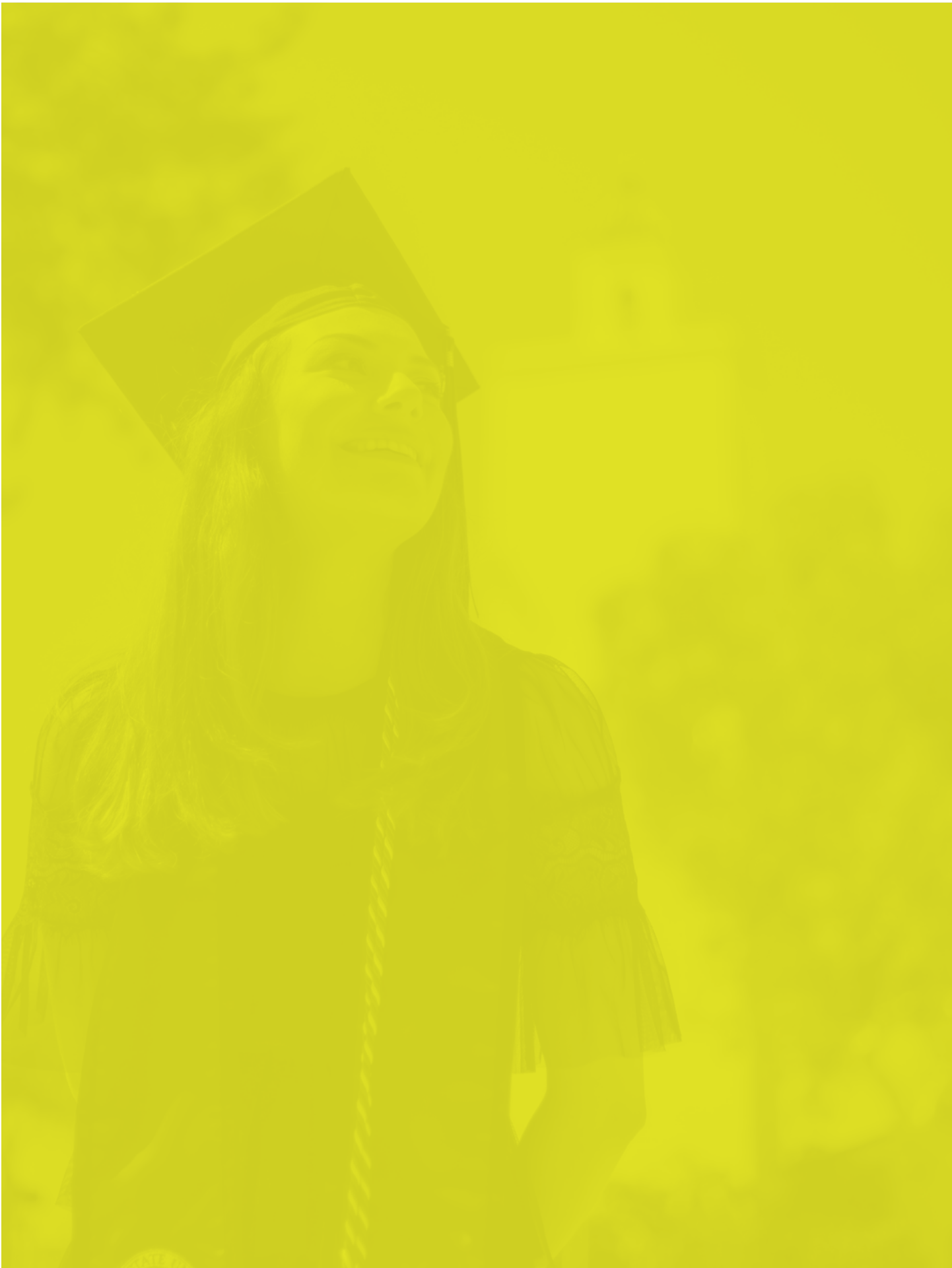**Contributors:** Dr. Chris Shields, Dr. Elizabeth Cawley, Luke DeCoste, Julia Koppernaes, Rowan Hart and Hayley MacDonald

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# Executive Summary

## Are you living your Quality Life?

The Q-Life (Quality Life) is a novel multi-dimensional wellness experience that can play an important role in relieving the burden on traditional mental health services. Within this experience – which is offered to post-secondary students as a way for them to build skills that protect against the daily challenges of post-secondary life – students will have the opportunity to build resilience, confidence, and accountability so that they can take control of their life journey. Reports have shown that, at any one time, up to 25% of students will report feeling stressed, and over 50% will experience this stress as a manifestation of anxiety or depression (Svetlak et al., 2021). From 2010 to 2015, in the United Kingdom alone, the necessity for post-secondary counselling services grew by 50%, with unclear reasons as to why (Galante et al., 2018). This increase has resulted in a strain on post-secondary mental health services, resulting in longer wait times and inaccessibility (Svetlak et al., 2021). Fortunately, eHealth programs have proven to be feasible and effective to support students' mental health, as they are easily accessible and anonymous, rely less on the support of mental health professionals, act as a preventative tool, and save valuable resources such as time and money (Svetlak et al., 2021). However, experiences like the Q-Life take this to another level by supporting the total health of each student.

A modular course structure has proven to be the most functional form of providing eHealth programs (Svetlak et al., 2021). The Q-Life program is a series of modules, called "plugs," and skill-building opportunities. This structure includes educational videos and interviews to introduce general themes and topics, as well as text-based lessons, which act as a personal companion or workbook that students can reference and follow to reflect on previous experiences and build their resilience skills. There are also numerous external resources offered throughout the learning platform, found under Course Content, for students who may be interested in learning more about a particular topic.

The defining feature of the Q-Life is that it has been skillfully crafted as a growth-management experience and targets multiple lifestyle behaviours at once. Skill development in isolation is often ineffective. However, by integrating and impacting multiple lifestyle factors within one program, participants learn to effectively live a healthier life.

To facilitate growth, students need to reflect on a variety of aspects of their lives. By participating in the act of reflection, students are able to become aware of what skills they now have and the ways they may be able to build on this foundation. Awareness of one's internal self and the extensive list of factors that can influence life are important for fostering and developing an environment that sustains and supports resilience. Resilience is the ability to recover from and adjust to misfortune, difficulties, or change (Dictionary by Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Resilience provides individuals with a way to make use of both internal and external resources to cope with a multitude of stressors that they may face (Clark & Ungar, 2021). It is also believed that resilience is a process that involves multiple systems (Clark & Ungar, 2021), and that therefore both being resilient and maintaining resilience depend on a variety of lifestyle factors.

The Q-Life experience helps with student growth by introducing the concept of the Resilience Battery or "R-Battery." The student's resilience is strengthened by daily practices. To effectively charge their R-Battery, they can "plug into" five different healthy lifestyle behaviours. These five "plugs" are Self-Awareness, Self-Reflection, Foundational Skills, Personal Power, and Resources. The plugs are rooted in a collection of research-based healthy lifestyle practices that help the student target specific areas of their life. These directly influence the level of their R-Battery, which gives the student a visual measure to reflect on. A fully charged R-Battery indicates that they are successfully practising resilience-related skills and are said to be living an optimal "Q-Life."
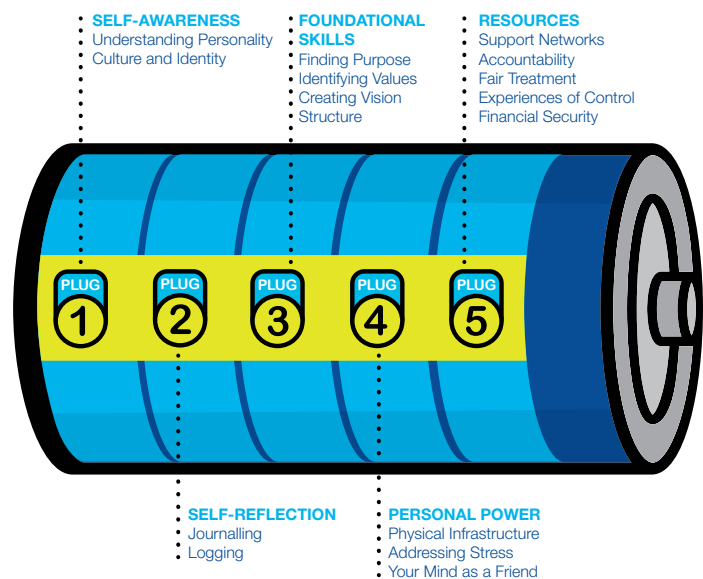
To monitor the effectiveness of the Q-Life experience, each participant is asked a series of before-and-after questions. The responses to these questions are what generate a Q-Score and an R-Battery Score. The questions ask each participant to define levels of importance within certain areas of their life. These elements include lifestyle behaviours, emotional responses, optimism, adaptability, and other perceptions. This is the beginning of skillful self-awareness.

The Q-Life can integrate with other mental health services. An example of this would be linking the Q-Life with Dr. Peter Cornish's Stepped Care 2.0(c) model. This model triages students based on their mental health needs and then determines what level of care is best suited for them. The Stepped Care 2.0(c) model works to ensure each student gets the necessary and preferred amount of support and care. This structure minimizes strain on more finite, expensive resources, while still effectively meeting each individual's needs.

Challenges and adversity are inevitable in a post-secondary student's life. The Q-Life program provides an opportunity to mitigate negative stress responses through purposeful total health behaviour change techniques. By participating in the Q-Life experience, students will become one step closer to living their Quality Life.



# R-BATTERY

**SELF-AWARENESS**
Understanding Personality
Culture and Identity

**FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS**
Finding Purpose
Identifying Values
Creating Vision
Structure

**RESOURCES**
Support Networks
Accountability
Fair Treatment
Experiences of Control
Financial Security

**SELF-REFLECTION**
Journalling
Logging

**PERSONAL POWER**
Physical Infrastructure
Addressing Stress
Your Mind as a Friend

# Introduction

Most students have faced the highs and lows of academia. This could be due to the constant balancing act of personal and student life and the opportunity to explore new roles and identities in a new environment. Managing numerous stressors and challenges can be exciting and manageable to some extent, but it can also feel overwhelming.

Mental Health Research Canada has reported that younger Canadians (ages 18–34) are more likely than all other age groups to experience anxiety and depression (Carden et al., 2021; Mental Health Research Canada, n.d.). Furthermore, the most recent report has identified that one-sixth of Canadians anticipate that their mental health will continue to deteriorate, with young Canadians being most at risk (Mental Health Research Canada, n.d.). Stress can be brought on by strain in several aspects of life and can negatively affect an individual's mental, emotional, and physical health. Although some stress can be manageable, and even helpful for one's personal growth, too much stress can be harmful and impact the total well-being of an

individual. One of the greatest adversities that post-secondary students face is stress (Freire et al., 2016; Palmer & Rodger, 2009).

Unfortunately, traditional mental health services such as counselling, which can be lengthy and costly, are often too overwhelmed to enable counsellors to meet with students in a timely fashion to address their distress (Svetlak et al., 2021). Ongoing attempts to encourage post-secondary students to seek help are often hampered by the shame and misconceptions that surround mental health issues (Elizabeth et al., 2017; Svetlak et al., 2021). Students may struggle unnecessarily because they lack the knowledge or experience to search for alternative forms of support that could relieve them of the debilitating stress that is impacting their life (Egan et al., 2019).

While the overtaxed mental health and support systems can benefit a small percentage of the population, it is unrealistic to expect these unscalable services to effectively help all students who experience mental,

physical, and total health concerns. This gap in the traditional health-care model provides an opportunity to implement forward-thinking and research-based services to the student population (Svetlak et al., 2021). Such services would provide an opportunity for those who are interested in improving their overall wellness, regardless of how accessible traditional health-care practices may be. Implementing a system that would provide information, education, and anonymity as part of a total health approach would give students a safe and accessible opportunity to gain knowledge and understanding about how they are feeling and how they can move forward and achieve their version of optimal health and wellness.

This white paper presents the reasoning and research behind the Q-Life (Quality Life), an innovative and effective multi-dimensional wellness experience. When integrated into daily life, the Q-Life trains students in skills that will serve them throughout their education and beyond. By learning to live the Q-Life, students will tune in to what a healthy amount of stress means to them while also developing the power to be aware of,

regulate and charge their R-Battery – their resilience – when needed. This R-Battery is charged by the five "plugs" they learn to develop: self-awareness, self-reflection, foundational skills, personal power, and resources. The R-Battery helps students define, assess, and revaluate multiple facets of their life.

The content and structure of the Q-Life has been carefully chosen and is backed by current research to ensure the crafting of a synergistic and integrative program. This program has been developed in such a way that it builds a broad and complementary skill set and is not merely a list of factors that contribute to resilience and total health. Life is complex. Fortunately, the Q-Life has been constructed with that in mind – ensuring that every aspect of it is comprehensive yet personal.

By introducing its components, setting out the research that supports our approach, and defining the solutions that the Q-Life program offers, we hope you will come to see how the Q-Life can benefit the health and well-being of every student.

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# Self-Awareness

## An Overview of Self-Awareness

The concept of "self" is defined by the attributes that humans perceive as unique (Sungar, 2015). Self-awareness can be defined as an awareness of our internal state that impacts and alters our own behaviours while also being aware of how our responses impact others (Carden et al., 2021). When we practise self-awareness, both a state of mind (e.g., mood) and consciousness (e.g., awareness) are present (Treur & Glas, 2020). The Q-Life charges for self-awareness comprise personality, culture and identity, emotional intelligence, self-compassion, self-confidence, and motivation.

## Why Self-Awareness Matters

Self-awareness is something that many post-secondary students struggle to fully understand and develop. Attending university may be the first time they are freely

open to exploring this aspect of themselves (Carden et al., 2021). Academic life often includes significant life changes and uncertainty. Many times, academic life coincides with students leaving home for the first time and having to adapt to a new environment. Because of these major life adjustments, students may come to feel lost in their own body and mind, oftentimes questioning who they are. Within development theory, the average age group of those attending a post-secondary institution represents the stage of identity uncertainty. If an individual has a limited sense of self-awareness, they are more likely to face challenges in both their personal and academic lives (Young & Fry, 2008).

### Understanding Personality

An individual who is unable to identify their unique and differentiating personality traits may become distracted in their ability to navigate different aspects of their life (Arslan, 2016). This is one of the reasons why post-secondary students might, at times, feel particularly challenged. Understanding their personality traits can allow them to understand how and why they may think

the way they do, recognize how they learn in both personal and professional environments, and aid with overall development of self (Oz, 2016). Understanding what makes up personality can predict academic success (Oz, 2016) and help with interpersonal problem solving (Arslan, 2016). For post-secondary students, understanding their personality can be one of the key contributors to helping them establish success in their academic careers while also developing a skill set to resolve troubles that they may face.

## Culture and Identity

Identity is defined as the distinguishing of character or personality of an individual (Dictionary by Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Identity formation is a vital component in the development of all individuals and is considered to be a dynamic concept that can impact the personal perception of experiences. Personal identity can also be considered a motivational factor: when an individual is familiar with their own identity, they are likely to seek out situations that will confirm their own beliefs (Burke, 1991). Furthermore, identity verification increases positive emotions and the formation of social connections. As well, it can help with the understanding of social roles (Crocetti et al., 2008). For these reasons, individuals with a strong sense of identity are less likely to suffer from depression and anxiety while simultaneously being more likely to experience positive personal development (Luyckx et al., 2013; Schwartz et al., 2009).

An important aspect of identity is culture. While a person will develop a personal and social identity, they will also develop a cultural identity. As defined by Meca et al. (2017), a cultural identity "refers to how individuals define themselves in relation to the cultural groups to which they belong" (p. 4). This means that an individual may identify with a particular cultural group and abide by the norms set out by that group. Those who do not build a sense of cultural identity may face feelings of depression and lowered self-esteem and be more likely to engage in negative behaviours such as abuse of drugs, addiction and rule breaking (Meca et al., 2017).

Finally, it is important to consider that individual cultures may have different experiences within the Q-Life experience. An important factor to consider in this regard is that different cultures can have different conceptions of what health and total well-being look

like. Individuals should engage with the content through their own cultural lens and use this experience to reach their own idea of wellness.

## Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence can be defined as the ability to perceive and express feelings, assimilate feelings with thoughts, understand and reason with emotions and feelings, and regulate emotions and feelings (Goleman, 2020). Emotional intelligence also includes an interpersonal aspect, which means the person is able to empathize with others' emotions (Papanagnou et al., 2017). Insufficient emotional intelligence can create challenges in understanding what certain emotions mean. This in turn may result in an inability to control initial reactions. Research has found that emotional instability can negatively impact learning processes (Oz, 2016), an important element to consider when working with students. Without emotional regulation, negative feelings can intensify, and constructive thought processes become challenging (Homan & Sirois, 2017; Neff, 2003). It is also valuable to understand how others may be affected by their emotions, and that although a person has control only over how they are feeling, they must also consider the impact they have on others. Furthermore, it is essential to understand that no two people will respond to their emotions in the same way. Lack of emotional understanding can become an issue that arises in the lives of students and can quickly lead to self-rumination (Egan et al., 2019); this is likely due to an individual spending excessive time trying to understand their emotions. If a student is unable to distinguish how they are feeling emotionally, they are more likely to exhibit unhealthy lifestyle behaviours, for example greater use of harmful substances (Egan et al., 2019). As well, a decrease in emotional regulation may negatively impact learning behaviours because of the lack of connection students feel with the material they are studying (Oz, 2016).

## Self-Compassion

Self-compassion is an awareness of personal suffering and, instead of avoiding or disconnecting from it, alleviating the discomfort through a kindness-based healing process (Egan et al., 2019; Neff, 2003). One's "self" is commonly measured by evaluating one's individual performance in comparison to others (Neff, 2003; Neff & McGehee, 2010). Because of this

constant comparison of where one exists in relation to others, individuals can become overly critical of themselves, resulting in a lack of self-compassion. Without the ability to practise self-compassion, individuals report increased likelihood of participating in dysfunctional lifestyle behaviours – through forms of eating, substance abuse, or lack of physical activity, for instance (Egan et al., 2019) – which can result in the deterioration of total health. During young adulthood, self-compassion can be at its lowest level (Neff, 2003; Neff & McGehee, 2010). Therefore, self-compassion is a necessary skill that requires both time and guidance for students to develop.



### Self-Confidence

Self-confidence, like self-compassion, originates from the evaluation of one's self. However, this form of personal understanding is rooted in the feeling of being capable of facing and persevering through life's challenges (Perry, 2011). Lack of self-confidence can result in an individual not feeling motivated to learn (Karaali, 2015). Students who are not invested in the materials they are learning are less likely to be engaged, which will result in them performing at lower levels than peers who perceive themselves to be able to overcome obstacles and adversity (Neff, 2003; Neff & McGehee, 2010). This highlights the impact that self-confidence has in a student's life and that it is important not only for their academic success but also for their total well-being.

### Motivation

Motivation, as discussed in the Q-Life, can come from both internal (intrinsic motivation) and external (extrinsic motivation) sources. Although motivation can waver depending on certain tasks, previous literature explains that motivation is a necessary function of self-awareness constructs (Karaali, 2015; Neff, 2003). This explains why, when a person lacks motivation, other areas of the self will often suffer, because the individual does not want to perform to the best of their abilities (Karaali, 2015). Motivation is partly based on previous experiences and successes that the individual has encountered (Karaali, 2015). It is also a self-dictated and adaptive mindset, which means that each individual experiences how they develop and maintain certain types of motivation differently. Motivation as a driving factor can be displayed in both positive and negative lifestyle behaviours. Having the "right" motivation is essential for students to engage in healthy lifestyle behaviours and avoid unhealthy choices.

Self-awareness is a necessary component of the Q-Life, as a lack of this consciousness can result in mental and physical health problems. By developing a stronger sense of self-awareness, students will experience a positive impact on their total well-being. This positive impact comes as a result of being in tune with their personality, culture, and identity. In addition to this recognition of self-awareness, there is also an increase in the practising of self-compassion, self-confidence, and determination of personal motivators.

## Our Actionable Solution

The Q-Life takes a variety of approaches to ensure the proper development of each student's self-awareness. To do this, the Q-Life helps students to explore who they are and provides opportunities to aid in self-growth. This skill-development process is accomplished through short, self-guided, skill-building opportunities that focus on the elements (the R-Battery chargers) that make up self-awareness. Questions that determine the Q-Score and monitor how a participant experiences their own self-awareness revolve around feelings and emotions involving mental health, the ability to engage in resilience-promoting behaviours, and problem-solving patterns.

### Understanding Personality

To increase understanding of certain personality traits, the Q-Life offers a combination of educational videos and text-based lessons, and it prompts students to complete an optional external personality quiz. These learning experiences allow students to investigate aspects of personality and the impact it has on their life. These learning and skill-building opportunities suggest to students how their personality is unique and allow them to gain perspective on how they can move about their life in a personalized way. For them to accomplish this, it is important to make sure they are adjusting their actions and behaviours to what they need, based on their personality, while also adapting their behaviours to effectively communicate and work with other personality types.

### Culture and Identity

With regards to identity, the Q-Life invites students to outline what makes them who they are with reflective prompts and brainstorming opportunities. Personal identity is then integrated into culture, which helps students discover where they fit in the larger social situations that they may find themselves in.

### Emotional Intelligence

Students are given the opportunity to consider and analyze emotions. By exploring emotional regulation, students can grow to appreciate and respond to the feelings they experience. This skill-building opportunity can also provide insight into how and why others may respond differently to their emotions and reiterates the message that this uncontrollable difference is okay.

### Self-Compassion

Self-compassion is practised through students becoming aware of and at peace with their imperfections. Students are taught to reflect on their perceived shortcomings with tolerance and kindness as opposed to judgement, and to work for progress in any form, not perfection.

### Self-Confidence

To gain confidence, students are asked to reflect on previous obstacles and barriers they have overcome. This skill-building opportunity encourages students to reflect on previous "mastery experiences" and appreciate their ability to successfully reach a goal when faced with adversity.

### Motivation

Goal setting is used to prompt an individual to build and maintain motivation for a specific task. This helps students recognize what drives them to participate in some behaviours and also what causes them to stop performing or engaging in certain tasks.

#### A special word on Self-Determination Theory

*Throughout the Q-Life, activities are used to help participants become intrinsically motivated. Many of these activities reflect those highlighted in the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) framework (The Oxford Handbook of Work Engagement, Motivation, and Self-Determination Theory, n.d.). SDT highlights how one becomes motivated to act on something based on a personal need, interest, or desire. By incorporating activities that create a sense of personal responsibility, as well as including a variety of learning objectives, the Q-Life allows students to feel a sense of autonomy over their total health journey. Furthermore, students are provided with the opportunity to explore personally relevant interests and experiences while also gaining competence in these areas. This is all done with the intention of ensuring the movement towards the thought process of internalized motivation.*

## Summary on Self-Awareness

The techniques used in the Q-Life experience have been included with the understanding that self-awareness can be developed through learning about oneself, interpreting problems and mindfully developing solutions, focusing on positive areas of the self, highlighting the importance of personal expression, and increasing feelings of motivation (Sungar, 2015). Through establishing these conceptualizations of self, which is supported by the skill-building opportunities, students will benefit more often from a fully charged R-Battery and progress towards living the Q-Life.

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# Self-Reflection

## An Overview of Self-Reflection

Self-reflection is a process that helps individuals objectively learn about themselves and grow from previous and present experiences, making it an essential component of the Q-Life. Reflection is the act of mentally processing information from previous experiences and then using this knowledge as a way of determining a solution for a present challenge or event. This process is enabled through learning and reframing, where an individual is attempting to connect previous and present states (Black et al., 2000; Lew & Schmidt, 2011).

## Why Self-Reflection Matters

Self-reflection is essential for post-secondary students, and it can promote both professional and personal growth. Engaging in self-reflection helps with understanding personal functioning, learning and problem-solving strategies, and relating new knowledge to previous understandings (Lew & Schmidt, 2011). Students who do not take the time to self-reflect can become disengaged from their decisions and choices. As a result, they may not take time to consider what positions they may be in, how they can learn from their mistakes, or when to celebrate victories (Barbanti et al., 2021).

### Journalling

Journalling is a proven form of reflective thinking that strengthens awareness, makes sense of experiences, and helps with sensitivity to self and others. It is also an effective means of developing solutions, making decisions, and gaining perspective (Black, Sileo and Prater, 2000). Without these skills, post-secondary students often suffer from an inability to examine personal issues, share thoughts and constructive dialogue, or overcome adversity (Black, Sileo and Prater, 2000). This can lead to a decrease in quality of life, as there is a higher chance for individuals to ruminate on unfortunate circumstances and shy away from challenges.

### Logging

Logging is a method used to track specific lifestyle habits and behaviours. Similar to journalling, the process of logging can help with personal organization, time management, emotional and physiological control, and the development of interpersonal skills. Additionally, documenting goals, setbacks and the outcomes of these processes can help with self-discipline, accountability and determining where adjustments need to be made for future progress (Travers, Morisano and Locke, 2015). Post-secondary students who fail to stay in control of their academic, professional, and personal lives will likely be left in a constant state of uncertainty and inability to make gains throughout life. This can also lead to rumination rather than resiliency.

Rumination occurs when constant negative thought processes repeatedly arise and are dwelled upon. These thought processes can negatively impact total well-being and will result in a lack of insight and a decrease in life satisfaction (Harrington & Loffredo, 2010). Rumination can be challenging to dismantle and can lead to elevations in stress as well as feelings of anxiety and depression. These effects are all known to impede mental and physical health (Du et al., 2020; Li et al., 2019).

It is clear that a life that lacks self-reflection can be detrimental to an individual's total well-being and mental state. For this reason, self-reflection is a valuable aspect of the Q-Life. It will help an individual learn and grow, both within and outside the Q-Life experience.

## Our Actionable Solution

Self-reflection is a skill that needs to be continually practised because it requires a deliberate effort. Fortunately, with even small amounts of practice, self-reflection can quickly become a part of a student's everyday life. The Q-Life introduces self-reflection skills through the initial assessment and evaluation of the student's Q-Score and R-Battery scores, as well as regular practice of checking in and re-evaluating the self. This is encouraged through both journalling and logging features of the experience, as they have shown to be effective modes of development (Alt & Raichel, 2020; Black et al., 2000; Carr, 2002). Questions asked within the Q-Life that contribute to a Q-Score and R-Battery Score include the time dedicated to

journalling, as well as any significant effects that this practice has on the participant's thoughts, emotions, and awareness.

### Journalling

Through the practice of journalling, students actively take the time to critically analyze their behaviours, motivations, and learning strategies (Lew & Schmidt, 2011). Journalling is associated with the conceptualization of abstract thinking and bringing this to reality (Lew & Schmidt, 2011), meaning that it is the process of bringing together internal thoughts and daily life. Furthermore, this practice can help students reflect on what they already understand and how they plan to problem-solve based on what they know. It provides a space for goal-setting and self-generated feedback (Travers et al., 2015). The Q-Life offers a journalling platform that allows participants to easily access their journal wherever and whenever they feel the need to reflect or contemplate. A technology-based journalling option (which is likely to be in the user's hands more than a pen and paper) may encourage students to reflect whenever certain thoughts and emotions arise, which will also decrease the likelihood of rumination. This is particularly useful, as many Gen Z (individuals born from 1997 to 2012) students may also be uncomfortable or unsure of how to traditionally hand-write thoughts, complex emotions, and situations. This generation may be more familiar with communicating their perspectives through a private virtual platform.

### Logging

Logging encourages reflective thinking, supports accountability, and aids behavioural change. Through the process of logging, individuals can set goals, continually update their successes and take time to consider failures. A student who practises logging becomes their own personal informant and gives themselves the ability to provide self-evaluative feedback (Alt & Raichel, 2020; Carr, 2002). Logging can be particularly useful for students because of its simplicity of checking in. Although there is a little effort needed at the beginning of this practice, it is an effective way to start making self-reflection a part of a student's daily routine.

## Summary on Self-Reflection

Self-reflection makes it possible to look more deeply into how and why one may be feeling or responding in a certain manner. Whether through the practices of journalling and logging, or an alternative strategy, self-reflection creates a space for personal analysis and appraisal. It can help with goal-setting strategies and behaviours, creating self-awareness to provide a stronger foundation for future growth, and it can help a person to incorporate or maintain skills through self-management (Travers et al., 2015). By recording their emotions and thought processes, students learn how to evaluate and respond to certain life events and distinguish personal trends to maintain accountability (Carr, 2002; Lew & Schmidt, 2011). In addition to this, journalling and logging can solidify personal experiences and educational materials. This process of connecting personal and academic aspects of life is a fundamental skill that can be beneficial and promote effective learning in post-secondary students (Alt & Raichel, 2020; Black et al., 2000). The ability to self-reflect enhances positive personal growth processes and can lead to a purposeful future (Travers et al., 2015), which means students are more likely to fully charge their R-Battery and live the Q-Life.

The content and structure of the Q-Life has been carefully chosen and is backed by current research to ensure the crafting of a synergistic and integrative program, building a broad and complementary skill set. The Q-Life ensures that every aspect is comprehensive yet personal.

# Foundational Skills

## An Overview of Foundational Skills

Within the Q-Life experience, the ability to determine what a student is working towards, why they are working towards it, and how they plan to get there builds on the foundational skills of living a well-rounded and well-structured life. The identification of one's foundational R-Battery charges, which include purpose, values, vision, and the ability to effectively structure daily life, helps individuals move towards living the Q-Life.

## Why Foundational Skills Matter

Foundational skills provide university students with the tools to help them build what is significant to them within their life. At the same time, these skills allow students to create a plan of action to help them accomplish their goals. Without foundational skills, students are less likely to stay consistently motivated (Musich et al., 2018) or feel fulfilled within a variety

of aspects of life (Beller, 2021; Yasuma et al., 2019). Foundational skills lay the framework for the What, Where, Why, and How that encourage consistent advancement in life.

### Finding Purpose

Purpose can be defined as the driving force that pushes an individual to achieve what they have identified as meaningful and important. Purpose also encapsulates what someone hopes to contribute to the world (Moran, 2020). It can be challenging to identify one's purpose, but generally this can be achieved by answering the questions "Who am I?", "What do I do?", and "Who do I do it for?". In times of hardship, a clear purpose can provide perspective and give meaning to challenges. Purpose also gives an individual the incentive to reframe and overcome obstacles, viewing them instead as opportunities to succeed. Those who report high to medium purpose in life scores have increased social support, higher health literacy, reduced health-care expenditures, and increased utilization of preventative health-care supports (Musich et al., 2018). Having

a purpose in life has also been linked to increased participation in physical activity and reduced levels of sedentary behaviours (de Oliveira et al., 2020; Hill et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2020; Sutin et al., 2021). Identification, exploration, and commitment to one's purpose in life in relation to overall life satisfaction is also associated with improved life satisfaction and positive affect (Sumner et al., 2015). A lack of purpose in the life of a student can cause them to feel lost and have a decreased quality of life. As discussed, this can lead to challenges in maintaining healthy mental and physical wellness.

## Identifying Values

Values are often defined as a set of words that guide an individual's actions. Put simply, values are the building blocks of one's purpose, vision, and goals (Beller, 2021). Ultimately, values are what an individual identifies as most meaningful to them and often serve as a guide to help with life navigation (Beller, 2021). In adolescents, value identification and commitment that includes feelings of enjoyment, active challenge, and cherishing friends and family can decrease physiological distress later in life (Yasuma et al., 2019). A lack of value commitment early in life can also be associated with suicided ideation in adulthood and over one's lifetime (Yasuma et al., 2019). In addition, self-direction and compassion in relation to personal values can be linked to decreased mortality (Beller, 2021). Value alignment (fluidity or reflection of values in purpose, vision, and short-term goals), structuring by values (scheduling time to accommodate what is personally important), and consistently analyzing values (understanding that values shift with experience) are an important part of living the Q-Life.

## Creating Vision

A large-scale vision is a mental picture of successfully achieving the goals that are guided by one's core identity, which is made up of one's purpose and values. A vision is the ideal state that is continually progressed towards (Buse & Bilimoria, 2014). Post-secondary students often define their visions through a professional lens (Fonseca et al., 2019), such as graduating with a degree or interviewing for a dream job. As an individual moves towards vision fulfilment, it is common for a vision to progress and extend to accommodate further personal growth and success (Fonseca et al., 2019). This means that a vision can support the execution of both long-term and short-term goals, providing a framework for success (Masuda et al., 2010). Research has shown that individuals who lack personal vision (which is made up of factors such as self-efficacy, optimism, and identity) will also lack the motivation to perform tasks and stay engaged in work (Buse & Bilimoria, 2014). This means that if a student does not have a personal vision of themselves or their future, they may be more likely to be detached from their self and be unable to understand the importance of making and reaching their goals (Masuda et al., 2010).



## Structure

Finally, structure within the Q-Life is based on the idea of a deliberate strategic action that a person takes to achieve a goal and maintain stability over time. Structuring a day by scheduling necessary tasks and duties leads to a greater chance of success. Structure in day-to-day life might sound confining and mundane; however, research shows that by establishing routine, the mind is able to be present in the moment. Time management skills are also a necessary part of academic success (Razali et al., 2018) and are associated with improved quality of life (Wang et al., 2011). Lack of structure throughout life can interfere with other necessary daily activities, including sleep and time for physical activity. It can also give rise to an inability to schedule appropriate time with social networks and to unhealthy eating habits (Sabaoui et al., 2021). These issues arise because there has not been an established routine to ensure that healthy lifestyle behaviours are prioritized.

# Our Actionable Solution

The Foundational Plug and the four charges (purpose, value, vision, and structure) are vital to ensuring a student finds success in their personal and professional lives. Through the Q-Life experience, students are supported and provided with opportunities to identify and develop their purpose, value, vision, and structure through a variety of skill-building opportunities. Questions asked within the Q-Life to develop the participants' Q-Score and R-Battery Score include how they monitor their purpose and vision, as well as their own commitment to routine.

### Finding Purpose

To determine their purpose, students respond to a series of self-reflection statements that help them develop a purpose statement. This statement is an effective way for students to narrow down what means the most to them and how they see themselves within their world. Students are encouraged to continually refer to this statement to ensure they are living in alignment with how they see themselves.

### Identifying Values

The identification of values is a multi-step process in which participants start by indicating certain aspects of their life that they feel are most important to them. From there, they develop a priority list of values that most align with who they are and what they believe. By highlighting meaningful aspects of life, students learn to become aware of their surroundings. They monitor and are attentive to what they are experiencing, who they are surrounded by, and the actions that they take. This can help lead them towards living their life in alignment with their values.

### Creating Vision

Practising vision within the Q-Life is unique, as it positions the student to imagine themselves in their ideal future. The student is guided by visualization cues and a writing activity to allow them to absorb their ideal future vision. This practice can act as a motivator to students but can also provide them with a sense of calm in periods of stress, knowing that their activities and effort are working towards a defined outcome.

### Structure

With regards to structure, the Q-Life provides a variety of activities for students to actively participate in scheduling their lives to make sure they are living in accordance with their purpose, values, and vision. Students are first guided through the creation of a week-long plan to integrate structure into everyday life. After completing and performing this form of structure, students then have the opportunity to determine whether their structure is in alignment with their highlighted purpose, vision, and values. Lastly, students can reflect on what makes a day successful, making sure that they are aware of their ability to control daily outcomes.

# Summary on Foundational Skills

The practice of identifying and utilizing foundational principles helps students to identify important areas of their life and gives them the opportunity to reflect and act on them. By identifying and living out their purpose, vision, and values – guided by structure – students will learn how to meaningfully engage in everyday life and receive motivation from larger guiding principles. Defining foundational aspects of life means that students are more likely to fully charge their R-Battery and live the Q-Life.

The Q-Life program provides an opportunity to mitigate negative stress responses through purposeful total health behaviour change techniques. By participating in the Q-Life experience, students will become one step closer to living their Quality Life.

**PLUG**
**4**

# Personal Power

## An Overview of Personal Power

This section is particularly important to the Q-Life, as it outlines the areas of an individual's life that provide more concrete steps on the journey towards living the Q-Life. This plug is made up of charges that include physical health, understanding and accepting stress, and mindfulness techniques. Physical infrastructure focuses on health behaviours that impact physical health, such as physical activity, sleep, and nutrition. Addressing stress is an essential aspect of the Q-Life and key to developing resilience. To understand stress, a student learns about their coping style, how they accept certain situations and experiences, as well as how they problem-solve. The final charge in this plug focuses on having one's mind as a friend. Students learn gratitude, mindfulness, and optimism. The mind and body are powerful tools and can often provide fast acting charges and quickly replenish the student's R-Battery when they are feeling low.

## Why Personal Power Matters

Defined as an attitude or state of mind (Personal Power | Psychology Today, n.d.), personal power is unique, as it is grounded in an individual's ability to change and manipulate specific parts of their life. By developing personal power, students can train themselves to manipulate and change parts of their lives for the better. Although most students do not understand what personal power is or how to have more of it, learning to tap into their personal power can be extremely useful when they are trying to create healthy lifestyle changes physically, emotionally and mentally.

### Physical Infrastructure

As discussed in Plug 1, students often struggle with building and maintaining self-confidence. As noted, this can have various impacts on a student's life, such as self-efficacy and the ability to overcome obstacles and diminishing experiences of control. Within the Personal Power Plug, students will learn the skills necessary to

build a strong physical and mental foundation. They will learn how implementing these skills on a daily basis will improve other aspects of their life and frequently create an R-Battery boost. Physical infrastructure is a key determinant of an individual's physical well-being, but it can also impact other aspects of their mental health and overall well-being. The physical infrastructure is made up of several charges, including physical activity, sleep, and nutrition.

*1. Physical Activity*

It is understood that physical health is directly correlated to the physical health and mental well-being of students (DeJonge et al., 2020; Herbert et al., 2020) and that an increase in physical activity will result in an increase in quality of life (Cicek, 2018). However, it is also understood that students are faced with multiple barriers (e.g., time constraints, lack of knowledge with regards to physical activity, limited exercise options) that can impede their abilities to maintain a healthful physical-activity routine (DeJonge et al., 2020). For this reason, students are often less likely to participate in physical activity because of feelings of inaccessibility (Cicek, 2018). The Canadian 24-hour movement guidelines state that individuals between the ages of 18 and 24 should participate in a minimum of 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity per week, and include muscle strengthening activities at least twice a week. Light physical activities (e.g., standing) and overall limited sedentary behaviour (e.g., no more than three hours of recreational screen time or breaking up long periods of sitting) are also recommended (CSEP | SCPE, n.d.). That said, because of some of the barriers that impact movement involvement, only 58% of young adults in Canada meet the requirement of 150 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity per week, while also spending 9.5 hours per day sedentary; with 15 to 25 hours per week of that sedentary time using screens recreationally (Colley et al., 2011; Statistics Canada, 2020, 2021).

*2. Sleep*

Students are currently experiencing an epidemic of sleep deprivation. One-third of youth don't meet minimum sleep duration recommendations (Chaput et al. 2016), and two-thirds of university students report trouble sleeping or poor-quality sleep (Lund et al. 2010). Sleep quality has been shown to be directly impacted by a student's level of stress (Du et al., 2020; Li et al., 2019). Insufficient and poor-quality sleep is related to poorer mental health and academic performance, higher anxiety, depressed mood, fatigue, and increased alcohol use in post-secondary students (Al Khatib et al., 2017; Chaput & Janssen, 2016; Dawson & Reid, 1997; Du et al., 2020; Lund et al., 2010; Schlarb et al., 2017). One night of poor sleep has the same cognitive impairment as being drunk and leads to increased caloric intake the next day. Chronic poor-quality sleep can lead to health risk factors such as obesity and an increased risk of diabetes and cardiovascular disease, as well as further mental health issues such as anxiety and depression (Al Khatib et al., 2017; Chaput & Janssen, 2016; Dawson & Reid, 1997; Du et al., 2020; Lund et al., 2010; Schlarb et al., 2017). Furthermore, sleep quality has a direct relationship with the qualities of resilience and rumination, where increased rumination results in a student experiencing higher levels of stress and, in turn, lower quality sleep. Previous literature has also stated that although length of sleep may be important, it is essential that a student prioritizes sleep quality, as this is what will improve overall health outcomes (Du et al., 2020). Without

quality sleep, students are more likely to experience issues with their cognitive processing, recovering from stress, and inability to eliminate feelings of fatigue, and to perform poorly in their academics (Soriano-Ayala et al., 2020). Similar to physical activity, the Canadian 24-hour movement guidelines also have standards for sleep, suggesting that individuals should regularly get between seven and nine hours of good-quality sleep, with consistent bed and wake times (CSEP | SCPE, n.d.; National Sleep Foundation's Updated Sleep Duration Recommendations, n.d.). Reports indicate that only two-thirds of youth meet the recommended sleep guidelines (Chaput & Janssen, 2016).

*3. Nutrition*

Literature continues to highlight that although diet is a leading contributor of both physical (Hilger et al., 2017; Trottier et al., 2021) and mental health (El Ansari et al., 2014; Trottier et al., 2021), post-secondary students continue to lack the nutritional literacy to make healthy dietary choices to positively impact their total well-being (Kalkan, 2019). Furthermore, a poor diet can also increase feelings of stress and even depressive symptoms (El Ansari et al., 2014). A healthy and balanced diet is important for total well-being, and it has been noted that students not following a balanced diet will experience a decrease in quality of life and academic performance while increasing morbidity and mortality (Trottier et al., 2021). For students, barriers to developing healthy eating can arise because of a number of factors, including the cost and availability of nutritious food (Ganasegeran et al., 2012; Hilger et al., 2017). As well, students note that their level of knowledge about choosing healthy food options is a determinant in whether they eat a healthy and well-balanced diet (Hilger et al., 2017; Kalkan, 2019).

## Addressing Stress

Resourcefulness is an important skill to have throughout the first years of one's professional life, including within the world of academia (Ceyhan and Ceyhan, 2011). Resourcefulness can appear in a variety of forms but is specifically important when trying to understand stress. Therefore, the more a student is able to analyze their feelings of stress, the more resourceful they will become. When resourceful strategies are limited, a student may become unable to cope with, accept, or solve problems in a healthy manner. This could result in



them finding it challenging to adjust and adapt to their life as a post-secondary student.

*1. Coping*

Coping is a unique practice that varies from one individual to another. However, the general theme of these strategies is primarily influenced by how we perceive stressors in comparison to our resources (Freire, 2016). This means that an individual who perceives themselves to have more internal or external resources will have healthier and more effective coping strategies. Coping is also unique in the sense that it is dependent on psychological functioning (Freire, 2016), and that feelings of self-acceptance, environmental mastery, healthy relationships, and personal acceptance can all impact an individual's ability to cope. As previously mentioned, students often experience issues within many of these areas, which can result in them using maladaptive or ineffective coping methods.

*2. Acceptance*

The practice of acceptance has been shown to be a significant mechanism in reducing anxiety and negative emotions (Elizabeth et al., 2017). Acceptance allows a student to acknowledge how they may be positively or negatively impacted by a situation and then move on from it, resulting in limiting rumination. This is thought of as coping by acceptance, which is an effective strategy in reducing and reframing stress and often results in better experienced outcomes than when maladaptive (e.g., avoidant coping) strategies are utilized (Plexico et al., 2019). Yet students often feel that they lack the emotional and cognitive resources to practise

acceptance, particularly in stressful situations. This may cause them to give in to unwanted negative responses, such as rumination and negative thought processes, in troublesome situations (Ceyhan and Ceyhan, 2011).

### 3. Problem Solving

A cornerstone of being resilient is to be able to solve and overcome problems (Coskun, Caropagaoglu and Tonsun, 2014). Students learn this skill through internally developed resources, including purposeful awareness and devoting effort when facing challenges (Arslan, 2016). Previous literature has shown that if individuals feel confident in their abilities to navigate problems in life, they will be more likely to experience positive feelings of self-compassion, openness to experiences, agreeableness, and responsibility (Arslan, 2016). Each student is unique and can have varying degrees of problem-solving skills and orientation (how one experiences a problem and relates it to previous problems and resolutions).

### Your Mind as a Friend

Making the mind an ally of one's emotional and physical self is key to making sure that thoughts, beliefs, and feelings are fostered in a non-judgemental and peaceful environment. Without the mind as a friend, students may feel as though they are endlessly battling themselves through every thought instead of being grateful, practising mindfulness and staying optimistic.

### A special word on the Mind as a Friend

*The mind, by definition, is "the element or the complex of elements in an individual that feels, perceives, thinks, wills, and reasons," while an ally is "one that is associated with another as a helper: a person or group that provides assistance and support in an ongoing effort, activity, or struggle" (Dictionary by Merriam-Webster, n.d.). To the Q-Life, having the mind as a friend means that the thought processes a person has about themselves and their life's circumstances is friendly, helpful, and supportive, just like an ally would be. This is important, as it creates a safe and constructive place for an individual to cultivate and foster a positive mindset towards themselves.*



### 1. Gratefulness

By being grateful, students are more likely to develop resilience, experience less psychological distress (Huang et al., 2020) and improve mood (Mariean et al., 2018). Being grateful can exist both as a state and as a trait – with trait-based gratitude being a contributor to total well-being (Mariean et al., 2018). Being grateful is often associated with being able to acknowledge positive outcomes, and with an acknowledgement and awareness of how these have come about and possible sacrifices from oneself or others (Huang et al., 2020). High levels of gratitude have been associated with increases in total well-being (Mariean et al., 2018). However, students have a particularly challenging time with finding the positive aspects in life during times of high stress, something that is persistent within the academic setting. This then leads students to feel out of control within their life, therefore making them unable to see and appreciate positive gains (Huang et al., 2020).

### 2. Mindfulness

Students who have maladaptive coping behaviours often experience higher stress, emotional dysregulation, lack of self-control, and identity issues (Soriano-Ayala et al., 2020). As discussed, there are many ways to promote a healthy behaviour change to shift these maladaptive behaviours into positive coping strategies, one of which is mindfulness.

Mindfulness can be defined as bringing awareness to the present moment, being non-judgemental, and participating (or being fully immersed) in an activity (Segal et al., 2002). A recent systematic review examining the efficacy of brief mindfulness interventions (mostly single sessions ranging from 5 to 25 minutes) revealed that, for nonclinical populations, these interventions resulted in lower physiological and subjective stress levels and negative affect as well as

an increase in the ability to regulate one's emotions (Howarth, 2019). For instance, undergraduate students who engaged in 15 minutes of brief mindfulness breathing following exposure to an emotional stimulus reported more positive affect and less negative affect compared to control groups, and they were better at sitting with negative emotions (Arch & Craske, 2006). Not only can mindfulness enhance our ability to regulate our emotions and cope with stressors, but it can also improve our attention (Malinowski, 2013; Tang, 2015) and impact how we perceive and process pain. Interestingly, individuals who engage in mindfulness were found to report lower levels of pain (Hilton, 2017).

Mindfulness interventions emphasize that rather than trying to control situations, students alter how they perceive and relate to life events (Svetlak et al., 2021). Mindfulness also cultivates fresh perspectives of viewing situations by altering metacognitive patterns and how one interprets the environment (Soriano-Ayala et al., 2020). Despite this, students are often not consistent participants in mindfulness-based thought processes and therefore often face stress and feelings of anxiety. Stress and feelings of anxiety can then morph into negative lifestyle behaviours, which could include harmful eating habits, substance abuse, and poor sleeping patterns (Soriano-Ayala et al., 2020). These practices can then further negatively impact mental and physical health, resulting in a lower quality of life (Svetlak et al., 2021).

*3. Optimism*
Optimism, in addition to happiness and self-esteem, can impact a student's well-being. Optimistic individuals are frequently found to be healthier physically, emotionally, and mentally (Dar & Wani, 2017). In addition to this, optimism can be an effective coping strategy and adaptation method for students when facing adversity in life (Gomez-Molinero, 2018). This can be accomplished through reframing and a continuously positive outlook. The relationship between resilience and optimism also means that post-secondary students are more likely to struggle with being optimistic if they have low levels of resilience, and vice versa (Gomez-Molinero, 2018). This means that if students exhibit decreased resilience or optimism, they are likely to cycle through a pattern of decreased happiness and inability to bounce back from challenging situations.

*A special word on Optimism*

*Optimism is one piece of a paradigm about how one navigates and interprets life's events. When an individual is optimistic, they have an expectation that good things will happen to them (Gallagher & Lopez, 2017). Although optimism is a protective factor that can improve resilience (Gardenhire et al., 2019), it is important to understand that optimistic individuals can still struggle. However, when individuals who maintain an optimistic outlook face life challenges, they are more inclined to engage in resilience-based practices to ensure that they stay positive and make the best of their hardships (Gomez-Molinero et al., 2018).*

## Our Actionable Solution

The Personal Power Plug makes up the largest portion of the Q-Life because of the variety of charges and skills available to students to improve their total well-being. Resilience is closely aligned with the level of personal power an individual may believe they have. A key objective of the Q-Life is to ensure that every participant feels capable of positively impacting and having influence over their physical and mental well-being, including how they address stress and make their mind an ally. The Q-Life takes the proactive and productive approach of asking participants questions about time commitments to healthy lifestyle behaviours as well as practices that decrease stress. These responses then help participants understand how they can develop a Q-Score and R-Battery Score.

## Physical Infrastructure

With regards to physical infrastructure, the Q-Life aims to create awareness about the physical self in addition to promoting healthy behaviour change. This aids a student in sustaining their R-Battery throughout their time at school. The components that make up the physical infrastructure are the importance of performing regular physical activity as well as getting quality sleep and healthy nutrition. These three factors are interdependent and complementary: there is strong evidence for each factor contributing to health and well-being, but also equally compelling evidence that each of these factors depends and contributes to the impact of the other two factors. In this light, we present physical activity, sleep and nutrition as equally important. It is up to each person to determine the relative priority of each of these personal power factors in their own behaviour change journey.

### 1. Physical Activity

It has been extensively reported that there is an undeniable correlation between mental and physical health. Research has also shown that there is a dire need to promote and improve physical activity to positively affect mental health among post-secondary students (Herbert et al., 2020). Fortunately, physical activity has been accepted by students and clinicians as both a beneficial supplement, and sometimes even a replacement, to certain forms of mental health supports, including counselling and pharmacological treatment. Physical activity stabilizes and improves mood and happiness (Zhang & Chen, 2019), reduces risks for and consequences of anxiety and depression, prevents mental illness relapse, and provides a low-risk option to increase total well-being, even if an individual may face additional medical concerns (DeJonge et al., 2020).

Health behaviours change, and education programs, such as the Q-Life, have been proven to be an effective way to promote and increase participation in physical activity (Cicek, 2018). Within the Q-Life, students are given the opportunity to formulate ideas about how they could become physically active and are then prompted to implement these ideas into their weekly schedule. For students to maintain and consistently engage in a physical activity, it is also necessary that they enjoy the activity itself. Merely suggesting engagement in the activity will not result in long-term health behaviour change (DeJonge et al., 2020).

The Q-Life also helps students understand and resolve the barriers that may impact their participation in physical activity. This is done with both the present and future in mind. The Q-Life guides students through the practice of reflecting on possible barriers and creating problem-solving strategies to avoid disengaging from physical activity.

Lastly, it is believed that effective physical activity implementation (especially within the lives of students) must be individualized (DeJonge et al., 2020). Therefore, the Q-Life promotes personal choice and relational planning when it comes to engaging in physical activity. This is designed to create broader appeal and enthusiastic engagement with regards to the selected task.

### 2. Sleep

Most students have been exposed to the need to be physically active and eat well. However, sleep has not yet been given the same status in society and the educational system. Sleep deprivation by "pulling an all-nighter" is still seen as a badge of honour for

many post-secondary students and is sometimes encouraged. Sleep-education programs are effective ways to inform students about the value of sleep and can help students learn how to implement healthy sleep behaviours into their daily life (Du et al., 2020). With improved sleep, students will begin to exhibit higher levels of resiliency (Du et al., 2020). Through instructional videos that explain the importance of sleep, and text-based lessons that provide recommendations about how to achieve quality sleep, the Q-Life offers an engaging and informative message to students about why and how they can get a better night's rest. Students also develop complementary behaviours (e.g., physical activity and nutrition) that contribute to a healthy sleep routine to create the conditions for optimal sleep quantity and quality.

*3. Nutrition*

By teaching the value of a healthy and balanced diet and how to incorporate this into their daily life, students will be supported in making healthy and educated food choices. To help students learn about the importance of daily nutrition, the Q-Life offers information on how to incorporate a healthy and balanced diet into their life by offering tips and ideas on how to "build a plate." The goal of this activity is to teach students how they can eat within Canada's Food Guide's recommended dietary requirements while also considering each person's individual nutritional needs. Eventually, in the mindfulness section of the program, students are also guided through a mindful eating practice to help them develop an appreciation for the food they eat and take a moment to be mindful of what and how they are engaging with food.

## Addressing Stress

Understanding the role stress plays in a student's life underpins the Q-Life. One of the Q-Life's goals is to help students learn about how they respond to stress, as well as how they can address adversities that they are faced with throughout their life. Students must first understand what stress means to them and how they can cope, accept, and problem-solve when faced with both positive and negative stressors.

*1. Coping*

Effective coping strategies can vary but often include aspects of planning, support, and comfort seeking from external and internal sources (Freire, 2016). These strategies are implemented in the Q-Life and are designed to help students understand how, when, where, and why stress may appear in their life. The Q-Life also allows students to reflect on the strategies they are currently using and adapt them to the stress. To help students develop an effective strategy, resources and ideas are provided so they can determine what works best for them personally and learn about how they manage and cope with the stress they experience.

*2. Acceptance*

Acceptance of problems and oneself can directly and indirectly contribute to life satisfaction (Ceyhan and Ceyhan, 2011). Acceptance-based practices within the Q-Life are introduced by encouraging students to reflect on previous or present negative experiences. Students are then guided through the process of finding the positives within these experiences. This practice is intended to show students how they are able to find the "good within the bad" as an acceptance-based coping strategy. By participating in this, students learn that there are areas within their life that are out of their control, and that they can be okay with this.

*3. Problem solving*

The development of problem-solving skills can impact how an individual approaches and perceives a problem as well as their feelings of self-confidence, responsibility, and willingness to act in the resolving process (Arslan, 2016; Du et al., 2020). The Q-Life encourages problem solving throughout the entirety of its program, as seen in many of its "overcoming barriers" activities (often found within the skill-building opportunities). Students are asked to consider

problems they may be currently experiencing and then are asked to deconstruct a problem into smaller component parts and generate specific solutions for these challenges. This helps students integrate the problem-solving skills they have gained throughout the Q-Life by thinking rationally to determine the best solution for past and possibly future challenges.

### Your Mind as a Friend

The final component of the Personal Power Plug within the Q-Life focuses on making the mind an ally. This helps students maintain the right amount of stress to perform at their best, as their mind becomes their friend rather than an enemy. To do this, students learn about and develop a grateful attitude, implement mindfulness practices, and exercise optimistic outlooks.

*1. Gratefulness*

The aim of this set of skill-building opportunities is focused on generating a gratitude routine to make it part of daily life. To do this, students are invited to take the time to notice and acknowledge the areas within their life that they are grateful for and then reflect on why these are important to them. By taking the time to learn this skill, students are more likely to experience an increase in their overall well-being, as they learn to develop more psychological, social, and spiritual resources. The skill of engaging in gratitude is supported by the Broaden and Build Theory, which states that as positive emotions increase (through the practice of gratitude), one's awareness, internal resources and positive actions or behaviours will increase as well (Mariean, Turliuc and Arghire, 2018).

*2. Mindfulness*

Mindfulness training has been shown to be an effective form of maintaining mental well-being and can be practically implemented into the lives of students (Galante et al., 2018; Svetlak et al., 2021). Mindfulness within the Q-Life is introduced as a preventative measure to reduce stress and negative thoughts. It is also highlighted as a way for students to become present within the moment without being disrupted by internal dialogue. To do this, the Q-Life experience provides skill-building opportunities with a focus on journalling and mindful hydration (the practice of taking moments to find peace, relaxation, or reflection while drinking water). Mindful hydration is a unique practice that integrates awareness as both mental and physical. During this practice, a participant takes the time to become aware of the sensations they are feeling while taking part in this everyday activity. The goal is to encourage students to apply mindfulness in various aspects of their daily life.

*3. Optimism*

The Q-Life introduces the concept of optimism as a skill to improve perspective. Students are asked to develop a short list of activities, events, or things they are looking forward to in the coming days. This can be a challenging process, as catastrophic thinking has become a habit for many students, especially if optimistic emotions are not part of a daily thought process. The Q-Life encourages and incorporates other learned skills, such as gratitude, to help the student reminisce on previous positive experiences. Not only can this skill support students in identifying how they can harness this feeling, the learned practice of optimism can also increase self-esteem and feelings of happiness in students (Dar & Wani, 2017).

## Summary on Personal Power

Through the range of skill-development opportunities offered within the Personal Power Plug of the Q-Life experience, students become aware of the impact physical, emotional, and mental well-being has on all other aspects of themselves and their environment. Additionally, this can help them with their abilities in managing their physical infrastructure, understanding stressors, and growing a stronger mindset. By developing a sense of personal power, students positively charge their R-Battery and come a step closer to living the Q-Life.

## PLUG 5

# Resources

## An Overview of Resources

The Q-Life highlights many internal factors that impact the amount of control an individual experiences and how this can impact their ability to charge and maintain their R-Battery. The Q-Life also fosters awareness of, and appreciation for, external factors that affect the R-Battery. Although these factors can be challenging to control, the Q-Life teaches that with the right mindset, there are many actions students can take to surround themselves with persons, places, and things that will positively support their resilience journey and charge their R-Battery. Recalling the value placed on self-awareness earlier, a student can see this as creating awareness of their surroundings or environment. Although students may not be able to control many aspects of their environment, having awareness of what can drain their R-Battery can potentially help them navigate how to avoid, limit or accept these stressors.

## Why Resources Matter

It is understood that students are influenced by their surroundings (Li et al., 2018) and that within this external environment, a multitude of variables contribute to total well-being or its lack. The Q-Life offers guidance on how to navigate these variables. The Resources Plug addresses support networks, accountability, fair treatment, experiences of control, and financial stability.

### Support Networks

A support network is a group of individuals that a student perceives as a way to gain social, physical, and psychological support (Li et al., 2018). The less support an individual has, the more likely they are to experience a decrease in self-esteem and an increase in emotional exhaustion (Li et al., 2018). These feelings can be damaging to students, resulting in them becoming physically and mentally strained. Furthermore, lack of social support is associated with poor mental health (Smyth et al., 2015) and an increase in susceptibility to illness (Harandi et al., 2017). Also, if students become accustomed to not

having a dependable network of support, they may develop trust issues when trying to console others. This is a result of becoming used to managing life alone, unaware of the benefits of a reliable network.

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## A special word on Social Support

*Having a social network is an important aspect of post-secondary life, and social intelligence is a key way to develop and maintain these relationships. To have social intelligence means to understand and act accordingly when interacting with others (Belton et al., 2016). Social intelligence is believed to be composed of five sub-components: social understanding, social knowledge, social perception, social creativity, and social memory (Wang et al., 2019). With increased social intelligence, individuals are more likely to enjoy positive and healthy social relationships, which will increase overall happiness and quality of life (Belton et al., 2016).*
</div>

## Accountability

Accountability and responsibility are necessary for a post-secondary student's professional and personal lives. It is important for students to be accountable not only to their academic pursuits, but also to their social networks and themselves. Accountability and responsibility are linked to the behaviours and attitudes a person may exhibit (Fonseca et al., 2019). In addition to this, accountability in both social and personal contexts has been shown to be significantly related to academic achievement, with higher levels of achievement being seen in those who displayed higher levels of responsibility (Martel et al., 1987). Without accountability, students are unlikely to be strong leaders or feel capable of committing to action, resulting in a lower quality of life (Fonseca et al., 2019).

## Fair Treatment

When students sense they are in an interdependent, comforting, and controlled environment, they are more likely to perform better in their required tasks (Theobald et al., 2017). However, a lack of fair treatment has been reported to be high in post-secondary settings throughout the 21st century so far (Barbanti et al., 2021). Two reasons for this have been identified:

the hierarchical nature of the system and the lack of interventions made to try to reduce these issues (Barbanti et al., 2021). When students experience feelings of unfairness, especially for marginalized groups, they are likely to be impacted negatively in their social, mental, and academic lives (Barbanti et al., 2021), resulting in a decrease in their overall health.

## Experiences of Control

Young adults who leave home for post-secondary schooling often have to adapt quickly to their new and much more independent lives. Students must adapt to a new environment and start to control the variety of factors within it. This adaptation includes making decisions about how they eat, drink, socialize, perform academically, or adapt certain lifestyle behaviours (Çepni & Kitiş, 2017). These external factors and choices can then further impact the student's personality, social support, ability to regulate emotions and their cognition (Çepni & Kitiş, 2017). Students who experience feelings of control with regards to their life have increased self-liking and self-competence and are able to problem-solve and cope more easily. In contrast, those who feel they lack control may have more persistent mental health issues and experience higher feelings of stress, anxiousness, and fearfulness (Kurtović et al., 2018). In addition to this, if a student experiences success while feeling as though they are not in control, they will attribute the gain to circumstances rather than to their personal effect (Kurtović et al., 2018). This means that students would then base their success on external factors, rather than considering how they may be personally responsible for the result of whatever outcome they are experiencing.

## Financial Security

With the high costs associated with attending post-secondary education, finances are constantly on students' minds. Frequent worrying about finances can lead to stress that can affect health physically, emotionally, socially, and mentally (Jessop et al., 2020). Financial concerns are unique to each individual and have been proven to be subjective – where the personal interpretation of a financial situation is the cause of stress, rather than the actual monetary amount (Jessop et al., 2020). This subjective interpretation provides insight about how and why each individual is uniquely affected by their financial position (Jessop et al., 2020).

Previous literature also shows that the more stress an individual experiences due to their financial situation, the more likely they are to be faced with negative health consequences (Jessop et al., 2020). Therefore, a lack of understanding or of feelings of stability and control with regards to finances can be detrimental to well-being. While the Q-Life cannot directly impact the financial security of students, it can equip them with the skills necessary to manage the stress associated with it.

Research highlights that the resources outlined above are a functional component of an individual's life and are linked to optimal well-being. Although external resources make up a large component of a student's life, students are often faced with challenges or barriers within these areas. For this reason, the Q-Life experience looks to develop resilience skills to ensure each student feels they can act and manage stressors that sometimes may feel out of personal control.

## Our Actionable Solution

An accumulation of resources will result in an individual experiencing more positive life outcomes and personal growth (Ouweneel et al., 2011). The Q-Life provides one of these resources and performs as a mediator for helping students take control over their total well-being independently, as well as acting as an active aid and support system. Through instructional videos and opportunities for skill development, students are exposed to a variety of methods to understand and learn about the external resources that impact their life. The resource questions that contribute to a participant's Q-Score and R-Battery Score involve how engaged individuals are within their social networks, how they seek out support, and how they take action to advocate for themselves in different environments.

### Support Networks

The Q-Life starts by letting students investigate who contributes to their positive support network, as well as helping them to reconcile with individuals who may have a negative impact on their R-Battery. By doing this, students can begin to recognize individuals in their life who they may want to spend more or less time around, to make sure that they are prioritizing their own wellness and R-Battery.

### A special word on Social Media

*A portion of the Q-Life is dedicated to educating students on the role of social media and its positive and negative effects. Throughout adolescence and young adulthood, negative effects of social media are often associated with lack of self-regulation (Government of Canada, 2021). Overuse is a common issue with technology and social media, and research has shown that this can lead to problems with sleep and cognitive functioning as well as increase the chances of experiencing mental health issues such as depression and anxiety (Government of Canada, 2021). Physical health can also be impacted negatively with increased use of social media, as more time is spent online and is sedentary rather than physically active. Additionally, social media can create challenges with identity formation due to the constant state of comparison-based interaction that many people take part in when they use social media. Furthermore, because social interaction primarily takes place in a virtual environment, individuals feel isolated; and feelings of loneliness are reported to be higher than ever in Canada (Twenge et al., 2019). Although the majority of research concentrates on the negative impacts of social media, it is important to acknowledge that there have been positive findings as well. Social media provides a way for individuals to maintain relationships and network with individuals who share similar interests (Government of Canada, 2021). Also, more online contacts could be a predictor of an increased feeling of life satisfaction and feelings of additional emotional support (Ellison et al., 2007). Within the Q-Life, students are asked to complete a social media reflection activity that specifically looks to help the individual determine how much time they are dedicating to social media platforms and what their perceptions are on that investment.*

### Accountability

To build on personal feelings of accountability and responsibility, students take part in reflection activities to increase self-confidence. These provide students with a new perspective on how they can be a support not only to others but also to themselves. Furthermore, students are led through an activity of setting SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, time-oriented) goals to create internal accountability and provide a form of motivation to accomplish tasks. Students are invited to connect with individuals who are within their support network to help them stay accountable to certain goals they may set or tasks they would like to accomplish. This teaches them about the effective and important role that external accountability plays.

### Fair Treatment

To explore fairness, students consider previous instances within their life where they felt they were treated both fairly and unfairly. In addition to this, students learn how to create an action plan by developing appropriate responses for future situations in which they feel they are experiencing unfairness. While the Q-Life cannot address the myriad challenges that marginalized groups face in the student experience, the Q-Life activities can help students learn that they are in control of how they approach possibly unfair situations. As well, the activities make it easier for students to understand and regulate their reactions and emotions when these situations arise.

### Experiences of Control

With regards to experiences of control, students are given the opportunity to determine what aspects of life they feel they have limited control over. They then use this skill-building opportunity to consider how they can achieve their desired level of control.

### Financial Security

Although each student's financial situation is unique, there are skills they can learn and implement to help them alter their perspective and experience and reduce mental strain or stress when managing money. To effectively do this, students draft a budget plan to recognize how, when, why, and where they are spending their money, then come to a conclusion about what it means to live within their means by evaluating what items fit within the plan.

## Summary on Resources

These opportunities provided by the Q-Life help students become aware of the control they do have over many of the external resources in their lives. The life-long skills taught within the Q-Life give insight about when, where, and how external resources may affect each student. As a result, they can make sure their R-Battery is fully charged, bringing them a step closer to living the Q-Life.

# Bringing it Together

Although the Q-Life experience is presented in five separate plugs, it is our underpinning philosophy of the Q-life that positive life behaviours are intertwined and complementary. The Q-life has been designed to allow students to integrate each skill learned throughout the process. By doing this, students learn to use their plugs and daily charges in conjunction with one another. This integration of self-awareness, self-reflection, building a strong foundation, increasing personal power, and accessing resources means that students are able to use each component in every aspect of their life to be as mentally and physically healthy as possible.

Students are encouraged to check in with themselves regularly to distinguish which areas of their lives may be more charged or depleted. Then, depending on what they find, students can adjust what plugs they are using to ensure they are consistently maintaining a fully charged R-Battery. The vision for the Q-Life experience is that engagement is driven by the user based on curiosity, wants and needs. Our dynamic Jackhabbit platform provides a way to deliver the appropriate content to the person in an individualized way, at the right time when they are ready for it, to maximize engagement and outcomes.

The Q-Life is a holistic wellness program that provides students with the opportunity to reduce the impacts of adversity and stress that affect them throughout their day-to-day life. This experience simultaneously develops a resiliency-based skill set for students to use throughout their post-secondary journey, which builds their overall health and wellness. The experience can further be integrated into whatever setting they may find themselves in the future. The Q-Life uses an accessible eHealth platform and has integrated Dr. Peter Cornish's Stepped Care 2.0(c) model to ensure that every student can have their own form of personalized support and success. To accomplish the goals of the Q-Life, five key "plugs" are introduced – self-awareness, self-reflection, foundation, personal power, and resources – that make up each individual's R-Battery. The program then provides educational lessons, skill-building opportunities, and external resources to help individuals develop their skills within these areas. All these components help to charge a student's R-Battery. This modular learning process gives students the opportunity to complete their wellness journey at their own pace, allowing them time to appreciate each part of the process. As well, the Q-Life suggests to students to return to the program, or any one of its lessons, whenever they feel they need additional support or a refresher of a specific concept.

The goal of the Q-Life is to ensure that each student lives a life filled with more resilience, more happiness, and more abundance. The Q-Life is designed so that students will feel engaged, excited, and accountable throughout their experience of seeking complete mental, physical, and emotional wellness.

*The Q-Life experience teaches students strategies for continually charging their R-Battery to make sure they are living the Q-Life each day.*

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