

RECOGNIZING THE EXPERTISE OF THE
UNCERTIFIED SELF-DIRECTED LEARNER

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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**RECOGNIZING THE EXPERTISE OF
THE UNCERTIFIED SELF-DIRECTED LEARNER**

by

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Abstract

This study comprises a phenomenological analysis of self-described personal experiences of learning undertaken outside the structure of formal schooling. The purpose of this research is to increase understanding of the contributions of self-directed informal initiatives in learning toward educational and community capacity building. This study adds to Merriam and Caffarella's (1991) and Candy's (1991) analysis of self-directed learning concepts by researching within the lived context of the learner and giving precedence to the learner's experience over teaching models and principles.

In-depth, phenomenological interviews were conducted with six men and two women, ranging in age from 45 to 90, living on the south coast of Newfoundland. Access to the participants was achieved through network or snowball sampling, based on the question, "Do you know anybody who taught themselves "from scratch?" The findings, written in narrative form, provide rich description concerning participants' learning experiences. The analysis indicates that self-directed, uncertified learners have certain characteristics i.e., ability/willingness to set goals, positive attitude, internal locus of control, an appreciation of the value of work and a willingness to take risks. Particular learning strategies employed include trial and error, networking, observation, mentally preparing for work, organized thinking, trusting and using instinct and positive self-affirmation. Learners believe in themselves, are satisfied with life overall, remember significant mentors, are curious, use positive self-talk and take on challenges readily, all within a social context of life and learning in small, rural communities.

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Chapter One

Introduction

In order to achieve an independent, self-sufficient developed society it is necessary to understand, develop and nurture human resources. At the same time it is clear that human beings and social interactions are rich and complex. In this era it is common to allow economic pressures and a glorification of technology to reflect in a tendency to process and mechanize human learning and work activity so that it more neatly answers economic, scientific and other social planning questions. However, recognition of the experiences of individuals is required in balancing human and technological needs.

In the last decade, Newfoundland lost the cod fishery, the traditional means of livelihood in the province. More than 28,000 people became unemployed as a result. Because my work involves federal government provision of employment counselling, I met and heard from many what these changes meant on a personal level. More recently I have been involved with in-service courses for employees serving clients and the examination of the effectiveness of programming designed to counter unemployment.

In this research, self-directed learners offer insights into the meanings individuals give to their learning initiatives. This is significant in terms of what these learners contributed to me in my responsibility to facilitate individuals access to *their* best choices in dealing with social transition. Recording and analyzing personal descriptions of

learning is the most accurate way to begin to understand what learning means to the learner. As I approached the study, I realized that although I worked the summer after grade eleven in a fish plant, my direct experience with small communities and fish plants ended then. However, through my counselling work, I have continued to witness rich and diverse experiences. When I met clients in the early 90s who were displaced from their work by the cod moratorium I realized that most of them had never used federal government employment counselling services. Academically and socially they had been invisible to me though they formed a significant portion of the provincial working population.

Within adult education and employment services, the dominant answer to the moratorium and unemployment seemed to be education and training. Yet I was invariably meeting many dynamic people who were budget conscious, creative, resourceful, involved astute parents showing every sign of being self-sufficient. It occurred to me that their knowledge, in many respects, likely exceeded many available education and training offerings. Public and private schools seemed largely unready to meet new students "rich in experience" or those assertive consumers who truly wanted to get the best educational opportunity available. Many unemployed fisheries workers recoiled from the idea of returning to school, but a lot of individuals signed up for what was available (Robinson, 1994, Williams, 1996). Although fishers and fish plant workers were often described as if homogenous in terms of their educational needs, I saw that many acquired uncertified training and that each person brought unique learning experiences with them.

I sought to understand non-traditional learning and soon began to recognize the potential implications for an improved collaboration between the formal learning system (perceived as having power in validating or negating learning) and the learner willing to learn. As part of the formal system and as a practitioner, I was often praised for my understanding and involvement. At the same time, however, I sensed there are significant systemic barriers in partnering with the "public" toward social and educational development. As well, I realized that I did not have a good sense of how to encompass the contributions of non-traditional learners nor did I know exactly what those contributions looked like. I could understand that educators were making efforts in improving access through development of such strategies as prior learning assessment but I saw this as often positioned to help non-traditional learners fit the mainstream system. I would have preferred to see a more equal collaboration. I began to ask, for instance, why it was that so many consumers seem to see themselves as outside the construction of knowledge and knowledge delivery systems. One of my employment counselling clients, age thirty-five, had built two boats. He had successfully run two fishing businesses, losing the first through no error of his own and then starting in again. When faced with training he said, "I know I'm smart because of what I've done but I don't know if I'm that kind of smart," that is, smart enough to master a programme in electronics technology. My work in employment counselling involved exploration with clients of their aptitudes and interests but it was to focus upon the learners' experiences of learning.

In order to recognize oneself as a participant in a learning society it is necessary that one sees models of involvement and participation. Everyone learns and it is widely accepted that independent learning can be surprisingly impressive, yet somehow our society holds on to a hierarchical valuing of knowledge, depending on where it was attained and if it is certified. As Adrienne Rich said, "When someone, say, with the authority of a teacher, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked in a mirror and saw nothing (Rich, cited by Bruner, 1990)."

Thus, after years in social planning and counselling, I came to see that my knowledge of the experience of learning was limited and I had plenty of reason to reflect and be chagrined about how little I knew of the heritage of learning and social development in Newfoundland. I am an urban dweller and have been one for the past thirty years, ever since I finished that summer job at the fish plant. Since then I have acquired more than twenty years of formal schooling. While I have deeply enjoyed many of my learning experiences, I marvel at, and envy, the everyday habit of finding out "what's new" that seems inherent in the attitude of those I interviewed. When course work for the Masters' program introduced me to feminist literature describing women's "ways of knowing" (Belenky, 1986), I was intrigued and decided to explore the perspective of learners' experiences of creating knowledge for oneself (rather than through a formal education system). I wanted to profile this understudied population and to render then visible as a point of reference in building a greater understanding of what it

feels like to learn on your own. Appreciation of the diversity of experiences in human development is essential to a true inclusive dialogue between all learners, formal and informal, regarding the shape of our collective future.

Eight participants from the South Coast of Newfoundland, two women and six men, ranging in age from forty-five to ninety, participated in this research. Only one completed high school. Over a lifetime, these participants enriched their lives with a large diversity of skills and knowledge. One person was single, four widowed and three married. One participant died since I completed the study. At the time of the interviews all lived in their own homes and maintained an active life.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is not to validate participants learning but instead to understand learners' descriptions of their experiences of uncertified self-directed learning. While explorations of learning can be of any experience with learning, I was particularly interested in seeking out special personal initiatives. Candy's (1991) four domains of self-directed learning helped clarify the concept as containing components of personal autonomy, independence, willingness and some ability and independent self-control which occurs without affiliation to an institution. This research into uncertified "expert" learners' experience was guided by the following broad questions:

How do uncertified learners perceive themselves as learners?

How do uncertified learners describe their learning processes?

What factors are seen by learners to have influenced their experience?

Definition of terms

Several terms and phrases such as "learner," "uncertified," and "recognized as expert learner" require definition. For the purpose of this research a *learner* was defined as someone who actively interacts with his/her environment in order to change behaviors, ideas and skills. *Uncertified* refers to a person who has not received institutional certification but who has effectively self-taught i.e., skills in community leadership, a trade, fishing, subsistence beyond what is ordinarily enough, etc. Finally, *recognized expert* simply suggests the acknowledgement by one person of another's initiative in learning. Thomas (1991) characterized learning as individual, influenced by other people, lifelong, taking time and not a process that can be coerced. Kolb (1993) described learning as "a holistic process of adaptation to the world (p. 148). "

Significance of the Study

As indicated earlier learning has often been proposed in international, national and local policy as a key answer to economic problems (Commission on Employment and Unemployment, 1985, Labour Force Development Board, Report, 1995 and Learning a Living, UNESCO, 1996). Learning is recognized in this way as essential to social and personal adjustment, but what has generally been overlooked are questions about the kind of learning, who designs it, and for what particular people and environments. For example, the programme emphasis of this generation is primarily focused on technological skill development as this kind of learning is often seen as the solution to economic problems yet many rural residents ask for the opportunity to live and work

within rural communities. Thus the hopes and dreams of the learner are too frequently dismissed. Research such as this can serve to create bridges to access the expertise and energy that mobilizes individual ambition.

Adult education, as a discipline, is new and theory development is still in a formative stage. Listed currently as one of the main growth industries, the field of adult education requires new thinking and depth of perception. Grace (1996) critiques the premises put forward by Knowles (1989) who is recognized as the major contributor to commonly supported adult learning principles. Grace questions several of the underlying assumptions in Knowles' work starting with the most basic distinctions between adult education (andragogy) and pedagogy (the education of children). He further argues that Knowles leaves out sociological, philosophical and other perspectives necessary to the understanding of learning experiences of individuals. Grace suggests also that Knowles, in focusing upon the individual's learning does not attend enough to the fact that learning is socially focused and collaborative. All of this suggests the importance of understanding and examining learning experiences from the learners' perspective.

A review of adult education research related to self-directed learning uncovers very little reference to lived experiences of adult learners thriving outside curricula set by institutions and no recent studies of individuals without previous formal learning. Shank (1994) assigned students of qualitative research to find natural experts, in this case expert tradespeople, and to use observations of these experts to inform their understanding of education and educational research. By inviting exploration of learning, Shank is

implying the need for theories and definitions of education, which are sufficiently broad to explain learning that takes place outside of educational institutions. This is echoed by McCann (1991), who said, "Educational theorists, particularly those associated with the human capital ideology, are often tempted to over value the school as an agent for social change (p. 114). " Acknowledging that education is more complex than a specific set of courses or skills means recognizing that new knowledge gleaned directly from the learners' lived contexts can contribute to educators, policy makers, and future consumers of formal education. Furthermore, Merriam and Caffarella (1991) indicate that drawing understandings from the learners' lived context is ideal since that is, in effect, the context of self-directed learning.

This research is timely. More and more educators and community developers are beginning to recognize that if the mind and heart is not engaged in education and employment planning, or if planning does not connect in any real way to the goals of individuals, then sustainable change or development is highly unlikely. This research should help make these connections more visible. The energy that is evident in independent learning is not a resource that we can afford to overlook.

Limitations

This research is limited by the eight participants' personal interpretation and memory of their own personal learning experiences and is not generalizable to all independent learners. The uncertified learners all live in either very tiny or relatively

small communities on the South Coast of Newfoundland. Except for one, they all learned outside the formal school system.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Given the attention to rapid social and educational changes, it seems clear that few old formulas fit. The premise that one must become committed to "life long learning" has gained precedence. No longer does the "degree" stand as a permanent proof of ability and intelligence. However, "life long learning" seems to have become interpreted as going back to school to "upgrade" or to become computer literate. Rapid change and society's attempts to cope have increased interest in life long learning. How some people create, from personal strengths, solutions to life's challenges through the use of informal learning is the focus of this study. It is therefore necessary to understand the learning process and the feelings of autonomous learners.

What inherent critical thinking exists in the practice of self-directed learning? Why explore this phenomenon? Concerns are frequently expressed about the schools' valuing of science over arts and about the contribution of a diverse range of skills required to ensure future economic security (Debate in the *Globe and Mail* December 13, 1999; letter and follow up to the editor). These are clearly not easily understood concepts. Often simplistic ideas like "everyone must be technologically literate" are seen to be the only answer to questions regarding economic success, which in turn seems to be equated with personal success.

The debate about the learner as a receiver of knowledge or techniques as opposed to a learner in control of his or her learning outcomes raises questions about the understanding of self-directed learning and consequently the will to foster climates for self-directed learning. Does this society possess too conservative a mind set about educational process and practice? Is there a market for self-directed learning in a world with values largely framed within a formal context? As educators, exploring non-formal autonomous learning, we seek clues to potential alternative designs of educational interventions, i.e., the timing of lessons according to the learners' curiosity and context or approaches which enable learners to identify and find resources as they reach personal learning goals. Formal education has provided us over time with what is now a taken-for-granted experience of a proper and approved type of schooling with its accompanying vocabulary (tests, failure, awards, access to higher learning, etc.). This differs from the sometimes interactive bartered knowledge or intergenerational transfer of knowledge more common in the informal learning environment. Newfoundland and Labrador is one province which still has older learners in small communities who are self-taught to high levels and who can share a unique view of that kind of learning. In a world of such rapid change where confusion surrounds choices determining security or work, absolute claims on the validity of technology as an answer to economic and personal well being are questionable. The individual quest for more personally derived solutions competes for recognition.

Since this study centers on individual self-directed learning versus the self-directed learning that occurs within formal learning, this literature review focuses particularly on studies offering insight into how adults describe their personal life experiences with acquiring knowledge and skill. Theories of learning provided help frame some of the most applicable notions of how individuals process new material and how they construct meaning from experiences both alone and through interaction with others.

Jarvis (1987) draws a distinction between teaching and learning, pointing out that teaching is rooted in psychological and behaviorist definitions of adult development which tends to focus on the individual whereas learning is a complex process occurring within a social context and, as such, is largely a social construct. Merriam and Simpson (1989) suggest the applicability of phenomenological research in exploring personal experience. Other authors also advocate examination of self-directed learning within the context of the person's life situation rather than by examining society or institutions (Merriam and Caffarella, 1991). According to Merriam and Caffarella, learning on one's own, always a main way of acquiring knowledge, is being rediscovered for its flexibility in pace, process and style. It becomes a means for change management and efficient skill acquisition. Of course, we must also examine broad economic, political and social trends as we increase our understanding of personal experiences of learning within communities. This study seeks to highlight what self-directed learners teach us about knowledge acquisition. Although Tough (1967) studied individual learning projects, little

is evident in other research on individuals' experiences, especially those having little or no exposure to formal learning.

The democratic implications around the power of, and access to, knowledge have been explored by Freire (1982). Likewise, Goldberger et al., (1996) have also drawn attention to the power factors in the construction and evaluation of knowledge, by posing such questions as: Who has voice and who is silent? How are collaborative learning, cultural diversity and local knowledge recognized? In what ways do the informal environment and process of self-directed learning offer us a means to explore how one comes to know? Since many individuals have long secured their survival and means to both happiness and life's amenities through extraordinary self-propelled accomplishments, it is important to understand personal experiences. Goldberger and her colleagues acknowledge individuals' awareness of their own roles in constructing and owning knowledge. Using results of in-depth interviews with women, Belenky et al., (1986) describe knowing as a condition within which women feel themselves as "creators of knowledge and come to value both their subjective and objective ways of knowing (p.15)." They suggest that individual awareness is a step to making up frames of reference of their own, rather than relying on imposed views of valued knowledge. The focus in this study is not to examine the imbalance of access to knowledge nor the ways diverse knowing may be less "valued." However, through exploring the richness of an individual's experience and enterprises in learning, it is hoped that there will be a greater recognition of the avid "uncertified" learner.

Views about self directed learning

Few solid theories anchor our understanding of what actually happens in the individual experience of self-directed learning, thus we need to start with a basic understanding of learning. Learning ranges in meaning from Collins (1987) dictionary from "knowledge got by study" to Merriam and Caffarella's (1991) expansive view of learning as a process, not a product. Kolb (1993) describes learning as a "holistic process of adaptation to the world (p.148)."

How do we define self- directed learning then? Is it a better, more independent grade of learning or simply learning as a more personally driven, active process? According to Knowles (1975) the process of self-directed learning is one in which individuals take the initiative with or without others to diagnose their learning needs, formulate learning goals, identify resources for learning and select and implement learning strategies. Brookfield (1986) defines self-directed learning as "deliberate and purposeful, occurring outside institutions, not accredited and, voluntary (p. 47)."

Garrison (1992) describes critical thinking as core to self directed learning allowing also for the potential of others to support the knowledge acquisition. Shunk (1996) views "self-regulated learning [as] the process whereby "students" activate and sustain behaviors, cognitions, and affects in a way that is oriented toward the attainment of learning goals (p.448)." In this view, components of self-direction often include a positive self-concept, the drive to self-actualization, motivation to develop competence, a

sense of self-worth, an ability to change beliefs and behaviors after judging performance on the goal.

Candy (1991) suggests that self-directed learning is a complex concept because it seems to have no agreed-upon meaning, described sometimes as a process, a personal style governed by one's traits, or a productivity strategy employed by business to have employees learn new skills. The premise of this study is that self-directed learning is a personal style or element of character governed by many elements of one's history, social context and personality development.

Perspectives on the Nature of Learning

Cross (1988) suggests that the common learning theories, behaviorist, humanist and developmental theory, apply more to what is learned than who is doing the learning. The humanist theory connects learning to self-understanding; the behavioral theory is related to practical skill acquisition; and the developmental theory to teaching personal development. The behaviorist perspective examines cause and effect and looks at behavior as something that can be explained and controlled. Examples of training based in this thinking are competency modules for military, government and business training. Conversely, with its focus upon potential and emotions, the humanist theory encapsulates learning that wholly engages the person and their experiences, the intellect and feelings, the logical and the intuitive as described by Carl Rogers (<http://www.infed.org/thinkers/et-rogers.htm>). While adult learning theory espouses

humanistic ideals, classroom rules and exams often seem more fitted to the behaviorist model. The cognitivist theory of learning Bruner and Piaget, (cited in Good & Brophy, 1994) emphasizes insight, memory and perception in the acquisition of knowledge. For example, Hartley (1998) discusses a cognitivist approach in which learners' prior knowledge and the learners' acquisition of strategies and plans for learning are recognized. Shunk (1996) notes that organization of data improves recall and that people often impose their own organization where there is none. While this organization sometimes involves verbal meaning, images may also be a way of storing information. The core concept is that learners build knowledge or that:

"Learning takes place in contexts and learners form or construct much of what they learn and understand as a function of their experiences in situations (Shunk, 1996, p. 279)."

General learning theory offers many explanations for what happens in the acquisition of knowledge. Trial and error in problem solving involve experience and knowledge plus a set of rules about what one might do in the future. Rewards, as in successes that occur, are informative to individuals regarding their capabilities. Other influential factors are values, goal orientation and help-seeking. This general checklist covering practice, experimentation, rewards, goals and values relate to all learning, self-directed or directed.

Rotter, cited in Shunk (1996) integrates learning and personality theories into what is called a social learning theory. Four variables are posed: behavior potential, expectancy, reinforcement value and the psychological situation. According to this

theory, no matter what positive reinforcement occurred in the past, people have to *believe* they will achieve. Thus, understanding theories of motivation is critical to understanding self-directed learning. Rotter included in his social learning theory the concept of locus of control. People's dominant belief may be that outcomes happen independent of how they behave (an external locus of control) or that outcomes are highly contingent upon how they behave (an internal locus of control).

The capacity to understand self-directed learning could be approached from many angles, thanks to past research. It may be approached from the position of adult characteristics (Knowles, 1980; Cross, 1981), an adult's life situation, the theories that exist regarding personal changes in consciousness (Mezirow, 1991; Freire 1982) and from the work of Belenky et al., (1986) who also explore awareness of knowing and different levels of knowing.

A wide range of other related theories and ideas has been applied to the issue of self-directed learning. Bandura (1986), for instance, uses social cognitive theory to highlight human learning through doing or observing others perform, i.e., through role models people acquire knowledge, rules, skills, strategies, beliefs and attitudes, storing the learning perhaps unconsciously for later use.

Constructivism, a psychological and philosophical theory contends that individuals form much of what they learn and understand through interaction with a situation in the acquisition and refinement of skills and knowledge (Brooks and Brooks, 1993). This view contrasts with behavioral views that stress the environment's influence,

and also with cognitivist (information processing) approaches that put the locus of learning in the mind rather than in the context in which learning occurs. Constructivism suggests that the world influences individual's beliefs through experiences, models and teaching or that previously acquired knowledge leads to new knowledge; or that it is a blend of both (Shunk, 1996).

Mezirow (1991) explores a concept called transformative learning, suggesting that what happens is not as influential in our lives as how we interpret what happens. The interpretation then "determines actions, well being and performance." Problem solvers change their frames of reference and using personal will, set in motion the future. Rogers (1999) argues a person learns what is necessary for self-maintenance or enhancement. Gardner (1999) advocates teaching so that a person has data that can be adapted and altered as needed to address life situations.

Experiential learning is evident in situations where "ideas are not fixed ...but formed and reformed through experience. The tendency to define learning in terms of outcome can be a definition of non-learning...in that the failure to modify ideas and habits as a result of experience is maladaptive (Thorpe et al, 1994, p.144). "

Besides the theories noted above, many disciplines such as psychology, philosophy, sociology, folklore and education inform theories about learning and self directed learning but it is difficult with different cultures, ages and life experiences to pinpoint a generic truth. However, growing in popularity is the learning styles approach (Kolb, 1984) which emphasizes that individuals perceive and process information in very

different ways, and that they are “smart” in different ways. Gardner (1985) discussed intelligence as problem-solving ability and the capacity to create things that are valued within the cultural setting, and described a kind of intelligence distributed among individuals in different ways evident in categories of skills such as verbal, logical, visual and spatial, rhythmic, interpersonal and interpersonal. Goleman (1998), in his work on emotional intelligence explains that self-esteem, assertiveness and other maturities for getting along and through life successfully are too often underrated. Gardner and Goleman’s work have prepared the stage, as has feminist theory, as described by Belenky et al., (1986), to look at the diversity of human capacity and possibility.

Substantive Background

In reviewing the literature, I sought out information about learning by individuals in informal settings, such as the small communities in which participants of this study live. The context of learning, as well as the individual learning experience is clearly important, but I found few studies that explored the context as critical, with the notable exception of the examination of “apprenticeship” to certain trades. Communities in Newfoundland and Labrador during the early part of this century provided unique learning laboratories and a social context in which a web of learning existed naturally. According to Lave and Wenger (1991):

“...learners participate in a community of practitioners. Mastery of knowledge and skill involves moving toward full participation in the sociocultural practices

of a community. Legitimate peripheral participation provides a way to speak about the relations between newcomers (in some communities often the young) and old timers ... to identify artifacts and communities of knowledge and practice (p.29). "

This view suggests that it is important to challenge educational ideologies by making room for consideration of learning environments and methods conducive to diverse ways of knowing. As Sui (1998) puts it, " it is impossible to ignore the importance of diversity and variety in our daily lives...the tradition and heritage of one group of people affects their value judgements and influences what they believe to be important in education (p.13). " Sui suggests that we need to be sensitive to local history, wants and needs. This is echoed by many writers who imply that learning must be connected to practical concerns, grounded in the customs of the learner and suited to human as well as technological development (Warnock, 1995, Postman, 1999, Blackwell & Seabrook, 1993, Applebee, 1994). Brookfield (1986) directs our attention to the "richness of differing class and ethnic groups actively exploring ideas, beliefs and practices resulting in a society able to recreate itself [versus]... a society where inquiry, reflection and exploration is the prerogative of a select group. Such a society is likely to be static, ossified and hierarchical (p.1)." Brookfield cautions that assuming formal education is good for all may not be a view taken by individuals who, though so labeled, do not see themselves, nor do their peers see them as non-literate.

Who becomes a self-directed learner and what difference do experiences in childhood make? Studies of childhood development and all stages of adult development inform adult education. Certain generalizations are accepted as belonging specifically and exclusively to the adult learning experience (e.g., an adult chooses learning in response to demands, usually as a means to independence, and is most interested in immediately applicable skills) but how do the first experiences of learning and self-concept reflect in approaches all throughout life? The need for research into learning habits fostered in childhood and how these influence adult beliefs, behavior and personality is an important subject for analysis. Seiffert (1997), researching emotions on self-perception and goal attainment in school children, found students' perceptions of teachers as nurturing to be a factor in fostering their confidence and learning orientation. In researching the experiences of the informal learner, could "teachers" then become a term interchangeable with parents, relatives, peers or significant others?

While adult education research contains little reference to lived experiences of adults thriving through independent learning endeavors, ethnographic collection and analysis of stories can provide insights into routes to achievement other than formal learning. Belenky et al., (1986), with questions arising from feminist research, explored: how is knowledge viewed; is it motivated by a need to know or that one is obliged to know; in personal approach which is valued, the rational or the intuitive? What is the relationship between learning and life ...and the context of learning (p.237)? Some agencies have tried to build bridges between the formal and the informal sector.

Moreland and Lovett (1997) note the Ulster's People's College effort to build connections between learning through and doing what is perceived to be more challenging, i.e., intellectual learning. Prior learning assessment (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1995), professional development (Clandinin and Connelly, 1995), the promotion of life long learning and distance education are examples of some initiatives. Overall these efforts show not only a valuing of the learners' views, but also a desire to help the learner fit into or stay up to date with mainstream expectations. Shank (1994), on the other hand, sent students to look for natural experts, in this case expert tradespeople, and to use observation of these experts to inform their understandings of education and educational research. By inviting exploration of learning beyond the school setting, Shank is implying the need for theories and definitions of education sufficiently broad to explain learning that takes place outside of educational institutions.

The substantive background is enhanced by a number of studies that focus on self-directed learning techniques. A description follows:

(i.) Self-directed learning viewed as deliberately planned

Tough (1967) interviewed 40 adults who undertook learning projects, taking the same description of self directed learning as does Knowles (1980), "primary responsibility for planning, initiating and conducting the learning project (p.3)." Participants in his study were randomly selected, not on the basis of having self-taught, but as college graduates of different ages and occupations. Tough selected twelve items

agreed (among his colleagues) to be key in designing a learning project. Items included learning space, timing of learning, costs, how long to learn, the goal and how to achieve it, accessing resources, dealing with barriers, self doubt, skill and persistence despite difficulties. Tough concluded that individuals were motivated, used many assistants to reach goals, made decisions about what to look for and material to use, and evaluated their own progress. Tough's study was based on the premise that: self-teaching follows the same general process as if one were one's own teacher; tasks undertaken were similar to those of professional educators and, as such, self-directed learning was something that could be taught. Tough identified the focus on a pre-set twelve-item list of learning tasks and the memory of participants regarding their learning projects as the main limitation of his study. Tough's participants were primarily middle class, formally educated and urban.

Spear and Mocker (1984), in contrast to Tough (1967) and Hiemstra's (1975) research took the idea that learners pre-plan their actions and argued that self-directed learners learn more by chance and that the resources or circumstances in their path largely determine the type and direction of learning. Spear and Mocker interviewed 78 urban learners who had less than high school education. These adult self-directed learners engaged in projects including adult basic education, health, job entry skills, child rearing and leisure activities. Using open-ended questions, researchers asked the learners to describe their experiences. While Spear and Mocker acknowledge a logic and purposefulness in the learning, they suggest an *organizing circumstance*, a negative or positive change that becomes the directing force which sequences progress, and not

necessarily in linear fashion. Circumstances created during one episode provide for choices that then determine the next events. The plan is sometimes not even conscious. For example, an interest in gardening might spring from a newly discovered book. Interesting questions arise from this: what knowledge, for example, might a learner have versus what is needed; what actions are spontaneous and which are directed; what is predictable and what happens by chance, how critical is a learner's ability to find resources, and how do people get started if they are not aware of what has to be learned? All of these questions lead into this inquiry about individual experiences. Do particular life experiences and personal attitudes lie behind the ability to identify, recognize and find resources?

(ii) The role of personality

Candy (1991) suggested that learning might be largely a consequence of personality, within the context of the individual's life. He observes that self-directed individuals are inclined to be autonomous and possess a core belief system which propels their action in learning. He points out that few efforts are totally self-directed, since individuals coexist within a social system where accident and chance move lives forward in directions that are rarely linear. Even self-directed learners rarely think of themselves as such, nor are they necessarily self-directing in all areas of their learning.

Oddi (1987) also positions personality as the framework from which to study self-directed learning, explaining that an individual might well have the skills to design the

goal and find resources but lack the persistence (a personality trait) to proceed. On the same note, Peck (1978) in his oft-quoted *The Road Less Traveled* suggests that once people realize that life is not easy and cease to rail against the fact, the energy then is re-directed toward other efforts toward creating the shape of one's life. Glasser (<http://www.wglasser.com/whatisact.htm>), a reality therapist, also introduces the personal in his explanation of choice theory, which suggests that learning is inspired by what the person wants most at a particular time e.g., survival, love, freedom or another need.

Delving even further into the psyche of the learner, Boud and Griffin (1987) describe the role of instinct i.e., gaining knowledge without specific steps or planning but instead relying upon a sense of what is right. The assumption is that learners are each part of a community with shared goals, challenges and language, meaning that those common symbols and values may connect to this instinctual sensing of learning. The questions they raise are: what is the relationship of instinctual learning to self-esteem or self-trust, to story and tacit knowledge, to observation, etc. and in what kinds of environments is intuitive learning most likely?

Intuitive learning, according to Tremblay and Danis (1984) means being aware of the value of the unconscious, while recognizing multiple realities and being open to the unexpected, just as Lee (1976) describes the joy in autonomy as "a state of being in which it does not occur to me to question my perception...in all my being...when a thought buds and develops...I greet my feeling and thinking (p. 1)." Similarly, Covey (1994), who writes advice to help business people, suggests that an act begins in the

intuitive self, before it becomes a mental blueprint or the preconceiving of one's plan of action.

(iii) Self-directed learner characteristics

Gibbons (1980) examined biographies of famous people spanning 100 years (e.g., Virginia Woolf, Malcolm X, and Walt Disney). Individuals were chosen because they became expert without formal training past high school or the equivalent. Readers of the biographies, on a scale of 1-7, identified key items significantly influencing the person's life: background, personal characteristics, learning methods, relationship with others, incidents in their lives, motives and attitudes. The study used specific definitions of these items. Biographies were chosen, not to highlight famous people, but to look for patterns in the lives of self-taught achievers. Forty of 154 characteristics were identified as key to achievement in learning. These included concentration of effort in the specific field, curiosity, single mindedness, powers of observation, non-conformity, a good memory and charisma. Mothers, it was noted, were often the major parental influence. Gibbons and this group of researchers drew the following observations with regard to principles of self-education.

Self: the locus of control and motivation is within the self-educator, guided by a vision; this theme of self-education is apparent through life;

Task: concentration focuses upon a specialty that tends to combine past experiences, talents, interest and opportunities;

Attributes: there is a tendency to use patterns of learning which work best for them, e.g., observation, experience, trial and error, to show traits associated with character (self-discipline, sensitivity, industriousness) and have attributes associated with drive, independence, nonconformity and talent;

Resources: learners tend to use reading and remembering when access to information and guidance is vital;

Personality: cultivated in atmosphere of warmth, activity and positive relationship; seem to like others and to be liked;

Methods: a great skill diversity is evident in what it takes for one individual to become expert; concentration was developed through active, experiential, challenging means rather than passive, abstract, teacher directed means.

While narrative study of participants who learn outside formal systems seems to be rare, the literature suggests a wealth of presumably identifiable traits and characteristics of the self-directed learner. Candy's (1991) summary review of research on self-directed learning resulted in the following list of characteristics: the autonomous learner is methodical/disciplined, logical/analytical, receptive/self aware, curious/open and motivated, flexible, interdependent/interpersonally competent, persistent/responsible, venturesome/creative, confident/positive self concept, independent/self sufficient, able to seek and retrieve information, able to learn, and finally able to develop criteria for evaluating what is pertinent. (pp.459-467)

Though such lists of characteristics are readily available, the concept of self-directed learning is missing a solid theoretical base. This absence was addressed by Long in a paper presented at the 1989 Annual Meeting of the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education. There is little evidence that his challenge has been taken up in the years since he presented. However some of the questions he raised are key to understanding the participants in this study: Is self-directed theory related to personality? Is self-directed learning developmental? Can self-directed learning be enhanced or hindered?

(iv) Informal self-directed learning in the social context

What environments cultivate independent learning and which contradict the possibility? Ryff and Singer (1998) say that lives lived with purpose are essential to individual and community wellness. As well, the characteristics from biographies analyzed by Gibbons (1980) suggest lives fully lived employing all of their potential and energy, without either dependence upon, or the benefit of formal education. As Caffarella and O'Donnell (1987) indicated, most studies are with individuals who have had formal education. However, they highlight two informal studies, one by Bayha (1984) who studied self-taught farmers and another by Leean and Sisco (1980) who interviewed rural farmers in Vermont. Despite extensive searching, I was able to find only a few studies which explore the personal experiences of learning in social contexts, from the self-taught learners' perspective.

As indicated earlier, Merriam and Caffarella (1991) suggest that learning on one's own is a context in itself. In the days of guilds and apprenticeships this was more accepted then than in the present when learning appears to be valuable according to where it takes place. Complex problem solving and exchanges of expert knowledge are not uncommon in Newfoundland and Labrador or anywhere in the world. In navigating boats, remembering exact fishing grounds, shoals and danger points in the fog (prior to the availability of sophisticated radar equipment), self-taught navigation and skilled fishing was learned through keen observation over time, combining intergenerational teaching, instinct, wits, and trial and error. In this way, skills were passed on, experimented with and adaptations were invented in emergencies. Torff and Sternberg (cited in Smith and Pourchot, 1998) discuss a study undertaken by Ceci and Liker (1986, 1988) of complex mathematical formulas used by jockeys in horse racing to calculate speeds and the interplay of different factors impacting the outcome of races, advocating increased "contact with expert models and participation in apprenticeship-type interactions (p.122)." They warn against isolation from this kind of learning opportunity in favour of reliance on "sole providers" of answers and information.

Cognitive anthropology, the search for meanings in expressed values and beliefs, provides a theoretical base for studying meaning-making and knowledge acquisition in the social context. LeCompte and Preissle (1993) offer questions to guide ethnographic exploration and the methodology used in this approach. They offer these questions as a guide:

"What parts of the material world are important to people; how is cultural knowledge recognized; how does language reflect the cognitive processes of individual human beings and what behavior is expected and appropriate?" (p.131).

Individual stories reveal similarities and differences, philosophies and visions which direct lives, work ethics established and accepted as absolute, spiritual beliefs, etc., all indicating that the roots of independence are reflected in independent learning. Clearly, it is important to seek out the language of the informal school, the *university without walls*. Also significant is the need to explore the meanings given to pictures, symbols, stories and metaphors. As Bruner (1990) suggests, "experience framed in narrative becomes slotted in memory (p. 77)". One difficulty in examining self-directed learning in social contexts is that it appears not to be a "contained" aspect of life. It is as broad as approaches to life since it involves all aspects of life-relationship, skill, knowledge and emotions.

A recognition of how self directed learners behave and think within particular social contexts implies that ethnographic approaches are needed to reflect on the interplay of a range of phenomena at work. However, while several authors (Candy, 1991, Merriam and Caffarella 1991, Jarvis, 1987) outline potential frames of reference for exploring self-directed learning, there have been few ethnographic studies that appear to study the personal experience of uncertified self-taught learners. What are often collected instead are lists of characteristics and information that suggests that all that is

needed is the right person, the right environment and the right motivation coinciding with the right resources.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Following my review of the literature, which largely focuses on self-directed learning by those with formal school experience, it became apparent that within qualitative traditions of inquiry, the phenomenological approach would be the best choice. It proved, in practice, to be the ideal research approach to learning more about what happens in the experiences of learners who teach themselves. A phenomenological study is primarily an attempt to understand empirical matters by entering the perspective of participants (Creswell, 1998, p. 275).

Phenomenological inquiry requires that participant experience, in this case, the experience of learning, be described in its entirety. Significant statements are then extracted from these descriptions and from these the participants' meaning is drawn. Themes are drawn from comparisons of several participants' descriptions to indicate the essence of the experiences of all participants (Creswell, 1998). The personal experience, in the participants' words, of learning new concepts and skills without formal direction to do so, is the phenomenon which is being examined in this study. This methodology is suited to exploring such phenomena without imposing upon it a problem question. This allows that, if the phenomenon exists, positive and powerful meanings may come out of the shared experiences of those who learned outside the formal system, understandings that may enhance formal and all learning endeavors. It allows for power and

resourcefulness, if it exists, to show in the participants' personal descriptions of experience. As well, the phenomenological design is open and emergent.

Questions to aid this research journey were suggested by the results of a review of the literature on self-directed learning (Candy, 1991). Research into personal experience around "ways of knowing" (Belenky et al., 1986) is well articulated in feminist qualitative research. Traits and characteristics of learners are indicated from results of the examination of biographies of famous achievers who do not complete formal education (Gibbons, 1980). However, I was unable to locate a study which specifically explored the lived experiences of uncertified learners in the rural context. Although there is significant literature on apprenticeships, that process is much more controlled than the learning experiences described here.

The Sample

The population for this study was made up of all self-directed uncertified learners on the Burin Peninsula. A formal definition of self-directed learning places it as a process in which individuals take the initiative alone or with others to diagnose their learning needs, formulate learning goals, identify resources for learning and select and implement learning strategies (Knowles, 1980). Self-directed learning is deliberate and purposeful, occurring outside institutions, not accredited and voluntary (Brookfield, 1986, p.47). Other authors define self-directed learning more as a chance occurrence sparked by life circumstances or suggest that it is a part of personality (Gibbons, 1980;

Spear and Mocker, 1984). This study presupposes no prior definitive answer to what constitutes self-directed learning.

The participants in this research lived in six communities within a seventy-kilometer radius of Marystown, my operating base. Note-taking was facilitated in that each evening I could return to this base. One of my bracketed assumptions was that independent learners thrive in places with less apparent external resources and are more inclined then to look to self as learning strategies. Thus the phenomenological methodology is well suited to interviewing participants in the natural setting primarily in homes within small communities.

Eight participants, ranging in age from forty-five to no ninety, recognized as self-taught by others who knew them, were identified to me using the network or snowball selection technique (LeCompte and Preissle, 1993), through which one person refers another who refers another. I took referrals as they were given. I did not specify a preference to be referred to male or female participants. Eight was chosen as a suitable number in order to ensure sufficient data for analysis of approaches to learning, allowing that some participants might be more verbal and descriptive than others. In rural communities easily tapped accessible networks indicate that people know one another's history. My explorations started with asking my father, age 77, if he knew anyone who has not been taught formally but has largely taught himself or herself from scratch. Then I went further afield to the private museum owner who I met on an earlier visit and recognized as self-taught. I moved then to people unknown to me, a town councilor in a

small town, a librarian who shared her admiration of an aunt and so on. It seemed the names of admired expert uncertified learners were on the tip of the tongue with people only too happy to tell whom they knew. The ease in locating interview candidates intrigued me and affirmed my intent. The network seemed well oiled. This was further indicated after interviews were completed. The historian participant, Leonard, who has since died, often called me, sent prayer cards and good wishes, and made himself available always to chat or clarify ideas. I also heard that Charles, from another community, had thanked the person who referred him, saying he enjoyed telling of his experience. Examples of a familiar interweaving of place, people and events are evident in how referents and participants connected with others and the things that happen in their environment.

Referent enthusiasm was notable. They said the people they referred had inspired them. I got the strong impression they saw participants' success as a wonderful piece of shared community property. They talked about their own learning goals or about their children's learning. Often referents stated a desire to help me with my study in any way possible. The issue of independent learning seemed always to touch a responsive chord, appealing it seemed to many people's ideas about the place of learning in making a full life. Fellow students stopped to share ideas or tell me of someone they knew who was like that, a learner. A principal of a large high school was spurred to talk admiringly of his fathers' learning. He shared too his own constructivist view of learning and expressed concern that students in "rows facing the front" for twelve years might not

attain the “looking-to-self” best suited to an independent quest for knowledge. This spontaneous sharing by educators in this case, indicated a very strong positive attraction, almost akin to spirituality, to the concept of independent learning and the very personal meanings it inspires people to voice.

Ethical Considerations

Since all participants are adults and the topic relates to exploration and affirmation of their learning experiences, ethical issues, while important, were not anticipated nor did they become a problem. All participants were assured of confidentiality as well as the right to refuse to answer any particular question or to terminate the interview process at any time (see consent letter in appendix). I had some small concern that being an employee of Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) might be a factor, given the often mixed reactions of the public to government programming designed to influence employment and adult learning. I was not evasive about my work. If it came up, I explained that my focus in this study was to learn more about how people learn i.e., that my goal was to better understand personal resourcefulness and independent approaches to learning. Reassurance was repeated in the consent letter, which emphasized confidentiality, voluntary participation, and the individual’s right to withdraw from the process at any point. For this thesis, I changed the names of the participants. All participants were also advised of the opportunity to see and review materials. Some references to community and notable achievements of individuals could conceivably

identify participants but there is no sharing of any data that could embarrass or diminish the privilege offered to me by the sharing of information. It would be impossible to truly hide the identity of such unique individuals given the ease of the network through which I found them and the very nature of the environments in which they lived and were learning.

Because several participants lived alone (single, children having left home or spouses deceased), there was a certain perceived element of participants needing and wanting company. Thus, I felt the need to respect this desire for company where this was evident and to ensure that such a rapport was established that participants did not feel they had to tell of adventures. I need not have feared. Independence is a dominant trait in these learners. Openness and lack of guile in sharing was apparent.

Data Collection

Before starting the formal part of the study, I conducted a pilot interview, which confirmed the rationale for doing phenomenological research. It also highlighted for me that I was not going to be able to harness or direct the story with set questions.

The data collection method used was in-depth phenomenological interviewing, (Seidman, 1991) using, based on the pilot interview, a non-standardized questioning style. Such interviewing is open, thus permitting willing individuals to reconstruct and describe, focusing on a particular subject, their experiences within the lived context. I was an active subjective inquirer, using observation, listening, paraphrasing and open

questions. Because in-depth interviewing as a method has strengths suitable to researching individual experiences and cultural nuances (Marshall and Rossman, 1995), this research method was the best choice. I found that I was comfortable with this interviewing method, probably because of my background in social work and career counseling. Interviews took place over a period of four weeks; all took place at the participants' kitchen tables, except Ingrid's, which was conducted in her living room. As each was completed I noted observations (common phrases, story and jokes, tone and energy, interest in me, the context of their learning, whether they lived in their own homes, cooked, initiated contact with others). I used questions suggested by the research purpose and the literature including studies of self-directed learning. The questions shaping the structure of the interviews are included in the appendix, however, the participants' focus was the true guide. Phenomenology with its origins in philosophical perspectives (Creswell, 1998) allows for a more broad non-traditional scope in which one can explore the sense of what is happening and ask about feelings with questions such as: What is it to be master or mistress of your fate? What is it to be your own boss?

Questions gleaned from past studies, though comprehensive, did not control nor seem to inhibit the flow of responses from participants. Perceptions, thoughts and feelings about learning and approaches to tasks and mentor relationships were shaped by the meaning participants gave to my questions about their experiences. In other words, my prepared questions guided but did not or could not direct the interviewing outcomes. All experiences were told within a narrative, the primary vehicle for sharing experience.

Linde (1993) describes narrative as "an important way we express self, communicate self, and negotiate self with others (p.18)." I believe after meeting the participants through their stories that each is unique in the approach to learning.

Feminist researchers Belenky et al., (1986) introduced the idea of conceptual thinking by examining levels of knowing, and by asking whether learning comes through discovery, a need to know or a sense of being obliged to know. Examples of other questions they posed are: Do learners value more their rational or intuitive responses in learning? What is the relationship between learning and the person's life? What is the relationship between self and the context of learning (p.231-238)? While such literature provided ideas about preparing to look at learning, other ideas also emerged which helped my thinking and analysis, e.g., Gibbons's (1980) ideas about personality, early childhood experiences and apprenticeships. While the literature indicates there is no existing theory to fully explain self-directed learning, key questions to guide theory development might centre on personality, behavior, developmental issues and factors which hinder or enhance self-directed learning (Long, 1989). The pilot interview and initial visits to communities before the formal interviewing helped me to become familiar with each town (e.g., the school and workplace of most participants), to make decisions on the most productive choice and style of questioning, and to map out the details of how to connect with participants and to begin making appointments. I was also verifying my initial commitment to the research. Would my interest stand the test of content and meaning and lead to completion? Visits to communities helped me know my place and ease my initial

tension as an outsider going into the private homes and into the personal stories of individuals. As I visited, I quickly began to recognize that while I describe myself proudly as a Newfoundlander, my life since I left high school many years ago had not informed me nor kept me up to date on the dynamics of rural community. In fact, I would describe my post-high school experiences as primarily directing my view out, toward technology, change, and globalization rather than toward understanding and fostering an ecological sense of the identity of the community for which, in a profound sense, I work and from which my story was born.

Data Analysis

My preliminary analysis was facilitated by a chance event. While doing my fieldwork, I almost immediately had the opportunity to present this as a work in progress at a national conference. This helped me see what themes, meaning and essence were most apparent in the transcripts. I had transcribed information provided by the participants from audiotapes and field notes and I read the transcripts often, getting a sense of what stood out, and noticing things I had not actually heard or understood during the interviews. I reviewed notes about my own experiences when doing interviews and bracketed my assumptions, recognizing my growing awareness of unconscious bias. Ultimately, this is why I chose to present the findings in a narrative form, in the words of the participants. The narrative enables the reader to hear more clearly the multiple dimensions of the phenomena, such as speech, personality, charm, dreaming, humour,

listing, and the articulation of concepts like learning all these steps in multiplication. The tone of will and determination is best described by the participants (Creswell, 1998). Furthermore, the narrative is in itself a sample of the findings pertaining to self-directed learning. For example, several participants described themselves as having a good memory. Presenting the participants' direct words exhibits more clearly the meaning participants attach to the importance of memory and their views of what difference it made in their learning. Without the narrative voice, some things could not immediately be understood e.g., an expression such as "the teacher learns you" needs to be understood by relating to the more common "I learned from the teacher" because even within the narrative sometimes participants use both meanings. Bruner (1990) argues that "experience framed in narrative is slotted in memory (p.52)," as in Shunk's (1996) suggestion that words and images often serve as receptacles to contain knowledge.

Marshall and Rossman (1995) note the value of thick description in presenting and accurately maintaining the integrity of participants experience in their words and within their own contexts. Other writers effectively use the words of the worker or the voices of Italian immigrant women (Seabrook, 1996, Terkel, 1974, and Del Negro, 1997) in presenting phenomena centred on personal experiences. Thus, because of the power of the personal voice, I chose to present data in the exact words of participants.

There are few models for analyzing the feelings and experiences of self-taught learners, however, the participants' stories set the stage for new understandings and helped suggest particular points of inquiry. Bracketing my expectations and assumptions

as they came to me e.g., that questions should be answered in the order in which they were asked, helped me stay open to the participants' rights to choose any form to tell their experience. Since it is a relatively new idea to look at identity development and meaning making, including how one thinks about knowledge (Goldberger, 1996), I was reassured that I was not alone in learning to use qualitative inquiry well. However, I also realized that I had tendency to romanticize the pioneer learner and I learned to see that examples of self-directed learning are all around us.

In conducting my analysis, it was helpful to read material by those who had examined validity in qualitative research (Lather, 1986; Borland, 1991). This material enabled me to see that to ensure validity I had to have enough data from enough participants and I had to let the stories provide the themes, patterns, similarities and differences in participants' descriptions of their learning processes. By matching, comparing, contrasting, and by linking the words, phrases and attitudes gleaned from the stories, I was able to better understand how my own language and thinking fit with participants' meanings around their learning experiences. More specifically, this phenomenological process allowed me to extract meaning from the interviews by comparing expressions, processes, attitudes, noting list-making styles and symbolic (dreams and images) styles of speaking, and so on. Proceeding with my analysis in this way, I was able to detect that the essence of learning seemed to connect to self-esteem, personal ability and perhaps even charm in finding "teachers" and, above all, a drive

against all odds toward the participants' learning goals. However, while the questions offered a frame for the experiences, participants were in control of their stories.

Through noting the frequency of particular statements, matching, counting, and comparing participants experiences and common phrases, some of which were like well worn and loved life slogans or mantras, and then through repeating that analysis of the transcripts over several months, I felt I was beginning to know the participants on a different and deeper level. My understanding of what is, for participants, the essence of their learning experiences is reflected in the analysis presented in chapter five.

The phenomenological approach was a rewarding one for me as researcher. I am daily learning the dangers of assumptions and challenging what I "think" is reality. The flexible design of the chosen qualitative method of inquiry assists such effort toward honest representation in assuming "the participants' constructs are [preferable to] objective approaches that use conceptual categories and explanatory relationships created or identified by the researcher (Le Compte and Preissle, 1993, p.45)."

Chapter 4

Findings

Introduction

Through the qualitative process afforded by phenomenological inquiry individuals shared their independent learning experiences. The statement "I did it on my own" defines the participants' approach to life. In this chapter, six men and two women of the South Coast of Newfoundland tell of their experiences in personal learning. Ranging in age from forty-five to ninety, the learners had developed a diversity of skills including welding, mechanics, navigation, music, managing a co-op, schooner master, captain, boat building, surveying, inventing a paving machine, steelwork, and community development. Seven participants had very little formal education (three to six years). The eighth finished high school and had post-secondary training in business and had taken a beautician's course.

Joseph, age 45, whose formal education brought him to grade six, is a welder, mechanic, carpenter, and inventor. He is clearly highly respected with a reputation that brings him calls from the North West Territories for his unique skills. Through independent learning, George, age 86, became a skipper, chief engineer, steam boiler operator, carpenter, plumber, reader and mathematician. Charles, near ninety, was a sought after successful captain, navigator and engineer of a ship, and town councilor for twelve years. Mary, age 73, was a self-taught organist, craftsperson, sewer, and knitter. Her mother, who died when Mary was 12, had done those things too. Leonard, age 85,

had been a schooner master, co-op manager, butcher, barber, and local historian. Patrick, age 73, was a highly successful fisherman, collector of artifacts, storyteller and storywriter. George, age 86, was a boat builder and, in my view, a philosopher. Ingrid, age 73, a distinctly successful community leader and catalyst, was the only participant with high school and some post-secondary education. She was referred to me for her exemplary leadership. Participant stories show how each used their talents. While some reflected on having been born with talents, learning patterns and skills also seemed rooted in early childhood, and apprentice-like experiences.

In the everyday experience of academic learning, the opportunity to meet and explore the thinking, processes and practice of learners who learn "from scratch" is rarely discussed as a model for understanding the lived experiences of self-taught individuals. The basic premise of this research is that we cannot afford to overlook this wealth of experience. The memory of such ways is fast eroding. We need to gain from these examples of learning and sharing in order to reawaken our inventiveness, control and pride in charting our life learning course, trusting our ability to interact, explore and invent answers and to teach one another.

Early in this exploration of non-school learning experiences, I discovered that meaning and language are different in the diverse cultures within a culture. For example, I frequently used the word learning in my questions i.e., What did you learn, how and when? However, in the communities I visited, the more common expression among older people is "the teacher learns you." Thus, I discovered that "learn" is a word that

goes particularly with schooling and is something done to you. It does not commonly mean knowledge and skills you pick up from people outside school or through trial and error. When I persisted with the word learn in my initial questions, one participant, with a little frustration, said, "I told you, I never learned anything; what I come to know, I know myself!" A more sensitive and apt question might have been, how did you come to know what you know? Independent crafting of knowledge and skills through experience is evident within all stories.

I was at first concerned that the telling of the stories was *out of control*. Upon early reflection, I realized I wanted contained answers and wondered if the participants understood what I needed? At first, in my effort to keep the research focused, I interrupted to ensure my questions (see appendix) and the purpose of the study was understood. Participants each nodded full understanding and then went on with their story. The telling of experiences filled from twelve to thirty pages but, what I thought was going off track, I realized when I reviewed the taped interviews, was that participants were telling me all about their coming to know as part of a narrative of lived experience. It was my listening for *pieces* instead of listening to the whole story that I determined to be my problem. I realized that the way participants described the acquiring of skills could not be separated from a *way of being* and self-expression that defines a person's identity through learning. Descriptions of learning frame who I am and how I got to be here. While questions listed in the appendix guided the research, in the data presented below, I have interspersed questions simply to highlight participants' described feelings or

strategies affecting their learning. The stories demonstrate the thoughts, influences, approaches and experiences of each in acquiring knowledge (social and work) and skills.

Goals for life were drafted in a fishing environment and for seven of the participants, youth and early adulthood were shaped in the context of the depression. Several, while children, lost a parent to death. Five live in small coastal communities with less than five hundred residents. Three live in towns with populations between four and eight thousand. All live near the ocean and all of the communities, except one, a mining town, were built around the fishery. Each participant now resides where they were born.

Narratives express the participants' memory of learning experiences, their description of processes they followed and the contextual or personal factors that seem to have had significant impact on their learning. Leyton (1978) praises the power of participants' words as "profound and illuminating [in communicating] the richness of a culture and the complexity of a human being... (p.46)". Thus, here are the participants experiences, in their words:

Patrick: "I watched and learned"

Patrick, who for many years was a highly successful fisherman, told his story of learning first. He is currently managing his own museum, telling and writing children's stories and distributing a simple community history he wrote. His story begins where he is, deeply involved in putting together his museum, his main project since retiring from

the fishery. Like some of the other participants, Leonard, Ingrid and Peter, who had stored records and pictures, Patrick shared the sum of his learning, experience and memory by being a community storyteller (both written and spoken) and by showing artifacts like those in the museum.

Patrick, how did you come to put together a museum? It seems a big venture to undertake.

I had a few things, pit saws, ice saw and a couple of scalding boilers used to boil the fat soap, the lye soap. I put that away and had it in the store loft along with my fishing gear then the people come and say, such a one was collecting them and so I decided I'd [collect more]. I told people and they might bring it to me. People came to get the bit of money for old pots and a coal bucket. If I wanted things I'd ask and perhaps he'd have it or his brother Tom or John would. After, I started going around. People coming to get fish (he sold fish too) would come in and look at it. It wasn't a museum yet but I got so much and stored it. After I left fishing I cleared up the store and put it out and it looked good. The St. John's papers gave a nice bit, basins, jugs and butter churns. They'd post it and I'd get the taxi or transport trucks to pick it up. I got right into it.

How did you know what to get for the museum?

I know everything that was gone out. [The things] me grandmother had basins and jugs and those things where the pictures would drop down. I never opened an antique book but I knew what to get, old tar pots to tan the nets, made of cast iron. [The tar] was used to treat nets. There was no need later with nylon traps. We used to treat [nets] so the

seaweed wouldn't rot them, boil the tar in tan pots, tar, and cod oil and then the nets were good. People [also] used barking pots to boil the rind of the tree, get the juice off that and then put the traps in and the nets.

How was that done?

You put pitch in a brin bag and boils it in five 45-gallon drums for tanning a trap. When the juice would be all out and everything hot, you'd haul out [the pitch]. You put in so much tar and cod oil. The [treated] trap would be all black, no spots for the fish to see, done good for years. When you'd mend them for winter they'd be white but there's not supposed to be any white.

How did you come to know what to do and how to do it?

I went through that myself. It went back to me grandfather's time...the traps and everything. As me father came up, he started, and then I went with my father, around 13, when I left school. We stayed in a little tilt, 8x10, for a whole week, came back Sunday, got food and salt and go back, ready to salt fish. An old drum to make a fire, roast capelin, fish, summer to fall of year. We go out in May to set the lines; afraid someone else would steal your net once you set your berth. No one would take it if it was set with bare hooks, no nets. You'd have to wait for the capelin.

Patrick describes the steps in his first lessons in fishing.

I had to learn everything, bait the gear, haul the gear, tie knots. When you were in the dory, tying the knots, your father showed you. You didn't learn the first day or anything. After a week he might trust you to tie a knot and first time with a lop going up

and down it could come undone. You had to do it right. They were sometimes patient or sometimes a little scrabbly and perhaps you'd be a bit seasick. I was seasick all the time. My father used to say, "I expect you'll have to go back and go to school." I hated that some bad. I'd stay fishing. It took many (times out) to sea before seasickness stopped. I started when I was thirteen. I was 65 when the moratorium came. You wouldn't make me sick now. The dory was lippy and sometime you'd be up before daylight. I never troubled nothing else. The [ship] yard started. I could have done that but I never left fishing.

I done good and better than a lot after I got my own boats. When you're with someone else you only got half your hand. You were giving them half what you were making and you had the other half. That's the way it used to go. I got a boat of my own, got a bit of money. I used to fish in small boats. I got nets in Burin, the first to get salmon nets, maybe the first to get nylon gill nets. [Because I had nylon net] I done good with the salmon, then I got a longliner, 32 footer, hydraulic hauler and steerer, radar and sounder and all that made a few dollars (Patrick's voice grew much quieter when he spoke of his success but still, there was pride).

"I learned on my own. I knew all the marks."

I learned all what I learned, about the marks of the rocks [indicators of the good fishing areas], from my father. He'd be jigging and he'd have the marks and you'd learn eventually. After I got clear of my father I learned on my own. I knew all the marks. A lot of people didn't know the marks of the rocks and when you'd be setting the net the

water was 11 fathoms, you'd set the nets so when the fish would come around the rock they'd run in the net set down 30-40 fathoms. There were a lot who never learned the marks, let it go with the fathers, but I learned the marks. No good of you going out, no good of saying Sugar Loaf, Markland [the general areas where there might be fish] if you don't know the land cove or cuckold, or taking a small mark of the land.

Was taking the mark and knowing the good fishing grounds built up from memory?

My father took a mark off the land, then he told me, set your lines on that rock. If you set on mud or level rock you could haul the lines and never see a fish. Sometimes, you could see a whole school coming. You learned about the weather, by. A big tide going west looks like we were going to have to go east. I watched and learned. Being seasick wasn't good, but later when you got some fish you wanted to go again to get more. Grandfather found the best berths bringing in 6-700 quintals of fish, to sell it in the store. A quintal is 112 pounds, however if you're weighing it green [not dried] it's twice. There were others who never had a word of learning but the compass. With tide overhauling you, you'd run into the side of the boat. Old fellows would learn them a compass. Skippers couldn't do the work all the time and ships were lost with less experienced people.

Patrick, what do you figure made you more interested perhaps than others were?

Well, there can be a fellow who is intelligent for something, go at it and do something that another fellow would never think of. Different people. I had no learning,

some but not much. There wasn't much else to choose. [If you worked for a company you only made enough to set up to work for them again]. I was proud of the way I was though I don't want to praise myself, for the fishing and the museum. I think I did well overall, to know what to get, what it was, how to put it together, how to put it out, lay it out, clean it up.

How did you deal with discouragement?

People would say, "What are you wasting your money on that, what do you want that old stuff for?" but I thought, perhaps I'll have the best museum on the Peninsula if I get a bit of money to folly it up. I did good and the same people who asked came up to look. I never troubled with anyone else. If I saw something I wanted I paid a good bit of money. Some things were dear [expensive] and I'd call in the morning, see if he take off another bit. It cost me a lot of money.

What do you think made you push forward?

I had to have that! You had to try. I go out some nights [to the neat and tidy museum] and go around and say, this would look better there and move it around. I did a lot of talking, lots of tourists. I know everything. They'd sing out and ask, what is this or that for? The praise was encouraging, and people coming would ask or suggest something. I never forgot anything. When I was starting this little book [about his town], I never forgot anything [from when] they'd start to yarn about this or that.

Patrick told of house gatherings that in some way seemed to me like small classes of sorts, when you consider the information exchanged in recitation and song.

Older fellows would get together, play cards, drink. They'd tell what this fellow did, the hard time. Me Uncle Tom was the real fellow for the recitations. One of the songs my grandfather made up, I found and wrote that in my book. Mr. Antle didn't have it [written] either but he worded the song over the phone to a girl in St. John's and she wrote it down and when she came in the summer she brought it and put it to music. One time, there was nothing to make the keg of beer, if you did [get some from St. Pierre] it'd last a couple of nights. You'd not trouble [to invite] those who couldn't sing. You could keep her going then. They [sang] loud but they were good. My father knew a great number of songs. It would get wild, a big ring. There were ten or fifteen around and one in the middle. It took so long to start but once the first song was sung, give them another glass.

What made you most proud?

I was really interested in fishing but now the museum is as important as the fishing. The fishing is out of my mind. I go out and work. I don't visit 10-12 houses before daybreak and hear recitations [anymore]. Not the same opportunity. The [local teachers] got their own way with guitars. People were good to sing and dance. Although they hadn't much to eat or much for the kids, they would sing. I liked parties, hearing an accordion on a clear night, you'd go in, have a flask of shine. I was interested in how people were, what was said and done. You'd listen for a mistake and tell others [correct] what was done. There was nothing wrong with [life]. Still, even then, skilled fishermen got a lot of fish. If you partied and were sick you had to work because the fish would rot

in the nets. You didn't want someone saying you couldn't go but in the sun, hauling gill nets by hand it was tough.

I had 59 years that I was never in a hospital. Wouldn't be going there now but I had diabetes. I learned how to take it [insulin], I don't knock off. Better not to lie down.

How did you set about research for your book on this town? (Patrick wrote a small history with help from relatives who were teaching and a young niece who is a student.)

For my book, there was a lot I didn't know so I went to the people who did know. I started with the woman who started the post office, the oldest. She put me on to others. She knew the early 1900's. She's 84 so she was young then.

What was your goal?

I wanted to know the [fishing] business. Mr. P. had a big business, drumming fish for overseas boats with three masters. *(Patrick then told of women working on the flakes, of countless dories in the harbour when supplies were being shipped to construct mines, in a town fifty miles away. As he described past scenes that had occurred outside his window, it seemed he was seeing and remembering all the detail. He ended with, ah, the smell of the salt fish was good!)*

I likes to hear stuff said and done. I thinks about stuff and what's going to happen later. I'm getting older but it don't get me down. I'm as eager to get the piece [for the museum] as I was. My parents were the best, never laid a hand on us. Father would get me smokes when he'd get beef, pork. *(Sometimes Patrick's story of personal learning is*

combined with his story telling, a habit from everyday meeting with tourists in his museum and telling them the history of artifacts. The story he tells provides the context of his life. He spoke about such things as the food, brown flour with insects.) Old stuff was taken off the farms for Newfoundland like the oldest fish was sent to the West Indies... poor countries couldn't afford good. West Indies fish was scrub swept off the floor and that's the way it was with Newfoundland. We got the [dregs]. There is not much [competition to fish] as before when people put mitts over the oars so it wouldn't squeak until they got out. Fish was same as war with only the possibility of the dole, only half a million dollars to run the country from England.

How did you happen to leave school?

One father took his son out of school but the court put him back because they had no permission. My father got me clear. If I had to stay for grade nine, I would have done a lot. Even with what I had, I never needed to go to anyone to get help with forms. When I was making a bid on my license, [during the close of the Atlantic ground fishery], I did it on my own. You had to see what you were doing, what you'd have. I put in my bid got back a fine registered letter, got accepted for the Atlantic Groundfish Strategy [income support] until the old age security came. They gave me what I asked, never questioned.

I asked Patrick if he thought other participants who self-taught might object to personal questions.

No, they don't care how personal [the questions are]. Like me, if there's something I know I'd tell!

Reflections on Patrick's learning

Patrick's stories have great detail. One point is built on another, in the style of story-telling. This organization of detail and specific itemizing would seem a habit likely to facilitate memory in the acquiring of new skill and knowledge. Clarity in oral literacy (speaking in steps, communicating whole pictures and ideas and putting it all in the context of the larger picture) constitutes a learning strategy perhaps replacing reference textbooks. Patrick describes recipes for barking pots, his first learning in baiting the gear, and how, step by step, he was introduced to the learning and the consequences e.g., of not tying the boat properly. He describes guests chosen for parties if they were singers or storytellers. How people were, what was said and what was done motivated Patrick.

Here and in stories that follow, positive self-talk and indications of ambition and self-confidence are found in expressions like, "I really done good," and "better than a lot, especially when I got my own boats," and "when you're with someone else, you only have half your hand or "I watched and learned. Compared to others, old fellows would learn them a compass and that was where they stayed," but he chose to take things further with learning and getting what he wanted through learning. Risk taking and individuality are evident. Taking charge of his learning seems to be one way he used to live out his ambitions.

Joseph: Work, it's one of me loves, I guess.

Joseph, 45, is younger than the other participants who are between seventy-three and eighty-nine. With less than grade six and no formal mathematics he learned to work out precise measurements for steel-cutting, designing products by using steelwork and welding skills which eventually led to him having his own business. He was also self-sufficient in carpentry, mechanics and other skills. Joseph indicated he had not before spoken like this [the interview] about his learning.

What does it mean to you to have done well in your own business?

It's about proving to yourself that you can do things, rather than having this piece of paper all the time. It's good to have this [an education] certificate. I haven't got neither one. If I went down to the [ship] yard tomorrow looking for a job, I probably wouldn't get ne'er one, only probably for my experience or they knows me. I probably wouldn't get a job in welding or in fitting or nothing else. No, what I got I learned on my own. I built my house, built my garage, learned to weld. Everything I need to do I does it. I don't get nobody to do anything. Mechanic work I do myself. Plumbing, anything at all I'll try. I don't get nobody to do nothing except perhaps with the newer cars. I don't know much about computers and stuff. But, I can fix most anything.

" I just picture stuff"

Whatever someone is interested in, I'm interested in it, how it works and how it goes together. I got interested and watched fellas at it. I looks at stuff and can figure out how it works. I see things working as it's working, a piece of machinery, and I can

picture how it works. Same thing, learning to weld. (Joseph's wife, said, "You've done lots of things you've never seen anyone else do)." I just picture stuff, making old stuff. I pictures the way it should be or the way I thinks it can work and I goes ahead and does it and most times it turns out okay.

Joseph built an asphalt-paving machine.

"They asked me to come up with some idea of something that would work so I figured it out"

I built a machine for the council but they spent \$28,000 for something that didn't work, a melting and recycling asphalt machine. I invented her, (sigh of pride) and I had her out this past couple of year, doing a lot of paving work. Like I said, I just thought about it and we did it with old oil drums and it was a hard way of doing stuff and I figured out a way to do it easier (self-conscious laugh). I don't know. [I put] two old furnace burners on it and the worm [a piece of gear] come out an old crusher and hydraulics rims on it. There was no old version. They asked me to come up with some idea of something that would work so I figured it out over the winter and built her. When the spring came, they wouldn't buy her. They bought one from the mainland and it's been broke down ever since (laughs). I've used mine 40 or so times.

Joseph elaborated how he constructed the machine when I asked, "Have you thought of getting a patent for your invention?"

I did but I haven't got the money to do that. I picked up old junk around, not junk, usable old stuff and put it together. I was asking \$8000 for it. [The town] thought what

they were getting was better. We had to use a shovel and everything before. I thought there had to be a better way. I came up with this idea of a screw going through it, for taking the asphalt out and an arm for shaking it down and then you could feed right into the wheelbarrow same as in a cement mixer. I rented it out a lot last summer and the summer before.

How do you feel about what you made?

Proud, yes, I guess I'm proud of it. I could probably learn things like that [mechanics, welding] easier than I can learn something from a book.

Joseph's wife said he built a firetruck and I asked. "How did you come to take on that job?"

I built 12 trucks for communities around the island. They ended up all over the island. The cab and chassis came in and I hooked up the pipe work on her inside. (*A newspaper clipping shows Joseph by the firetrucks and him described as a steel fabricator*). I was at the shipyard for 14 years. That's where I learned plating and welding. I said to myself, I can try this. All that came in was the cab and truck. I built all of those. I believes in having it right when it's done. I had specs and I had to cut it all out, same as building a house. I find it pretty simple.

"I did it just by going at it."

I knows the tape [measuring instrument], I guess, and a little bit of blueprinting, if I was to go by blueprint. When I was at the shipyard, I learned a little about blueprint, not a lot. I went at labour work and I was interested in steel work and in welding and every

chance I got I'd take the burning gear, the welding gear and got into it that way. Someone laid it down, I picked it up. That's how I got into welding. Someone took a break, I fooled with it while they were gone. As far as I can remember I liked to be around work. That's one of me loves I guess, work. I just loves to be at it. I'm after dreaming about things and learning how to do it. I don't know how to explain it? Things I've mentioned. I wake up and I know the answer. I never liked school and I don't now. I couldn't go back. I'd like to but I don't want to. I never got much from school. I never learned to read or write, not the way I wanted to. I've tried to go back to school to learn to read and write but I can't hack it. If I could, I would. It would help me out a lot more if I could read or write better than I do.

Tell me about starting your own business.

I designed trawl doors. That's how I got started. Work got scarce in the yard and with my brother in law I was repairing old trawl doors and selling them back to them again. We said "By, if we can repair them, why can't we build them?" I said, no trouble to build them if you got the money to put up, so that's what we did. Trawler doors, for spreading the nets, weren't being built anywhere else but were brought in from France and Norway. I said, why can't we do it here? I started and then designed some of me own for the big trawlers. The ones I designed fishes better, not because I designed it (a self-conscious laugh with pride). We wanted them to fit smaller, different sizes of boats so we cut down the weights and experimented with shapes. My brother in law backed the

money. I don't want to go in the hole to make things better than they are but I'm satisfied. I'm making a very good living.

The conversation returned to the building of the firetrucks, a special project for which Joseph expressed obvious affection.

With the difference of me being at it and only me here doing it the other place went out of business [the place which used to manufacture the truck bodies]. There were five trucks needed and they got them all in one summer.

What are the things or events that encourage you?

Other people's confidence. Some people got more confidence in me than I have in myself, employers. When they liked my work, I felt proud. I may not have said much but I felt good. I made moulds and parts for the fish processing when that was going good out of wood and templates of different shapes. That's like fixing the chassis of an old car. You imagine it and cut it out. It comes from doing it so often, I guess. (Joseph grimaced in pain, a back injury gained from helping a neighbor lay sods but he showed no signs of wanting to stop the interview).

How do you feel about your learning so many different skills?

I never talked about it before. This is the most I ever talked about it. I really can't describe it. Perhaps that's how it is. I understand how it is and how I want it to work and then I just build it in between. I want to cut back on manpower and hard work. I don't try to. I'm not an inventor. It's just something I done and it worked out.

How do you think your approach has influenced others?

Well, disbelief it can be done perhaps, that I was [actually] doing it, in one sense. My nephew picked up a bit of welding [by watching me]. When someone watches and at first they are disbelieving. I heard many times "You didn't," as much as to say, you couldn't. When they see the picture [in the newspaper] when I was building the fire trucks, a lot of people came to look, from everywhere. I am most proud of the firetrucks. I guess it's the look of the finished product. If I had better material I could redo the paving machine in a real way. I was saving up for years before I did it. I knew what I was going to do [the asphalt-recycling machine]. I was just going to do it anyway for myself. You can buy an expensive one but it's not as simple as the one out there. After it's done [building something], it's so simple. I got it down pat and can do it [pave driveways] as smooth as this floor, as the road. I developed it over the past few years.

"Most of the time you know what you want to do before you start. I'm in a rush to finish it to see what it looks like. I can picture it being done."

How do you suppose you came to where you are?

Maybe I got my skill from my mother. She made everything, made do, had stuff. Things she didn't have she almost had to make. Most of the time it works [when I attempt to make something]. There's always room for improvement but most of the time it works. It's the finished thing. I looks at stuff and pictures it, picturing the way it's got to go, even the blade on the truck, everything a different shape. You sizes it up [a job] and sees if you can [do it]. I cuts it out of steel, rolls it up, makes the whole thing from scratch. If I can't bend it myself I bring it to the yard and bend it. Gotta keep going,

make a living. I'll keep going as long as I can. I'm curious, yes, about everything. There's lots of complicated stuff. I just goes, tries it, I can do it 80% of the time anyway. [Sometimes there's a need for money to start a project]. I don't want to risk what I've gained, put my house up against the money.

How did you get the resources you needed for your business and the things you made?

There's only so many places you can buy steel but I asked questions and built up contacts. Most of the time you know what you want to do before you start. I'm in a rush to finish it to see what it looks like. I can picture it being done.

How do you examine (evaluate) the results of your work?

I thinks I can go do one of those trucks without looking at anything now. I can almost remember the measurements on everything that's there. Yes, I was really challenged. I never did it before. But people were pleased.

How does learning on your own compare, do you think, to schooled learning?

I don't like personnel hiring people and not giving the person who can do the work a chance. I don't think it's fair. I wouldn't be hiring them because they had the paper but because what I figured they could do. I'd give them a chance to prove themselves. I'd hire someone I thought could do it. Experience is better than schooling in terms of doing work. I'd love to have the theory part of welding but I don't suppose I ever will if I have to go to school for it. I learned by doing and asking questions about rods and temperatures. I had no trade but I learned by picking up the rod and burning it,

cutting off a piece of steel plate. That's how you got started at the yard...first, then second helper and so on. This foreman saw me at it and he said, "I see you're interested, how would you like to try out as helper?" That made my day and that's how I got into steelwork. I give him credit. I learned from other people. I don't see it as a big thing. I'm always interested in new things. In the yard there was something new, new ships coming in. Now I'm on my own I'm not seeing as much as if I were out there. Bad in one sense but then I am out and about so I see other things. I probably see more out of the yard that I would in it. I don't know. There are positives to being in a company and to being on your own. I'd sooner work harder and be independent here than go back into the yard. At first, I didn't know [what was best]. My biggest goal was to have my daughter reared and to help her out a bit. (I was show a photo of father and daughter and one of Joseph on his first day at school). Religion, I believe in that. It helps you a lot.

Reflections on Joseph's learning

When Joseph speaks about loving work it is evident in the energy in his voice, his bright eyes, enthusiasm and tone of respect. He solves problems with steel and seems to innately understand precise measurements and calculations. He spoke of going to sleep with a problem and waking up with the answer or seeing how something was not working well, how much better it could be and then filling in the gap to make it work, like a puzzle. He works largely by sense and instinct and seems unlikely to say no to any challenge. While he wishes he had the theory of the trade, he also says, "If they can do it

in Norway or in France, why can't we here?" He watched, listened and took chance opportunities to gain more knowledge in his job at the shipyard, using this learning eventually as a springboard to his own successful business. Perhaps because of his age and the time of his growing up, he seems more self-conscious about his lack of schooling than older participants yet, at the same time, he compares his skill to certified trades, noting his own uncertified skill as important and valuable. It is just that it has to be defended e.g., "You wouldn't get a job unless someone knew you. "Still, by his own estimates, his ability is proven by his results and by others' disbelief or amazement that it could be done."

Leonard: "I'm not a history keeper. People come to me because I have a very good memory."

Leonard, age 85, lived in a tiny cove, which up to seven years ago was accessible only by boat. In the 60s, strong pressure came to bear on residents to resettle to larger communities. Leonard decided not to move, since, as he reasoned, his boat could be moored anywhere so he was staying! As a safety measure he built a house in another community, just in case "push came to shove". Leonard, of small stature, was always, I was told, perceived of as a man of influence. Solicited by those in charge of resettlement to entice others to move he instead kept peace with both sides sticking to his own plan not to move. Leonard died some months ago. I was fortunate to meet and get to know him beyond our interviews. He is truly missed by many and I miss him too because I

came to recognize how vital he and his way of living is to what makes us who we are. Perhaps like his many other pupils, I was left feeling that I had more to learn from him.

Leonard's experience was varied; he had been a schooner trader, a co-op manager, a pig slaughterer and a barber. Though he said he was shy of strangers, he earned a reputation as the keeper of history, getting as many as 70 cards each Christmas, mostly from people who visited him to get information on their family history.

Leonard, what do you remember as your first learning?

My prayers. My mother learned us our prayers and I never forgot em. She was a teacher, one of the first who ever went to Litledale [the Newfoundland Teachers' College]. She only taught us our prayers, the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the Apostle's Creed, the seven deadly sins, and the Ten Commandments. It was drilled into me. There's hardly anyone who knows them now. I ask lots of people.

Leonard describes setting in motion the act of learning.

The first thing you wanted to learn, you weren't sure and then you decided you wanted to [learn] and that you were going to figure it out. There was nothing ahead of us except fishing. I remember the teacher asking us what our ambition was and we said, fishin. She had no time to teach anything to a crowd of 50 or 60 in one school. I left at 16 for fishing, made \$2.64 for the season. That was the year of the tidal wave, in the thirties. There was no fish along this coast until after the war. After July I worked on the high road [add explanation]. We got \$2.50 a day. Then in my father's boat as a schooner hand I got \$35 for the voyage. But, I wasn't in debt in the fall. You had to have pants, a

shirt, cotton gloves, suit of oil clothes and a bit of baccy and \$35\$ just took care of that. I was 37 before I married. How could you get married, for God's sake, on so little?

How did you get the reputation as the person to visit to get your family history?

I'm not a history keeper. People come to me because I have a very good memory. But I never asked many questions, never much good to talk. I had an inferiority complex. I failed in grammar. I can talk and understand my own sort and understand a lot of people talk but real educated people use words you don't know the meaning of. I never had enough education to talk amongst educated people. It didn't bother me [not going to higher education]. A man teacher was a sissy and there was nothing only fishing then. There was no money in a job in the store. I was never dissatisfied. I was happy with my life.

I was skipper in 1949 and got the schooner. *(Leonard seemed more at ease telling his story if he was also presenting a visual, showing pictures of all his schooners, letters or an artifact which marked an event. For example, when he told of his role in going against resettlement he showed me some of the letters written to residents then and he played on the record player a song called Western Boats which he said summed up for him the end of a way of life. The detail continued with him showing me a picture of locals and himself, naming all the characters and telling about them.)* I was jack of all trades. In 1942, when I got the schooner, I was in business, the coasting trade.

"When you're with someone else you're a shareman; you'd never have anything as shareman."

My ambition was to be on me own, to be a skipper. I thought I could do as well as anyone. We cut lumber [for the boat] with an axe. Every piece had to fit. We were carpenters and we could do our own twine, make our own traps, everything. I watched my father. (*Leonard sometimes jumped subjects excited, I believe, to have the chance to talk and, from other things he said, lonely for visitors.*) If we were a few days behind, someone took our berth.

How did you go about picking up information and ideas?

You were watching someone else. People were talking all the time. I took an interest like that as long as I was able to do my own work. Myself and Mike my brother branched off; the other two stayed with my father, an independent fisherman. We never made much money. I learned enough to keep myself, to get through life. I wasn't stunned you know. I started a business after that, a general store. I learned what I needed to run the store in school, figures. I ran the co-op for good many years, the Fisheries Co-op. Everyone called me Leonard, not mister.

"We were on the job all the time; no one ever taught anything. We picked it all up ourselves."

How did you go about starting on your learning path?

In the spring, men would come the tenth of April. When we finished school we'd go aboard the schooner, spend our time there when they were off work. You'd hear them talking, and when they were getting ready for the refit, doing their trawls, making buoys and killicks [anchors made of stone in a twig casing] and tanning their traps, you'd listen,

watch them boiling their tan. We were on the job all the time; no one ever taught anything. We picked it all up ourselves. There were lots of fishermen that weren't much good. I was never like that. I was always able to do it myself. We were apprentices, I guess, learning our trade by watching and helping. There was only fishing. You had to know how. You had to live! And you weren't lazy. You knew you had to work. Work never daunted me. I was at it since I was that height. When I was ten my father said whoever brings up the most wood will come to Burin with me. I brought up 66 turn of wood that day. I was going to have that trip. I always got seasick, until I owned my own schooner. I got better of it then, more responsibility, I guess. You had to fight it, if you fell over or no, with throwing up.

Leonard, why do you suppose you were referred as a person who taught himself?

I do have a good memory and I know a lot of people. People come here. I'll ask where they came from. If I don't know, they tell me and I'll ask if they know such a fellow, and we make the connection. A fellow from Jacques Fontaine told me his name and I said you didn't always belong to Jack's Fountain [other way of referring to the same place] did you? He said no, he came from Morton's Harbor. Then, I asked him about fellows there. I liked to know people but I used to find it hard to without an introduction. I'm able to talk to you but I don't like to butt in though I knowed what they were talking about. I ran the store and didn't tell people's secrets and was never out money.

What made you most proud?

Getting my captain's ticket (no hesitation). I had to learn flags, codes and signals, take off courses and plots and everything like that. I didn't want it [to have to get the captain's papers]. I discovered you had to have your ticket to keep going on your schooner. I went to see the Harbour Master and asked what did I need to know. (Leonard told about a man who failed because he was colour blind). I came home and studied and I know a lot since I'd been a skipper a long time. There was a lot I didn't know. When he knocked off asking questions, I didn't ask him to ask more! Later I was asked did I have a receipt for my ticket? No! I had to do it again! It was harder, a different book with a lot of dots in it that made a figure or letter. If you were colour blind, you couldn't see it. It was codes. You had to know every flag, A to Z. That was hard and the only one I remember is the quarantine flag. No one remembers these things. You have it all in front of you on deck anyway.

"Still, if you didn't know you had to ask."

I picked it up from experience. When you have a schooner, you do business with everyone. You had to look out for the cull, for the weight [bargaining for people on whose behalf he sold fish]. I never fought but I had lots of arguments. The weigh masters were trying to gyp you on every fish you weighed. They worked for the merchant; they couldn't work for the man that had the fish. I remember the name of a fellow gave us the worth of our fish though it was a long time ago. He got suspended a few days for that. The fisherman was always fighting for his rights. The merchant wanted lower grades. (Leonard showed sale receipts from 1950/51).

Leonard told a story about how he worked on behalf of his customers, like his father had.

I did the best I could for my customers (Leonard's schooner was a trading vessel. He took fish and sold it for fishermen, and picked up supplies). If you were honest they were good but if you tried to get one off they'd maybe take the schooner. My father would go up and fight with them in the office. Sometimes they drove him out. He was fighting for his rights and I was pretty well the same. I think he respected me for that. That was business but for butting in on someone's conversation, I never did. Still, if you didn't know you had to ask.

I reminded Leonard of my interest in how he came to accomplish his learning and we reviewed my questions. The story of how he came to his identity was interwoven in the story of events.

Everything influenced what we done for the year, the wind, how much fish we got, how much gear we set, when we came home, when we left again. I could [write my life story] from memory, my town as I remember it. I have a lot written down. I'll show you. (Leonard then told in order of where the houses were or once were, who married whom from where, their children's names, who died or had been adopted, couples who lost a spouse and remarried. He told of people's original place of residence, listed schooner names, who owned them first, then what happened to them. He had kept meticulous detail and made notes over the years).

How would you describe the spirit some say is in Newfoundlanders?

The spirit that keeps Newfoundlanders going is a tough and determined one. When people first discovered Newfoundland they would creep away, live in the woods masterless men stowed away. That's why they are in every cove. Every man haved a place of his own. In our day, visiting, some told stories of Jack, Tom and Bill who went away to seek their fortune.

Reflections on Leonard's learning

Leonard, despite having had two strokes in the five years or so before I met him, still maintained a strong memory, holding court for those who came to his town, seeking knowledge of their roots. He mentioned that one time he caught a 70-pound cod, dried it and sold it. On the schooner he took notes [requests] from people in isolated communities to buy soap, hats, and coats in St. John's. "I used to buy everything for the house in the fall of the year. I picked out all the right sizes." Leonard was thereby personally involved in the lives and incomes and dreams of the people in his community. He prided his ability to keep a secret. He kept old bills, receipts and letters related to resettlement as well as the details of the fish sales and the history of schooners. Old photographs and documents were carefully kept in what he called a *ditty box*, a wooden box with a lid. To recall a dying way of life, he played a Newfoundland song about the last of the western boats.

Leonard detailed facts more than he described his feelings or learning process. He said he was good at figures and detail is evident in his history keeping. I came to see

Leonard as a *numerical learner* who, like Patrick, listed and numbered items, dates and names of people and who owned what schooner when. This habit, like the structuring of story, perhaps facilitates memory. Other learners like Peter seemed more inclined to envision the whole problem and then fit pieces of a solution together, intuiting the answer to the problems they sought to solve, trusting gut instinct and initiative. Consistent with his use of numbers, Leonard motivated himself for his daily exercises (a walk around his kitchen and living room) by using cut out numbers 1-22 and counting those forewards and back until his walk was completed.

Peter: "I was going by nothing, just my thought and what I was thinking."

At 86, Peter lived alone in the house where he had raised his family, a house with electricity but no phone or bathroom. Peter said "I waste nothing, I find a use for everything." Photographs taken by his son, a teacher, were proudly displayed and he showed me a beautiful wooden ship builder's model, smooth from touch, wrapped in heavy waxed paper.

Peter was referred to me by a woman who had grown up in the community and who admired Peter for what he had learned and done on his own. He walks several miles daily and, since he had been pointed out to me, I stopped him on the road to introduce myself, tell him about my research and ask if I could visit. He cautiously said he didn't know that he could talk to me, however, despite the hesitation, he shared a great

deal about how he learned and managed. When my interview was over and he walked me to the gate, I got the impression I could have stayed for days.

What do you first remember learning to do?

It was a little boat I built for myself. I was in the woods one day cutting wood and I come across this timber. I said, that's a nice timber there, I'm going to have that and put it together and shape the timbers for a punt. I was 16 or 17. I never seen one built before. I got two flour barrels in the store and set up a dale, put up a plank, locked the stem on this keel, this piece of two by five, fastened down on the dale, got some timbers, chopped them, shaped them.

What were you going by to make this boat?

I was going by nothing, just my thought and what I was thinking. I didn't know if it was going to work. I went to the woods and cut down this big stick, and then got a pit saw and cut. One other time I made a little sail for her. I brought it to the wharf in the winter, laid her down in the side of the water. I got down. I didn't know if she would hold me or no. I knew I could hold onto the wharf. I knelt down in the punt. I put the sail on her and sailed down to my uncle's. When I got down there was no wind. I couldn't sail back and she was too small to row. If it was too lippy, she'd sink but I got her back anyway. She was just the length of me. I could lie on her. She wasn't six feet because I wasn't six feet then.

What inspired you to make the boat?

Well, I often wished I had something of my own because my brother Cecil would take the dory and I was left on this side to walk right around the bottom to get across. If I had something of my own I could come and go when I like. This got on my mind. It was very good for the first little thing. A few year after that I built a bigger one. She was nice, a rodney, a little punt. I had nothing to go by, no one to instruct me. There was no trouble to get someone to instruct me not to be doing it. No odds. I went on, built her and had her for years. She was to me liking. I used her [second boat], sailing on the weekends, up to Marystown one year, in Paradise another. I'd bring her wherever I was going. When I built that first punt, I didn't know how. My father never had any carpenters' tools. I got my grandfather's handsaw. My grandfather had a little plane, ten-inch. I'd get that for planing the boat.

"I never had any trouble getting along with whoever I was with."

The people I was [fishing with] were dying about me [liked me a lot]. This Mr. Tom wanted me to work with him the next year. I must have suited him. I never had any trouble getting along. I always wanted to help, do whatever good I could. I never had to learn anything (Peter seemed to be saying that it was his nature to pick up skills and knowledge).

How was it when you began to work?

I was fishing with my grandfather from age thirteen or fourteen. Cecil [brother] was with my grandfather, then went with my father to do harder fishing. I [did the same]. With my father we got nothing. Everything was sold in his name. We got a bit of clothes.

Our mother was dead then and we were having it pretty tough. There was nothing to do in the winter, only go into the woods, cut a bit of wood, stuff to keep up your wharf, fences. There was nothing for me to do but go fishing. After my mother died, I had no home. I spent most of the time with my grandfather and his third wife. I didn't know what was ahead of me. Whatever I could do I did. My grandfather was independent. He looked after the light on the Eastern Point and had a little a bit of gold poked away. I used to help him get turrs and rabbits in the fall of the year. Only for him, I wouldn't be here.

When my mother died, my youngest brother was only 18 months old. He got up to 6. Then my grandfather's wife put him in the Belvedere orphanage. He got a bit of education, which helped him. Maid, if I had time to tell you [how hard things were], you couldn't think a man could go through so much and live through it. [But] in our day everyone made friends with everyone else. That's how come we knew everyone here and other places.

"I know that to be true. I done good work."

In terms of how I'd treat others, I'd say above all don't steal or don't hurt anybody. I didn't learn anything. Whatever I got was born in me. I built a ship, then [the employer] wanted a store. I was honest and did a good day's work. I got what I asked [pay], more than a lot of people. When my wife got sick [tuberculosis] I was in Freeman's Cove building a shop. [The employer] said, I had a lot of work planned for you. I said, you'll have no trouble getting someone. He said no but I won't get anyone to do the work you do. I know that to be true. I done good work, a good smart worker.{So I

went back to work there again] I learned by that work that what I had done was suitable. That cheered me up a bit, encouraged me. He [respected me].

“I believe there’s something guiding me.”

One day, something told me there’s trouble home, go home. I got straight up. I didn’t know what the trouble was but I had to go home. This thing struck my mind. [When I arrived] my wife was sat with the baby on her lap. I knew the trouble. The baby was sick. She died. Three days from that Berthe [his wife] was in the san.

We all have a guardian. It could be my dead mother or my dead daughter. (It wasn’t the first time dreams had spoken to Alfred. When he was fifteen he had dreamed about the girl who would long after that time become his wife, some time after her first husband died.) I was asleep on the couch and I dreamed I saw her going to root out a few new potatoes. Her suit was a blue skirt and a white smock. She was coming across the breakwater with a white enamel pan. What made me dream and then wake to see the same thing? All of this was part of my learning, all those things. I believe in my dreams. As sure as I dream something it’s bound to come out true. There’s something guiding me. [The priest] said that too. I’ll go out fishing by myself in the boat. Because I’m by myself, I’ll get that fish. Before I go out I’ll ask the Almighty God for whatever I’m going for, to get so much fish or to find my buoy, about fifteen miles away, in foggy, fine or windy weather. Another person will go and not get [fish]. I always get what I ask for. It’s faith and belief. I say if I can catch it and put it in my boat, I’ll take care of the rest, curing it and doing the best with it to get the best price.

“If someone else can do it, why can't I? We all have the same means.”

I always had the best fish. I like to have the best and do the best. My brain was the same as Jim's; I was a part of him, my second cousin. I was also like my mother. My mother, she was handy. She had grade four. My wife turned a lot of clothes, hooked mats, made quilts. I also could hook mats. I made three quilts. I bought quilt cotton, joblets. You could buy soiled cotton and make dory sails out of it. I bought burlap first for the inside of the quilt, washed it, bleached it and put some thick stuff on top. I'd tack that and then put nice cotton on bottom and on top if I sew straight it will bunch up, so I criss crossed. Then put on a border. You do whatever you think. I made a nice heavy quilt, nice as you'd buy in the store. When my mother was hooking mats I'd do the flowers and the scrolls. The shamrock, thistles and rose was a fine pattern on a mat. They're still doing mats in Boat Harbour.

We had no roads before confederation. No one had any power. The old dock manager in Burin had a rattletrap [car]. The only way to travel was by boat or steamer. They were running for three forms of government, confederation with Canada, responsible government and economic union with the US. I had worked with the US base. I knew what kind of money they had. I knew nothing about Canada. They were sending a message. They wanted to put me down. I said put me down for economic union with the United States. I knew it would be prosperous. At that time we were run by English rule. You had to live on six and a half cents a day. We had cabbage and sheep and cods heads. You had the fall to get pork, beef and flour, no milk and eggs. Everybody

was alike, Maureen. Others were living like us. Around the tenth of April, their fish was sun cured, and sent down by freighter. The [merchants] give you what they like. You turned in your catch and they give you your winter's tithe, [keeping] you in debt so that they'd have you working for them the next year.

I was twenty-five by the time we got radio. I could learn music because I was a good singer but I never did. I never got to learn my prayers yet I can learn a song if I hear it twice. I don't know. If someone wanted a song I knew once I can't think of a word. By and by I got a word and start to sing. When my wife had Alzheimer's, sometimes she would start up a long song, a true story more than song. She would sing it all yet she had no mind. I never taped my wife singing (regret). My son done that (took all those photographs) after he went teaching. He done all that stuff. There's a picture of him and his children and my house.

"Carpentry's that's born in you is different from carpentry someone else had to learn you in school."

How did you know how to get the things you needed for what you wanted to build or make?

I don't know. I never learned. If I needed to do something I just started in and did it. My mind always was, if you could do it, I could do it. I never entertained the idea I couldn't do. It was all hard work. I didn't have to learn to like work. I always liked work. My mother (Peter reminisced about her teasing affection) was very handy.

How do you compare the carpentry and boatbuilding you came to know to what's taught in school?

Carpentry's that's born in you is different from carpentry someone else had to learn you in school. Today you go to school; all kinds of tools are there, the plane, the saw, and the axe. I did a lot of my carpentry work with an axe and a bucksaw. I never had a chain saw in me life. That'd be too easy (laughs). If you go to school to learn carpentry you have to have the tools. I never went to high school, only a one-room school and not much of that. I be ever so long trying to learn my lesson. We had the Royal Reader, St. Pat's the Cat. You'd think I could learn that. And we had spelling. You only had your word to learn but then she'd ask you another's. No odds about his word. You learned your own. About spelling, I never learned a word. I never learned a word but I knew them all. The letters in the words would just come to me. She asked Pat H. how to spell pork. He spelled p-i-g. You know the word you were asked. You'd figure out the letters to suit that word. That should be the spelling of that word. I never had to learn spelling, even if she never went through it in the book.

"What I know I know myself, where it comes from I don't know. I always planned what I was going to do."

Well, I'm gifted somehow, really gifted. I don't know. When I went fishing I learned by fishing. You saw someone else at it: Then you take the knife and split a little fish. It is a part of your brain. Your brain works your whole body, doesn't it? A message has to come from your brain to your hand. If you learned me something it's no trouble for

me to describe it because you learned it to me but what I know I know myself, it just comes to me and where it comes from I don't know. I always planned what I was going to do. Then when I went to do it, I just went ahead and did it. If I were to put up the fence or build a bridge I worked it out in my head; then all I had to do was go ahead and do it. I didn't have to stand up and plan. A lot of people spends a lot of their time planning when they should be working. Like I told you Uncle Jim would lie back, looking at the ceiling light, draw, his mind is on whatever he was doing. Myself and his daughter had the greatest fun arguing. When he's come out of it he would laugh and say "two fools natural". He wouldn't hear us until when he'd knock off thinking.

Peter cherished the friendships with girls that he enjoyed in his youth.

You had to argue with girls. You'd treat em as you meet em, if they were nice. I always liked to be going around the road with a girlfriend rather than a boy friend because if you're going around with a man friend there's something in your mind, swearing or saying something out of the way. But if you had a girlfriend, you're saying something nice, just making you more fond of one another. I like to know people, make friends with people.

[About learning] it's only my own story I'm telling. If you teach me, I had to learn from you. What I learned came to me. No one taught me to cut up wood, make a woodpile. Just like I could be learning it to you, I learned how to make mats, poke potatoes, make manure, dig in the fall with my wife, seven or eight sacks.

Reflections on Peter's learning

Peter began his learning journey as a young boy, inspired by the need to get across the harbour without having to depend on someone else. He often worked out in his head his plans before he started a project. He compared himself to those he admired for their skill, his mother and an uncle. Peter seemed to believe his behavior was influenced by his genetic predisposition to be handy, like his mother or a thinker, like his uncle. He believed, in any case, that a person is obliged (to God or life) to use what he had. He cherished kindness and girls with whom he enjoyed good-natured arguing or [conversation] that was a bit better quality than conversation with boys. "It made you fonder of one another." Described by others as an excellent boat builder and carpenter with samples of his work all around the community, he was charming and interested in our interview. Besides planning his work, he trusted his instinct and envisioned success in the fish that he would catch or what he would build. He spoke positively; the first dory he built was good for a start and the second was better. He said he gave a good day's work for fair pay.

Mary: "Everything like that I could get hold of I'd be trying to do."

Mary, age 71, grew up in a small community. When she was twelve, her mother died and from there she took on adult responsibilities, adopting her mother's skills and cherishing the skill to which she related most, playing the organ.

Tell me about things you have taught yourself?

We can start with the music because my mother knew music. She had an old organ and taught music lessons. I don't know how she learned. She had to. She didn't teach me but I was listening. I watched. I'd hear them at the scales. She had a book [which] was left and after she died I thought I'd try to learn. I had to get out of school before she died because there was no one to do the work. I had a small brother and my father but I got to learn, picking out notes, looking in the notebooks. A lot of it was by ear. As I got older I'd keep at it. I'd have the organ there and I'd practice by myself.

This lady said you should play in church. I said I'll try. I was doing it by ear (laugh) but I knew the right hand notes. I learned the treble but it was a hard for me to hear the bass and without the bass being done right you don't get the right sound. I had to try to learn the bass but I found it hard. They had the basic music sheet. It showed the keyboard. You'd look and see notes like the flats, sharps, and naturals. I figured it out. My mother was trying to [teach music] because if anyone knew how to make a few cents you had to do it. It's only a few years since we got an electric organ. I bought an adult beginners' book (self-conscious

laugh) to try to help learn the bass. I didn't learn a lot from the book. As you get older, it is not so easy to remember.

"I had to work hard but I didn't work under a boss all my life."

You'll laugh when I tells you how I learned to knit and take off patterns. We had this paper, the Family Herald, an old paper. We didn't get mail often then. In the paper there would be a knitting pattern. I'd take off that pattern. Everything I could get hold of I'd be trying to do it. I tried to crochet, looking at books and papers and whatever.

Was the learning that you did recognized by anyone else?

I got that plaque last Christmas (the inscription says " For Years of Dedication and Service as Organist at St. Mark's Church). " I did like music, and I still play in my turn. They could choose who they want. If they want me, I play. [Another person] will play and make a lot of mistakes. She don't care. That would bother me. I do care. I couldn't go on making mistakes. I do make mistakes. Everyone who is not a professional makes mistakes. If there was a way, I would have found the way to do it properly. I wished that I could take music but I never had a chance. I looked after my father and brother until I was 25, when I got married. Parents expected children to look after them, to do. I worked hard but I didn't work under a boss all my life. He [father] was fishing with my brother. After I got married, I lived with his [husband's] mother. It was strange as I was always on my own, doing everything my way but I managed. She lived with us 25 years and then went with her daughter.

Tell me how you approached new things you were interested in learning how to do?

A lot of people teach themselves [when you think about it]. I learned to sew by ripping [old clothes] apart. When I could get patterns, I did and used them. I used to like to make the dresses for the girls. I used to use a hand machine. Now we got an electric machine.

"It seems to me I just took it up. It was no trouble for me to do it."

If only [my mother] could have lived. She sewed. I sew. She could crochet. I crochet. She knit. I knit. She played. I play. I can't say I learned from her but I remember her doing these things. I was born with a talent for music. At the Jubilee Guild I learned weaving, leather works, and print design on a cloth using stencils. I like that. Music and knitting too. I'm glad I learned. At first I learned knitting from the paper. It seems to me I just took it up. It was no trouble for me to do it.

The organ was my favorite but I would have liked to play guitar. One [brother] got drowned. He died in 1979 at sea, fishing. Mother died young. I got through it all, thank God. I made the most in the space I had no TV, no cars. There was no way out except by boat. The road was built in 1951 but why leave? Then we had phones, TV, a road. Fishing is not good now though people made a lot of money at that. People still catch lobster and there is a lump roe plant. A lot of young people left. There are 19 houses now with only one person in them.

What made you most proud about your learning?

Probably the music played in church for the first time. It was important that I could do it, for the first time, for an ordinary service. After I started, I didn't stop. Some ministers would compliment you, thank you and say you do a good job. That meant something.

How did you know what you were doing was good?

It sounded right, as good as the other one was doing. If I could do as well, that was good enough (laugh). I just picked it up and I made mistakes, took it out, did it over and the same way with crochet and sewing, ripped it apart until I could get it good enough. Then, when I got patterns I went by that. If something came to my head that I wanted to do, I was going to do it.

"Although I seem to be a kind of nervous person when I get going I'm OK."

What inspired your learning?

My mother and my grandmother. I was 12 or 13. We had sheep. I used to card wool and spin the yarn [from which] I would knit the sweaters. My grandmother probably helped me doing some things. I did lots of mats. We had no carpets then. When my brother was 10 (there was only a seventeen month difference in their ages) he went with my father. They were fishing and we used to have to make the fish, wash the fish and salt the fish, dry it and spread it day after day and get in and put it in the store and have it all ready for sale. I was the one in the house. We used to grow vegetables so I took over in the garden, at 12, being really tiny. I did it anyhow, did it all.

Did you have some other experiences or training to learn new things and how did you go about it?

I have my [driver's] license. I was going to have my license and that's that. I tried three times. Although I seem to be a nervous person, when I get going I'm OK. What started

me was my daughter Mary. They took drivers' education [in school]. She had the book and learned the questions and I learned them too. I said I'm going to do my written test. I went, did it, passed it. Now I've got to try for my license. I did it. I wasn't scared. About the worst time we, my husband and I, had was with him teaching me driving. It's better to have someone else other than your own teach you to drive. And I never liked backing up very well.

"Anything I can learn to do I still like to do it."

Not because you're old you can't do stuff. If you know how to do it you may as well do what you can. That driving business was something else. When my nephew wanted to drive I said I'll have to [teach you] because, if your grandfather were alive, he would have learned you how to do it. I did it for his sake. He got his license and that was fine.

What are some other experiences of learning new things?

I wanted to say I was in the States, once anyway. What an experience, the best money ever spent in my life! (Mary spoke about her husband having cancer for sixteen years before he died and of her own fight with cancer). I said I'm going to fight. They told me it was 99% curable with treatment. I said I wouldn't be unlucky enough to be that 1%!

" It don't seem to me that I really do plan that much. I just start in."

I don't do all that much planning. If you need different material, you got to go and buy things to do the work with. I just get a pattern, a book or whatever and follow it (Laugh). There's lots who can do what I did, maybe more.

Mary, why do you suppose your niece referred you to me as having taught yourself?

My niece knew about the knitting, the crochet, the cooking I learned myself, making stuff, doing whatever I could to teach myself. Others don't mention it. Everything is taken for granted in small places like this. I'm not that religious but I do believe in God and I believe in myself. If I want to do this I will ask God to help me. If you believe this, it works. You have to believe it though. It helped me a lot. It helped me when I was sick [with cancer].

I could have made something out of myself [if I had] a good education. It might not have been music but there would have been music in it. I did think to be a nurse or a music teacher, if you got ahead that far. Anyway, I never got the chance. I wasn't in love with school but I would have liked an education. Parents expected a lot of their children. It seemed I should stay to care for them. Sometimes I think if I had more education, I would know better how to talk to people.

Reflections on Mary's learning

Mary seemed to model her learning of music and sewing almost exactly upon her mother's interests and skills. She "jumped in" and did it. That was that. Her learning seems also related to having had to be so independent as a child and the enjoyment she took from being mistress of her own house. She was responsible for many adult tasks from an early age. How Mary taught herself to play the organ from scratch most impressed the person who referred her. While I visited, that avid interest was very apparent in Mary's disappointment

that I didn't know music, in order to be able to perhaps share ideas on how she might tackle certain pieces she wants to get right.

Ingrid: "I realized I had a kind of quality of leadership about me."

Ingrid, age seventy-five, has published stories to keep alive the history of her town. She demonstrates story style in how she tells of her own life experiences. There is a tendency for her to center less on her personal experience of learning than on anecdotes and distinct pieces. In spite of this, her approach to learning is visible in how she tells of her role in "making things happen." Her tendency toward telling story as if teaching comes from long practice. As I was leaving, she told me of her plans to write a new children's story about a duck family in a nearby pond. Her love of sharing is reflected in how she is still choosing to exercise her options.

She is the only participant with high school and two post-secondary skill training courses and who also experienced what appears to have been a more economically privileged background than the other participants. Her parents owned a large house and a business. However, like the other participants, she has a keen interest in everything around her. She completed high school, went to Business College, taught herself community leadership and how to run a library. Spunk and assertiveness are words that suit her approach. Ingrid is included not as a person who learned from scratch or who is an uncertified learner but as one, who, in common with other participants, took charge of her own learning.

I explained that a friend of hers who admired her approach to learning had referred her to me. This is how she responded.

I often visit with kids in school when they have programs like, "what were the games and clothes like in grandma's day?" It's satisfying to tell and show the difference in then and now.

When I graduated grade eleven, in 1938, there were three choices, a teacher, a nurse or you could enter the business field. I didn't want to teach. Besides, the pay was thirty-eight dollars a month so it had no incentive. Nursing, I'm scared of blood. My family always had a business, a fishery business. I knew all about the fishery. I would love to get into school and tell about the fishery. They don't make enough use of resource people. The high school should be making use of this but they rarely ask. One day the people who [know] will be gone. The one alternative was to do business. My mother was a telegraphist and said that would be a good idea. I went to the Mercy Convent Business Academy [all religious groups went there] and that was great, meeting different people. I got my grade twelve certificate in business education. I was fortunate. I also took a course in telegraphy while I was doing this. I was the only girl among ten boys. Afterwards, [a company in my town] started a branch. I did all the bookkeeping, the ordering. I worked there seven years.

"I say we'll just do it and we did it."

I loved my girlhood. By the time I was 18, I realized I had a quality. It dawned on me I can make it happen. I say we can do. How you gonna do it? I say we'll just do it and, we

did it. Things were happening in other parts of Newfoundland and other parts of the world that weren't happening here. Why it was we had no organized sport? Nobody cared. I couldn't understand. Remember we had just gone through a depression and money was scarce (Ingrid told of her first love, a childhood friend whom she married before he went to war. Though she loved him, marriage didn't appeal to her free spirit for several reasons). You'd see a couple getting married and you wouldn't see the girl any more for about a year till she got out with a pram. Not like now. I said to myself, I don't think I'll get married. [If I do] I'll have to stick in the house and whoever I marry will be out walking around with his friends, playing cards.

"She used to okay everything I'd do like that"

Tell me about your first experiences of learning.

I began to think on things when I started to read the papers. We got a batch once a week. The Family Herald had a section in that for old time songs. My grandmother was telling me to learn this old song. My grandmother, my aunt, my two sisters and myself played the piano so we'd have to fight to play. Our house had a room with everything in it, old books and old pictures. Whenever I was missing [they would say] where's the rummager. I'd bring something down to the first landing. Sometimes I'd get it down to my grandmother's kitchen, because she used to okay everything I'd do like that. [Grandmother lived in half the house with her own kitchen, dining room, and living room] It was great, great company.

"I didn't realize it until I was 12 or 13 and then onward that if you didn't have anything you should [have it]. "

I read about Halloween one year. I saw the pictures of pumpkins on the fence and I said, "Why don't we have Halloween?" My mother said, "They have that in other parts of the world, we don't have that here. " [Her saying that] surprised me because our family had advantages lots of people didn't have. I wanted pumpkins. [There were none] so I got the two biggest turnip I can get and scoop them out. She helped me and we got the candle. (Ingrid explains that she may have been a bit favoured by being the youngest in her family). I was ten years younger than my siblings. My oldest brother, the one in the fishery, was the one I trotted after, the one most tolerant of me. I loved being in the fish. [The next year Ingrid's plan was a little more elaborate] "I'm going to have Halloween party. " I was about 12 then. She said, how? I'm going to have spooks and dress as a spook." I wanted money to get peanuts and candy so she gave me a dollar and I got a whole pile. I knew about the dunking, and grabbing for the apple. I and ten or so girls had the nicest kind of a Halloween. Later, [I started] masquerade parties with people disguised as the Dionne Quintuplets and Queen Elizabeth, Princess Elizabeth then. One popular dance was the Lambeth Waltz. (And Ingrid breaks into song, "You'll get down Lambeth way any old evening, any old day and you'll hear them say!") I had everybody learning the Lambeth Walk. (Ingrid went on to organize softball, basketball, asking locals to build the hoops, nagging family for land). I was inclined to be boyish. I liked horseback riding and boats and rowing [but] I had no organized

stuff to be athletic. I didn't realize it until I was 12 or 13 if you didn't have anything you should [have it]. I began to realize Newfoundlanders had an inferiority complex. If someone came from away, a maid from Boston, everyone would look to see what she was wearing. I'd say we dress as well as her, you make all our clothes! [While] my mother was awful particular, she had these Newfoundland ways, which I didn't have [being impressed by others].

"She encouraged me. She believed in me."

But if I had it and my friends didn't, I asked and she (mother) always gave me some (One time, Ingrid, a young girl, saw a little boy who had no clothes. She stole a sister's skirt and started to cut pants from the skirt. Her mother's reaction shows the kind of encouragement Ingrid received from an early age). [Mother helped] cut them out of paper and said, "Tack it up and when you do I'll sew them up for you." She believed in me. She knew she had something different from the rest. I was the proudest person in the world when I brought him down the pants.

Ingrid showed a gallery of family photos and a certificate of recognition of her contribution to the community, noting this meant a great deal to her.

How important was encouragement?

If it was a good thing for somebody else and for the place, I went ahead and did it. I used every argument but people [co-operated] with me (Ingrid was not afraid of speaking

out). I was Chairperson of the Council Catholic Women's for twenty-one years. I'd say give somebody else a chance, you can do it as good.

"I might be frightened to death and I'd never say."

The year I came home from school, Jubilee Guilds had begun teaching all kinds of crafts, glove making, weaving and cooking. Nobody was interested in leading it. (Ingrid was asked by the priest to set it up). By my going into it a lot of my girlfriends went into it. I got them organized. I got my sister to teach making salads and cookies. A lot didn't know how to do it. Another woman was a great knitter and I got her to do that. They all learned weaving. People could make things for themselves and we made toys for the poor. When people got tired or knew what they were doing, we turned it into a little social club. But we didn't have a place to meet. (She bargained and cajoled and recruited help and turned a twine loft [storage space for fishing gear] into a fully decorated club house, stove, cupboards, ping pong table and all. I got my gang to work. We called it the Guild room.

Sometimes on a nice moonlight night we would row into the harbour. One girl, a nervous type, said, "Oh my, I wonder what would happen if a submarine came up?" There was a war and we were way out in the harbour. Everybody got scared. Now, if I thought on that I wouldn't say. I'd put it out of my mind. I might be frightened to death and I'd never say.

We organized a voluntary service club for military men who had nothing to do. The reason I had fun [without too many community objections to different projects] was because

anything we did [money raised] went in to the church! If we had a masquerade party, it went to the church. If we had a concert, it went to the church. I wanted to work for the church anyway. I was 21 years Chair of the Council of Catholic Women. Then I was with the Cancer Society, over 20 years Chair of the Cancer Society. In my early days, teen years, I was with the TB / Lung Society, sold forget-me-nots for them.

I got into things because I saw the need and I always like home. As I told you on the telephone, a 'community is only as good as the people in it' (quoting Winston Churchill). I wanted to be a good community person. I felt I had to be. I loved introducing new things.

(Ingrid's young husband had been killed in the war. After D Day, she decided to go to New York, to see a bit of the world and to stay with an aunt Tess, whom she had always been told she was like). I loved Broadway plays and personalities but after a month, I thought this is going to be monotonous so I had another idea. Since we had no beauty parlour in our town I said, I think I'm going to enroll in a hairdressing school. (She tells a story of the first day enrolling in the school in the middle of New York and then independently finding her way back to Brooklyn). I wasn't going to let them think they had a green Newfoundland cousin with them.

I was there fourteen months. I did a state board exam besides the school exam for the hairdressing course and came home and started a business. I loved creating beautiful updos, artistic uplifts. So, I fulfilled another [community] need.

"I like dealing with the children, with the public, discussing it with them. I was learning too."

First I worked in an office, then I was a beautician, and then I became a librarian. I was one of the ones responsible for getting a library. You had to have \$500. Between the company and the stores around I got it. The company gave us an old bunkhouse, made it nice inside and put in a heater and we started our library. I was chairperson of the [volunteer] committee. There were hardly any books for children. I canvassed the town and got books for kids and then we started the *Talking Library* and got people coming. I took the circulation from 500 to 1500. They said to me, "Why don't you keep the job?" I like dealing with the children, with the public, discussing it with them. I was learning too. I took it over.

"She was a great storyteller and I was a great asker and listener."

Education in Newfoundland had changed from my day. Children were coming in and asking me for the history of our town and then it struck me, "Why shouldn't there be a history of [our town]?" How did we start? I graduated with grade eleven. The most I learned was recent European history, a bit about England, the Battle of the Roses, a bit about the Beothucks, our own local history. My grandmother was a great storyteller. She was 75 when she died. I'm that age now. She was a great storyteller and I was a great asker and listener. My mother used to say what are you always tracing relationships for? Grandma'd tell about my ancestry. I went to a few older people who I thought could give me something but they couldn't. When I started this research I was 50. Children came in [to the library] looking for

the history of our town. That showed me how ignorant I was, so I took my holidays and spent three weeks in the archives and in the Gosling Library (in St. John's). I came across Sir Richard Clark's narrative and there I found how the town came to be settled. It started with the shipwrecked sailors off Sir Humphrey Gilbert's flotilla as he was going back after colonizing Newfoundland in 1583 (Ingrid told me the full story. she arranged with government to fund the re-enactment of the scene for the community and a big celebration with a ship in the harbour.) It happened on Labour Day, so all the kids in our community could watch how we came about. It was a beautiful day, with the boat coming out of the mist.

Reflections on Ingrid's learning

Most of Ingrid's stories were of personal projects within which you see a woman who from childhood was an organizer of new ideas and activities. She was curious, decided what she wanted to know and made her thoughts and dreams happen - Halloween and Masquerade parties, the Jubilee Guild, the hairdressing, the clubhouse, the library. It almost seems like a compulsion to do, learn and work out problems, as if her early thinking, "why can't we have it?" became her motivation. Certainly her early childhood experiences gave her confidence and encouragement and many experiences of success. At seventy-five, she is still active in community, bringing history to elementary school children and having her say in other events.

George: "If you don't know something don't ever be afraid to admit you don't know it because there's someone who do."

George, eighty five-years-old, enthusiastically welcomed me when I called to set our appointment. "Come on over, have I got a story for you!" I remarked on his enthusiasm and he explained, "If I approach [our] interview this way it's more fun for me and for you, so why not?" As we talked, I realized this open energetic approach is his style and approach to all new ventures.

George checked to see if I wanted to start with his background in education and to lead up from here to the rest of the story.

I was born in 1915 in a little village that had a one-room school. I started at five and left at age 12 and while I was supposed to be a bright student, according to the teacher, I had more interest in outside interests. For example, I had a piece of line in my school bag for tying knots and if she asked me to spell knot, I'd say I can't spell it for you but I'll tie it for you. When I left school I stopped everything except reading. I forgot how to write. I forgot mathematics and I was only up to short division, not long division. When I was away from home I would just say, tell your father if he sees my father; tell him I'm all right (word of mouth because he couldn't write).

When I was twenty I met a girl whose employer moved to Argentina. She said, when I write, answer me yourself. I said Ok. Well, my sister sat on one side of the table and made

the letters for me. You would think if you could read you could make the letters. She spelled the words for me and may as well have written the letter for me. By 1940, when I was twenty-five, I went overseas, I had learned how to write. I never bothered with no mathematics.

"I could multiply and add and subtract in my mind but I couldn't put it on paper."

Once she showed me how to spell and make the words, I was no expert on writing but I could make it legible. I'd keep getting her to help me. Then when I went overseas, I could write home. I forgot everything [about school] except addition. Subtraction came back to me on the boat, playing darts. But, strange about it, I was a little bit of a mental mathematician. I could multiply, add and subtract in my mind but I couldn't put it on paper. I learned how to make belts. We used macramé twine and with a series of knots you'd make it up into diamonds and all shapes. A girl I went with wanted me to make one for her. I and a friend went into Woolworth's. He know what education I had. I was looking for this macramé twine and they didn't have any but they had this silko [a finer consistency twine] there. I said that would probably even be better to make a belt for a girl. With the other I knew how many strands. You'd use up to four times and bank it into knots. This silko I'd need double. She and this other girl got a paper to figure it up. Before she could, I told her how much I needed. I could multiply like anything in my mind but not put it on paper. When she finished, she said I had the right answer and, "You must have had good education." I

said average. My buddy walked away so he wouldn't laugh. He went to the same school I did. He knew what education I had.

Now, [in the navy] we loaded ammunition to go to Egypt. We had to go around the Cape of Good Hope and up the Indian Ocean, a long route. They put an extra gun on board. One night the subject came up about mental mathematicians and I said I remembered my father reading a story about a man who was sentenced to 21 years in prison. However, if he could in the night, without paper or pen, calculate his sentence in seconds he could be free. [The men on the boat] took out pen and paper. This is complicated because you have to know the month, the time, the date and the time of day and the second of the sentence. And you'd have to know leap years, months which have 30 days, 31. Now we'll assume his sentence started in March. The February of that year had 29 days; now we can go from there. I got a piece of paper and pencil too but I'm not doing it. I just want to see what way they are multiplying. When we were comparing answers he asked me what I got. I hedged. He said your answer can be as good as anyone else's. Finally, I said, I got nothing! I said I wasn't at it. I admitted I didn't know how to multiply. I was just trying to figure what way they were doing it. He was flabbergasted that someone my age didn't know how to multiply. He said, "That's terrible, would you like me to help you?" I said yes, sir. We started right back at the first thing in mathematics. We studied away and it's not much longer before we're up to Egypt to discharge the ammunition and of course they took [him] my teacher off!

"I wonder would so and so have a bit of eraser he doesn't need"

Later, I'm up on the wheel at night on watch with the third mate. I said, I wonder would so and so have a bit of eraser he doesn't need. The guy said, "Are you studying for a ticket?" I said when they took the gun off, they took my teacher. He said, "There's no shortage of teachers. Would you like me to take you on?" I bought a slate and pencil same as the first day of school. We started to study and got to New York sometime in January, then [got] ready to go to England. We weren't long into it before we were attacked and we lost 22 U boats so there was no study then. Finally when we got in he said, "You study for another four months and you'll be able to write a fourth class mate's ticket and I'll bet any money you'll pass."

"Wherever you go, keep studying, there'll always be someone there to help you."

Later, I sent away for an ICS course but it was way above me. I didn't have the basics and they had a lot of short cuts in that mathematics. I stopped studying, kept what I had and didn't try to advance it. When I went over on the fish plant [as a boiler operator] there wasn't much time to study. I got married in England, stayed over until 1949, and worked there at a large boy's school where I got steam experience. After I came home I wrote a fourth class ticket, which combined steam and motor and [then a third class ticket] to get a job with CN. I started work with steamships running from Halifax to St. John's. I got this job on the boats, 15 days on and 15 off and decided to go to school on my days off (moving his family temporarily into St. John's). I wrote part A and worked toward a second class ticket which

I figured was good enough. The ink wasn't dry before they had me chief engineer. I suppose I was with that about 11 or 12 years.

"I just kept in on it"

Then we were in on refit. The steamship inspectors come on to see the crew's certificates and they said second class, what about your chief's? I said I don't need that. They said you better believe you need it. If [young fellows] come in with a first class and you only have this, they'll get the job. I studied on my own and boy, that was studying! I studied aboard the boat and anywhere else. I showed one piece, electrical technology, to someone who said sure, that's third year university. I got enough so that when I wrote the ticket I passed it (he showed me the Certificate for Competency for First Class Engineer 1974).

I should be ashamed of remaining ignorant as long as I did. There's so many ready to help if you admit that you need it but if you pretend you know everything, who's going to bother about you? If you don't know something don't be afraid to admit it. There's someone who do.

"Because I never learned it in school see, so I do the whole thing, right out. "

I [was still] doing [math] mentally but not on paper. I was always adding on in my mind. A friend helped me very much because he was slow, and when you got it you had it. Another was no good to me at all. He'd be canceling stuff out in his mind as he went, crossing off as fast as he went. The first friend went down the line, step by step. Because I never learned it in school so I do the whole thing, right out. When my first friend went to correct

me, he started to listen and when I'd finished with it he said [in amazement], you know you did something there I never seen done before. You never added what you multiplied and the next bit. He was just going to correct me but I'd gone on to the next one. He was so used to seeing people do one piece and then add but I never did that. I go step by step. You learn all that stuff [shortcuts] in school [but] I do the whole. Funny thing, I could multiply two rows in my head but not put it on paper. I was going to multiply by 15, keep that in my mind. I could do two lines in my head but not put it on paper. When I wrote the last papers on my ticket, I started writing and wrote three pages of what was in the book. I couldn't stop. I could see [it all] in front of me. I tried to create other words, my own words. It was all glass so he could see. It was so strict that if you went to the toilet they went with you in case there were papers you wanted to look over. [The others] said, he must have had the book. No, he argued, he didn't have the book. I told them if they only know how hard I fought to use other words.

Did that surprise you, your ability to see and remember so clearly?

I had a photographic memory. The same with the multiplication. I could see the figures but I couldn't put it on paper. I don't remember realizing it at all until I wrote this paper and then I knew I could read something over and close the book and see certain things, not everything. When I was studying [at home] I'd get up at 7 in the morning, have my breakfast and start. I'd come up around three for a cup of tea and supertime, about 7. This is the week before the exam. When I came up I was ready to break, like the fiddle string. I'd

put on Montevanni's semi classical and fix a drink. After a few minutes, I would be totally relaxed.

"Maybe it's a trait in my grandfather who was friends with a group who understood one another"

That was stamped in my brain. It sounds like I'm blowing my own horn, like I'm particularly clever, but I did have a lot going for me that others didn't have. Some part of me said, don't stay down, go up. Maybe it's [from] a trait in my grandfather who was friends with a group who understood one another. Where they got the books I don't know, old rusty books, some as rusty as anchors. They studied before there was any education. People say kids are so much smarter today than before. They start with Mr. Dressup and Sesame Street at 5, then to university for five years. They got to know something, haven't they?

If I'm reading a big book, I learned how to spell before I went on. I didn't have to go back over the work. My sister was the brain altogether but she had no education. [For example] my niece [asked for help] to put the family tree together [for a project]. I said, my dear, I don't know one little branch on the tree, but when you come home in the evening I'll have the whole tree with not one little branch missing. I went to our Cove and told [my sister]. She talked, I wrote and don't think I didn't get the family tree. My sister knows eighteen families in M. Cove, 18 children born in one year

"It's that step up."

We always had to get to the top. When I was a sailor, the next step up was a bosun. If you please the crew, you don't please the mate but, it's that step up. On the boats I wasn't satisfied until I got to be top engineer. I was also a part time inspector for Lloyd's of London Surveyors. I didn't put down surveyor because I wasn't qualified. They'd check nothing. I knew about this from my experience engineering. I built [my son's] house too and wired it. I told the inspector I'm not an electrician, I'm an engineer. He said, that's good enough for me.

"Never hide your ignorance. It's a killer if you do. If you reveal it, there's someone to teach you."

In England where they had their own laundry and steam boilers, I got steam experience. My wife had a job lined up. I told the second engineer on the boat about this steam job and he showed me how to light it up. I figured I'd have a couple of weeks with the employee who was leaving and I'd find out what it was all about. I went down Monday morning to see. I discovered just workers preparing the building. A man said, thank God you're here, the fellow who left fell down and broke his hip on the way out Friday, I'll show you where the boiler is. I said this is it for sure now! They had two rooms, one with a steam boiler, the other with coke furnaces for hot water. I got that going. I got the hot water going through. I was there a week when a contractor came from London to install a steam pump. He'd rather talk than work so I asked him questions about things I needed to know. After my

first experience on the boat, I never hid ignorance again. It was up front with everything. That's my main message. Never hide your ignorance. It's a killer if you do. The contractor told me everything to do. When he left I was okay. In the night to bank a boiler, you keep a bit of ashes and threw wet ashes to keep it smoldering along so you could go home. The next morning it was all right. Not bad.

"I was always the type never to take no for an answer. Always check why that no was no."

When I was 11, I fished lobster with father. I first left home when I was 13. Men were scarce then. We used to row out and go in to every corner and crevice with lobster pots. I was too small and we had to rig it [the boat] up so that my feet could reach. You worked day and night. I wasn't the exception. Other children were doing the same thing. The war broke out in 1939 and on Sunday November 3, 1939, three of us went and signed up. I went soon for a medical. They turned me down because I had my top teeth out. I knew this was a peacetime regulation. I was always the type never to take no for an answer. Always check why that no was no.

Were there discussions in your family around ideas and learning?

We never had much discussion unless it was about religion. [My father] had a book this thick about the lives of the saints, and he knew about all countries, their capitals and governments. He could talk to most anyone on a subject they'd like. There weren't many who had any education.

"It don't matter what I see done but after they finish I could do it. "

I don't lie and I don't blow about what I did. I know there's always someone who done more. I don't see any point. I had certain gifts that a lot didn't have and one was having a sort of photographic mind. I still have a bit. I used to be able to read, shut my eyes and see it perhaps on the wall in front of me and to visualize the person you were talking to, see the features, the way they were sitting or standing, as they were talking. That didn't have to be taught. When you finish talking to me, later I'll be able to see you there. I don't know if it's a gift or what it is.

"A lot of people got no confidence in themselves. "

Whenever I see something done I could do it after, perhaps not as good as they did but I could. A bricklayer came to work on our house. I finished the brick after he left. It was his trade but I could do it well enough not to have him to do it for me. It don't matter what I see done but after they finish I could do it. I might not know that I might want to, perhaps not even have any interest. We'd be talking and I might be mixing some mortar or cement. He told me, you're a good hand to mix mortar. I kept mixing. I didn't know if I was a good or no, but it was the way he had it done. Why would I have someone else do it for me? In 1954 one of the boys showed me how to use a blowtorch. [After] that I did plumbing perfect, no leaks anywhere.

A lot of people got no confidence. They can do it but they got no faith in themselves. If I mess up stuff for myself that's my problem. I had tiles to be laid and the worker didn't

come. Finally I said, why am I'm waiting. "Those are my tiles, if I lay them down I can haul them up. I said, we know the size of the floor, why not start with the bit you're going to finish with and go from there. You put a twelve-inch tile in the middle. You allow six inches on each side to come in toward the side, take off that six. A carpenter [told me] he had never seen it done before. I'm not in their class, but a bit of common sense and a floor that size.

George describes some general examples of his learning e.g., from the experience of being interviewed by me and by a reporter, from using his best time of day for studying and in working out mathematical problems as he slept.

More people encouraged than discouraged me. Once I made up my mind I was going to get there. My best time for study is in the morning. I'm most alert. I have a book that describes this, why some people going to school are better before lunch. Perhaps you experience this yourself. When I had a mathematical problem no one could help with I'd wake up in the night and I'd be thinking how that was to be done. I'd get out of bed and write it down. One problem was about fuel consumption to certain speeds. I had the answer but it wasn't showing how it was done. I tried a couple of different ways and didn't get it. My son tried. As he was ruminating, I said I wonder did they get the cube root of that first before they did whatever they did and then squared it. There were three steps or stages into that. The first was the cube root.

Reflections on George's learning

George is exceptional, energetic like a child eager to play with learning, never losing interest in "figuring things out." George spoke of a history of learners with his grandfather being part of a group who studied from books "rusty as old anchors" before there was education. I could easily imagine him, at each stage, acting out his goals. He found teachers, creating it seemed a floating school beyond school walls, achieving academic (mathematical and subject knowledge) and work skills. From the many problems he solved he seemed to construct deeper knowledge. His interest was so intense, that he seems to have defined his own learning strategies. He was aware of his "photographic memory" gift, his best study time, and that he preferred to learn step by step rather than take shortcuts. Peter, another participant, seems to be saying something similar when he talks about the difference between what you come to know yourself and what someone else "learns" you.

Charles: "My aim in life"

Charles fished with his father from an early age, deciding his goals and navigating his life towards these. Like George, at eighty-nine, he has the enthusiasm of a much younger person, as if he were still involved in the learning and problem solving he describes.

That was my aim in life, to go master, get a certificate and go on ships. Ottawa notified that people in the coast area got to get certified because if the captain wasn't a certified master, he's out of a job. My company said "Look, we'd like to keep you, you're

doing a good job, so buckle down and get a certificate. " We went to St. John's, me, Uncle Jim and the big sealing master. We were feeling pretty nervous, the [examiner] was a tough old guy. He sung out "Come in!". Uncle Jim said , "You go first." I went in and he put me through the ringbolts. When Uncle Jim came I said, what's the struggle? He said, "He's tough. I'd like to be like you. He told me you were one of the smartest that ever come in for it." I'm not bragging! When we got our certificates, I got unlimited masters, any ship. Uncle Jim couldn't go over three hundred-ton, but I could take anything out. I wasn't too bad, but he was tough, an old English captain.

"I think that's what made me the seaman I was, because he'd depend on me."

When I come out of school, my father was going blind, and he says, 'I got to take you out of school. There wasn't much about education then, no industry, only fishing in Newfoundland. The paper mill was built in 1920. I had to go fishing and that's it. I went out there with my father, who could hardly see me in the stern of the boat. We fished for two years, and he trusted me for everything. He was almost blind. I think that's what made me the seaman I was, because he'd depend on me. We'd set our trawls out and find the buoys and keep the hooks in order. I had in my mind then, I'm going to [to be] skipper. When I was out there fishing, old Captain Charlie came here to get a baiting of capelin and the Electric Flash passed with all her sails on. She looked perfect, and I said to me father, I said, "Some day I'm going to be skipper on one of them." He said, " Well me boy, you can do it you can do anything you want, if you work for it." I certainly did work for it! In 1924, I left for Sydney.

Until 1949, we couldn't get into Canada without a job. My sister in Sydney signed for me. The United States was dry, no liquor. I got a job on a rumrunner, seventy-five dollars a month! After four years of rum running, I got fed up, you might get pulled in and go to jail. I gave it up.

I then met a wealthy owner and manager of Fishery Products Limited who asked me to bring [a yacht] down from Boston. After we landed he said, "What are you going to do now?" [And he offered me a job on a wooden dragger and training to go with it] When the time came, he called me. I said, "I'm not going to take it." He [bought] a [refrigerated] vessel. I was skipper three years. Then he bought a war ship and converted her into a cargo ship, a real fast one [and I was skipper of that boat].

How did it happen that you came to be a skipper [captain]?

When we goes to Halifax for our refit, the steam ship inspectors come aboard and they said, "Captain, we want to get the number of your certificate." I said, "I haven't got one. They said, "We're sorry you have to get a certificate, because we're giving this boat a seaworthy certificate, and you're not a certified man. The company called me up and said, "You got to get that certificate, you've done a good job for us and you don't drink." [That's when he and his Uncle Jim took the test] I took in anything, whatever come along [tourist boats on Lake Erie]. (Charles told of positive feedback, being given high responsibility and solving problem situations. He heard comments like, "He's a real genius", and it is apparent this assisted his confidence. He met allies and supporters. He didn't speak of obstacles.)

"I'm going to night school to do navigation."

Jack [a friend] went principal of the Parade Street school in St. John. I was engineer on an old steamer [that needed a new engine] when I decided I'm going to night school to do navigation. He said, "I'll buy the book and go with you." He could put everything right; only had to figure it out. It being my aim and object [so] for two months I got a lot out of that navigation.

I done a lot of reading. In the rum running days, an old guy who never married, George, was on the boat. He liked to read and to drink. Every nickel he spent on reading. He told me you got to get down and start reading, boy so I got down on the words. He was a real scholar. I was with him four years. When he grew up you didn't get much schooling but he got interested in me and he had all kinds of books. I used to stand watch and he and I'd be always yarning. He'd tell me if I missed a word or didn't know it. He had a gift.

"When I was bank fishing with skippers, I'd think I'd do things a lot different than you're doing it."

My heart and soul was right in [being skipper] from the time I went out here with my father. Right from the time that the Electric Flash went by I wanted to do that. When I was bank fishing with skippers, I'd think I'd do things a lot different than you're doing it. The skippers would throw you off anywhere. Our skippers at that time weren't navigators. They went by good reckoning. But if you don't set your trawl right on [the western banks], if you

go out in the deep water, there's no fish out there. They'd throw off ten dories fishing with forty lines a year, and perhaps you wouldn't get enough fish to eat.

Charles reflects. His only son, who died in his early forties, had become highly educated and very successful in his career. The couple had to learn to deal with this tragic loss.

I got thirty years since I retired when I was sixty. I does all the dishes! I gets it all ready. You know we're not young anymore. The wife preached education into our son day and night! He went to the top, no time before he had a job with the Maritime Commission. They loved him.

"We'd go out and sit down on the steps of an old store that was there, and take down the sun."

Of his mentor, an old navigator who lived in the town, Charles said he was a good navigator, one of the best.

I used to go down to his place and ask him questions. He had an old sextant. We'd sit down on the steps of an old store, and take down the sun. He'd teach me, and tell me what it was all about. I spent a lot of days taking bearings on lights and fog alarms in the fog. He'd tell me to get the bearing, and then you got to run two miles one way and two miles another, and your longest point will be a position from that horn. He'd explain it all to me, and I took it down. Like I said, that was my ambition. When you'd get out to sea you'd try it out. That's the only thing we had before radar came out. A Loran [radar equipment] was the last thing

came out in navigation, press a few buttons and you had your position in seconds. When I started we had nothing, only the log. I'd leave Burin for New York and go up south of Sable Island, Nantucket, and then when you get out there, it's all dead reckoning. You didn't know whether you was a few miles out or not. Are we gonna make her? We did, right on the button. I seen quite a bit. They always said, boy, you're doing pretty good, you know, they'd always say that.

Charles speaks about his reputation with his crew and later how he worked on behalf of the town as a councillor.

When you could put confidence in [your crew] they just liked that. You wouldn't chase them around. They looked after the ship and got the boys to paint her up. On the Brula (one of the ships he mastered). I had a cook for years, two mates, and a chief engineer. I wouldn't look over their back all the time.

I was elected three times in twelve years [to the town council]. I went to St. John's and got in with the minister of finance, went back and formed the town council, but don't think I didn't get a lot of [flack]. (Charles tells of the need for a breakwater, paving the roads and how he worked "with" people to get agreement and with government to get funding). My father told me, don't argue, walk away, and there will be no argument, since it takes two to make a quarrel. There'll be no bad feelings. I'd sit down and listen and wouldn't argue with them, then they'd stop and then you could talk. You'd say, now we're going to put a cement

wall there and a nice road because we were losing our beach. We done all the local roads with pavement too. I got this for the town council. There's nobody can say one word against me.

What were you most proud of in your learning?

It was when I got my certificate and went master of ships. That's one of the biggest things in my life; I got what I was looking for and what I was going to get if it was possible at all. It came natural, and after a while you went to New York as though you were going to church. You knew you were doing right. The younger days was a lot of worry. On the last of it I could sleep and let the boys take over. I had a lot of confidence in me ownself. If you don't have it and your're going to worry [that's not good]

"Think it out and see what you're doing. That's the way it was I set out to do something."

Did it take long to study and prepare for the captain's papers?

I had five years before I had to [be tested]. There wasn't much I had to learn. You have to think. (Charles tells of a dangerous incident in which a crew person covering him decided to take the right of way from another ship). Six or seven hundred passengers were aboard. That big ship'd have piled over us. I didn't report him, but I gave him the low down! Think and see what you're doing. That's the way I set out to do something. I thought it over, looked at it all, studied it the best I could, and never had a collision. I didn't stop and think, this is right and that's wrong. Experience, that was it.

You are very proud of your work. What kinds of influence did your experience have on others, would you say?

I could get [workers] anywhere, but I used to pick them up here. (He gave a man who needed work but had asthma a job, giving him lighter work until the owner of the ship said lay him off. He valued his crew and they seem to have valued him). If anybody ever said anything about me, they'd skin em, you know?

I set out to do something when I was young, and I planned everything as it come. It worked out very good.

Reflections on Charles learning

At age ten, Charles said learning to be a skipper "was in my heart and soul." Charles set his goals early and stuck to them. He seems to have met a lot of people, the employer who put him in charge of the first ships, and the principal who did a navigation course with him, who respected him and praised him, both directly and indirectly, for his problem solving and for "being a real genius." Early on Charles had the confidence to choose what he wanted and to risk. Charles' reputation was important to him, as a fair employer (hiring local workers) and as a non-argumentative person.

He also met many "teachers" along the way, the early navigator who mentored him, his father whose dependence probably "made me the seaman I was," and the "reader" on the boat who was "right interested in yarning" and in helping him read. He also seems always to

have been confident, evident in his choosing not to go on draggers when a job was offered with training. After all, it wasn't the kind of vessel that fit his ambition.

Conclusion

How learners perceive themselves, how they describe the processes they followed in learning, and what factors seem to have been primary in contributing to their independent learning was the focus of these phenomenological interviews.

Three key elements connect participants' stories. First, except for Joseph, age forty-five, each grew up in situations where it was common for relatives or other adults to share information with children. Children were also in a position to look on and "practice" work. Second, in the early part of the century, when most participants were beginning their learning, there seemed to be few barriers between groups and individuals e.g. in terms of accessing information and opportunity. With few choices, it seems everyone was as *important* as everyone else was. Third, phrases used often in participants' stories reflect a very strong valuing of independence and hard work. Learning and work seemed accepted as natural companions on the path to getting ahead, an undisputed fact of life.

It was a surprise to discover such confidence and presence in participants' expressions. While years of career and personal counseling had introduced me to the amazing accomplishments of individuals without formal education, still, on some level, I expected to hear more regret from individuals largely learning outside "the formal school." Perhaps this

is a function of my having spent so much time attached to formal schooling. Since no participant positioned the formal school as a real judge of their learning, tapping the rich resource of uncertified learners may be of more benefit to educators seeking ways to improve all educational interventions than it will be of benefit to the self directed learner.

Joseph, who wanted to but could not relate to school, did not seem to let any negative feeling detract from learning on his own or creating a business. He wished he had able to learn theory. Others suggested that more grammar and math might have been an aide to getting ahead faster. For Mary, Alfred and Joseph, talking about their experience seemed new. However, Leonard, Ingrid, Patrick, George and Charles were comfortable telling about experiences. New to most was perhaps the idea of relating experience to learning. In this respect, George paid particular attention to articulating his thoughts on learning and how to learn. He had sought out writing and mathematics lessons. Others talked about the activities associated with their vision or ambition.

Several remembered a mothers' skill, kindness, humour or resourcefulness. Others had positive learning support from an uncle, a sister, a mentor, the navigator, the reader on the boat, math tutors at sea, all people who took time to praise or give them a chance. Participants in turn showed me the same respect. Even if they felt shy or awkward at first, they wanted to help my "study" in any way they could. I sensed they would put themselves out to help me succeed.

In terms of self-perception and how learners describe themselves and what they have done, what is most common are positive attitudes, humour, ambition, good memory skills, hard work, and a connection to a network of informal assistants. Positive self-talk is sprinkled throughout the narratives. "I done good, it was pretty good for the first time, and I was a good worker, a smart worker. I made a fine quilt; I applied for my fishing license and got it, no questions." Participants seemed grateful for their "talents" such as an excellent, even photographic memory. Most went to church and seemed to acknowledge some higher power, e.g., "it's not just me, you know," for the gifts they enjoyed. While a participant might joke that having the right tools would have made things "too easy," I heard no tone of resentment. Poor fish prices, unfair resettlement practices and death of loved ones was not evidenced in a "why me" attitude, nor did I hear self-blaming. Ambition, vision, determination and a positive view of a world were the dominant themes.

Personal initiative and skill in communication is evident. George's main message was "Always ask, never be afraid to reveal your ignorance." Participants seemed to see teaching and learning as a natural two-way flow. In addition, being a good worker, handling confidences, never arguing, helping, having a good name, not hurting anyone, being honest, and contributing to the community were values expressed. Ingrid's motto was, "A community is its people," and her stories show this as the code she lived by.

As I drove away from these inspiring interviews, the ocean was always within view. With its beauty, its constancy and strength, it occurred to me that the participants, even those

who traveled, had this same view all their lives. I wondered how nature itself acts as a model for persistence and creative use of resources, the backbone of these learners' approaches.

Chapter Five

Summary and Discussion

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to gain insights into the self-directed learning experiences of individuals whose learning occurred largely outside formal school structures. The findings are significant since they suggest that the core meaning of the learning experiences lies less in the act of learning itself than in the experience of becoming who one aspires to be. Participants described feelings, processes and people that contributed to their experience of learning. From my analysis of the findings, three clusters emerged. One centers on personality traits, beliefs and attitudes with regard to learning initiatives; the second focuses on the learning strategies employed; and the third, on elements within the environments in which individuals acquired their learning.

Characteristics of Self-Directed Learners

a. **The ability/willingness to set goals:** Most self-directed learners do create a learning plan for themselves, but it is more like a broad deliberation into which resources, helpers and plans are fitted. Aims and visions are formed with conviction, like a map, to follow in moving forward and up. I recall asking, "What led you to make this, Peter?" and he responded, "Just my thought and what I was thinking." Three participants expressly valued contemplation of a problem before action. It is my experience that in most workplace meetings, action items are praised with little respect for contemplation, even after history shows goal-setting was necessary. We are a society that values fast movement, perhaps often at our own expense.

b. Positive Attitudes: Determination, will and the trust that others will help is evident. Positive self-concept, self-trust, affirming self-talk, charm, curiosity, courage, and humour stood out. Courage was perhaps especially apparent. As Scott Peck (1978) pointed out, "life is difficult." He suggested that once that idea is accepted, the fact that life is difficult no longer matters. Feelings are deeply experienced but the loss of loved ones, poverty or hard work is approached with grace and courage. Having positive past learning experiences e.g., being respected, seems to have the stage for asking more and going on to learn. Though often encouraged by significant helpers, participants said they would not be easily discouraged anyway. Which came first, the help, the ambition and personal drive is not easy to say. However, it is no wonder those who referred participants to me were so proud of these citizens' achievements. Those individuals recognized the initiative and achievements of uncertified individuals.

c. Internal locus of control: All participants clearly demonstrated a belief that they had the power to truly influence the outcomes in their lives. In none of the transcripts did I detect examples of blaming or anger about the struggles in life or learning. Participants, though using unique approaches to realize goals through life learning, shared certain attitudinal approaches. Mary, George, Peter and Ingrid all said that you have to believe in yourself or have faith. All participants spoke about wanting to have things right, do the best, get ahead, and not make mistakes. Ingrid and Charles were more strongly assertive in tone and manner but all individuals were purposely committed to goals, using discipline, courage, creativity and blind faith to realize them.

d. Valuing work: Neither hardship nor necessity dominates the attitude evident in phrases such as Joseph's "Work, it's one of me loves, I guess." Energy and optimism is clear, for example, in "I just do it" or in the common hard-working approaches to

challenges "If they can do it [the work] in Norway, why can't we do it here [making trawler doors]?" Individuals, though led by personal goals, did not seem driven; they maintained a calmness and deliberation. New ventures were like puzzles to be approached with resourcefulness and imagination, not worry.

e. **Willingness to Take Risks:** Learners were not reticent about their learning, as shown by such initiatives as buying or building a new boat, taking a trip to New York, introducing Halloween and saying no to a job that was not perceived as essential to achieving their main goals. In so doing, the participants expressed their individuality and what we often call an "entrepreneurial" spirit.

Learning Strategies

a. **Trial and Error:** Persistence is evident in phrases such as "I rip it out and start again." Experimentation, asking, trying and risking are apparent, as is an appreciation and an acceptance of the work involved. Quite often positive self-talk is evident. For example Peter spoke of his first boat as good and the second one being better. Neither boat, not the first he built as a teenager nor the one he built with that experience was a "bad" product. Patrick talked of learning to tie the ropes so that in a wave they wouldn't come undone: "At first you wouldn't know but it was important to learn." Similarly, Charles watched others' mistakes or tried out lessons that his navigator friend taught him on land. Experimentation seems to have been a pattern. I contrast this sharply with children's and often my frustration when I don't know something that I actually have never had the opportunity to learn. I believe that too often the expectation that we must "get it right" makes for embarrassment in sharing our ignorance which in turn can stop us from approaching a task, expecting trial and error and thus building knowledge usable in

new settings. It seems that these participants learned that it was okay not to know and also to say that out loud, confident that just about anything they do in another country, anywhere with or without a teacher can be done, if you try!

b. Networking: Good communication skills and the ability to connect with others seemed especially important, as evidenced by the learners' ability and willingness to find mentors and role models, whether they were family members or others. For example, in George's hint to a mate aboard ship, "You don't suppose so and so would have a bit of eraser?," he was able to create an opening for a new teacher to jump in. Humour, timing and charm seemed especially important in terms of how individuals made themselves available and ready to be taught.

c. Observation: Another learning strategy, which emerged easily from the data, was observation. Phrases such as, "I watched and listened" and "I did what he was doing" were noted repeatedly throughout. Interestingly, these participants used observation, not only to learn from the best, but also to watch for errors and to learn from their mentors' mistakes. Charles, for instance, recalled saying to himself, "I won't do what they're doing." These observation strategies went beyond learning from others, as the participants also spoke about mentally reflecting on a problem and observing how something works or could work.

d. Mentally preparing for work: In addition to observing, four participants emphasized thinking before doing. As Stephen Covey (1994) suggested, all things are created twice, first mentally, then physically. In a similar way, participants seemed to think things through and use a kind of mental *blueprint* to form the end result. George talked about his photographic memory, doing mental mathematics, his best study times, building his vocabulary and needing to know all the steps in solving a problem, in this case a

mathematical problem. He used the self-awareness he gained to maximise his learning. Several said in an offhand way that maybe they were different or had a gift. In comparing George's approach to descriptions by Mary, Patrick, Leonard, Charles, Joseph, and Ingrid, it is not evident that they analyzed their personal strategy in the same way. Peter observed that the brain sent messages to the body and also that his intent to catch fish and do good (sometimes bargaining with God as well as believing in his own ability) translated into his actually doing well. Peter also described the necessity to mull over a plan before beginning work. Both Joseph and Peter connected dreaming to learning; the former in the sense of sleeping on a problem and waking with the solution and the latter, in the sense of trusting instinct.

e. Organized thinking: Related to this is substantial evidence of attention to detail and orderly thinking. Some learners itemized or used numbers and dates, while others painted mental pictures. Ingrid's original transcript contained eighteen stories. Story (distinct anecdotes) seemed to be used like note taking, capturing not only what happened, but also the good feelings associated with past accomplishments. Several participants credited having a good memory (even a photographic memory in George's case) for how they were able to do things.

f. Trusting and using instinct: As illustrated by Joseph's remark, "I'm after going to sleep and dreaming the answer, " learning problems were often resolved before the work was started. Sleeping on a problem seemed quite different from other ways of mentally preparing to tackle a task, because it appeared to involve a profound trust in their own personal instincts.

g. Positive self-affirmations: These participants were clearly very proud of their accomplishments, as illustrated repeatedly throughout the transcripts by such phrases as,

"I done good" and "I'm proud." These positive self-affirmations seemed highly strategic in terms of providing motivation to continue learning new knowledge and skills. Besides positive self talk, it seems the participants positively identified with others' initiative, choosing to relate stories of initiative (i.e., the man aboard ship who was a scholar, a grandfather who read with a group of other learners, a real smart friend who was principal, an inventive mother who made things from scratch or a supervisor at the yard who gave Joseph a chance to "prove" he could do welding).

The Social Context

All of these participants were born and raised in communities with a tradition of youth inheriting adults' skills. In that sense the practice of sharing knowledge was an existing pattern. Except for Joseph, who gave an example of learning by observation at the shipyard, all spoke of looking on, practising or beginning work early in childhood. Also, except for Ingrid (privileged in terms of education, family owning a business, etc.) often heavy responsibilities were placed on participants at a very young age. Whatever participants beginning work experiences, all indicate a personal valuing of the qualities of independence and hard work and a tendency to embrace possibility where perhaps another person might have felt lost.

There was only fishing. Although participants often repeated a variation on the theme of limited choice throughout, it seems clear that they were able to make choices resulting in the development of diverse skills. In fact, they learned from many teachers and all, in a sense, became their own boss. In seeing their own environment through rose coloured kaleidoscopic lenses they were able to expand the options normally available.

A couple of participants indicated that formal education might have helped them

in talking to "educated" people. I got the impression from general conversation that what they needed specifically in order to talk to "educated" people was grammar and to be better able to use big words yet participants did not seem to feel less "educated" because their skill was not certified. Even when an exam to captain ships was necessary, the fact that this was "certification" did not dispel the worth of learning up to then. It was a hurdle, successfully met and a source of pride. Joseph expressed some frustration that, without certification, you always have to prove yourself but he did not let that stop him starting his own business, and I heard recently that since trawler doors are no longer needed, he has started another business. Though external validation was not an apparent goal for either participant, when recognition came it was valued (e.g., for Joseph, others' amazement that he actually built the fire trucks or for Patrick visitors admiration of his displayed collection of antiques, for Mary and Ingrid certificates of recognition for their contributions to community).

Related to this is the participants' ability to find models and mentors within an environment limited by the ebb and flow of the fishery. An admired uncle was remembered as a contemplative planner. A resourceful self-sufficient mother, though deceased, might still be a symbolic model. Most participants described positive early memories of someone who cared and chance meetings with knowledgeable others, including, but not limited to those who were working in the fishery. I observed that all participants, including the unmarried participant, had what appeared to be supportive personal relationships, a marriage partner or in the case of the single participant, nieces and nephews who shared his interest in the town's history. I perceive those supportive relationships plus the models and mentors met along the way as evidence of the learners' skill in communicating and relating effectively to his or her classroom.

Many Newfoundlanders and many people have learned to an exceptional level, and self-directed learning, while a notable phenomenon, is not rare. What is significant and worthy of examination is what meaning this learning had to those who experienced it. Why do some individuals take the initiative to develop their own skills and knowledge? Explanations for the accomplishments of these self directed, mostly uncertified learners could include an unrelenting determination to learn, a great curiosity and no strong messages from others that it could not be done. Or perhaps one could say that poverty, desperation, or the emotional pain of losing one's mother or another family member drove a person to shape their own path. Or is it that the community mentoring/teaching structure quite suits some learners and they flourish in it? It is interesting, though, that while several participants were modest about their accomplishments, none seemed greatly surprised that others had referred them as being significant achievers and learners. These participants seemed to know what they wanted to learn, and that impetus propelled them toward positive development and, in the end, pride.

For seven of the participants, learning took place in the first half of the century and for most, before Newfoundland joined Confederation in 1949. Peter refers to the vote to join Newfoundland with Canada or the United States. He voted to join the United States. Leonard told how, in the thirties, an incredible tidal wave destroyed the fishery and ten years of sparse catches and poverty resulted. Ingrid spoke of women who were left to take care of the community when the war was on and how losing her young husband affected her. Leonard talked about how a buyer for the merchants was suspended for giving a fair price for the fish. Leonard, Peter, Patrick all referred to the control of the merchant on work conditions and how little you got to live on if you were totally dependent on your attachment to the merchant. It is interesting, though, that I never detected bitterness but rather a sense that

these individuals saw life and the power structures within it very clearly; they also, again without apparent bitterness made strong resolutions not to be a shareman i.e., one who split the take with many others. This did not seem to reflect any selfishness. Instead it looked like ambition. No matter what the family background of individuals all transcribed descriptions reflected an attitude of "I did it my way" and of pride in independence. Clearly, this need for independence was a strong motivation for independent learning. In the meantime, this desire to achieve may have had many hurdles. One hurdle that most participants growing up in the early part of the century did not experience was the strong message that credentialism was sacrosanct. While they may have been told what their place was by the merchant fisher code in place at the time, neither acted on any dictate that they were to be dependent. As with any era of society, including our own, the social messages that dominate the social context and those that are absent can profoundly affect how we think about ourselves and how we think about our learning, a most profound expression of ourselves.

Implications of the study

a. Theoretical Implications. Phenomenology, a philosophical mode of inquiry, is well suited to exploring personal descriptions of perception, the origin of experiences and relationships drawn from human existence (Merriam and Simpson, 1989). The practice of self-directed learning does not have a well-developed theoretical base; however, this qualitative inquiry into the lived experience of self-directed learning does offer some theoretical insights.

The feminist analysis provided by Belenky et al. (1986) opened the door to new concepts about different ways of knowing. That exciting new dimension was expanded in later work that included examples of culturally diverse ways of knowing (Goldberger et al,

1996). Gardner (<http://www.nea.org/neaoday/9903/meet.html>), in describing the psychological theory of Multiple Intelligences which takes into account different ways of learning, adds another dimension in terms of the diversity of human expression and ways of achieving and being. He advocates teaching for understanding, providing a deep immersion into topics so those students can use their new knowledge in other situations. Goleman's (1998) concept of Emotional Intelligence also helps us to expand the theoretical frameworks within which to understand who we are and what we do. The flexibility provided by these new paradigms that go beyond scientific examination of humans as creatures who can be defined and measured objectively, allowed me to begin to explore actual experiences in order to raise new questions about self-directed learners. Is it all intuitive, as Boud and Griffin (1987) suggest, or is something else involved, such as a unique organizing circumstance (Spear and Mocker, 1984) which stimulates and propels new learning? Who is likely to be a self-directed learner can be informed by phenomenological studies like this one as well as by biographies of independent persons who excelled. Gibbons (1980) early research, for instance, showed characteristics of single-minded pursuit, positive early influences, and persistence to be key to independent achievements. As well, Candy's (1991) work suggests that personality is a large factor. Perhaps instead, as we discover through these descriptions of learning experiences, learning not only flowed out of their personalities, but also helped to develop those personalities along the way.

This study expands the general thinking on self-directed learning. Formalization of goals and learning processes were not the common practice described by informal learners within this study. Instead, these individuals seem to have swung a broad net in the direction of being a captain of a particular kind of vessel, a ship builder, a musician, or finding other ways of giving to the community. They were determined to catch

something and whatever came into the net was then used as a learning resource. The goal, the net, was the organizing circumstance.

In terms of a theory upon which to build adult education practice, constructivism and the practice of constructivist teaching methods (Brooks and Brooks, 1993) seems to best reflect the interactive work of building knowledge, awareness and problem solving skills. In tackling building a boat and in communicating learning needs and goals in self-understanding and in finding teachers, participants within this study built knowledge, knowledge they knew for themselves. The phrase, "I did it myself," was the slogan for those who played music, built a boat or laid floor tiles. The phrase was used to describe acquiring skills necessary for doing the job, but it seemed to carry over in descriptions of taking things apart, constructing and reconstructing knowledge.

b. Practical Implications

This research offers discussion material for adult and other educators for potential use in fostering life-long learning. The findings are of value to practitioners who work with adults on social development through theatre, community health, social work, education, government, zonal boards and non-profit organizations. Now is a good time to profile the pioneering learning ventures symbolized by self-directed learning as we define the human place in a world where technological advancement dominates. Rural Newfoundland, as perhaps one of the last North American bastions of the self-made person, is in a position to represent the value of traditional knowledge. This venue is worth exploring, not only because it seems so exciting and positive, but also because it builds naturally on individuals' personal strengths. By making visible the uncertified learners' expertise, and connecting that to valuable elements of constructivism e.g.,

creating knowledge through interaction, adult educators can begin to reconstruct what happens in learning just as George did as he became more self aware of what strategies worked for him. We need to interpret with learners what such terms as self-paced, direct application, time for reflection and a high tolerance of trial and error mean from the learner's point of view, in order to aim for best practice within adult education. The findings from this study demonstrate that collaboration between teachers and learners can create truly meaningful learning experiences.

By what means can adult educators explore the strengths and interests of individuals within his or her lived context? How are diverse ways of knowing engaged so that the newcomer to adult learning institutions feels that formal learning can complement and respect their prior knowledge (knowledge that is generally assessed by the institution on entry)? How can adult educators learn from Joseph, who dreams answers to design and mechanical problems, then builds a workable product all without the understanding of mathematics and physics generally assumed to be necessary for solving problems and describing theory? As educators, how can we explain this alternate form of knowledge construction, and what do we do if the learners' prior self-taught expertise exceeds the level offered by the institution? How ready are educational institutions to learn from the learner and incorporate that knowledge into the practice of teaching? How should we regularly check assumptions that may be inherent in our well-intended, well-designed curricula? In practice, how can we acknowledge that there are many equally valid ways to construct the same knowledge when, as Warnock (1995) said, "It is no use to come up with a concept of person which has no relation to our practical concerns, our beliefs about ourselves and other people (p.127)." How can we open possibilities to enhance partnership with learners?

Community developers and anyone else who shares an interest in vital communities may want to explore holistic approaches. Ryff and Singer (1998) discuss human flourishing, a concept of wellness, described as that which comes from a "sense of purpose, embodied by projects and pursuits that give dignity to daily existence and allow for realization of potential (p.7)." The participants' experiences reflect that sense of purpose in a vibrant way. Perhaps a good start would be to begin examining ways to build on the social and economic strength of communities by asking what messages are being transferred to individuals about their personal potential and their chances of success within societies that foster self directed learning. How is the rapidly changing demographic picture altering community structure and traditional meaning making? What learning styles are reflected in the actions of this generation's young learners or young adults? How can positive cultural modes of learning be valued and incorporated into current practice?

The participants in this study were referred to as models of achievement. As we challenge ourselves to value the contribution of all citizens it will be important to use these models of self-directed learning as motivation to continue to develop such intellect and personal resourcefulness, perhaps even with the same energy we use to foster a computer driven world (Postman, 1999).

These hard-working, imaginative enthusiasts have shown us that we all have the opportunity to approach the knowledge and the material of our everyday lives in ways that permit us to build the events and products that identify us. If this expertise, developed outside the formal educational structures, is rendered visible in the meaning-making associated with learning, then adult educators can begin truly to collaborate in community with self-directed learners on the meaning for each of us of the journey we

will take.

Suggestions for Future Research

Not long after I started my interviews, I began to recognize the potential for further research. For instance, when I first heard the phrase, "the teacher learns me," I became curious, because the phrase seemed to go beyond a simple difference in the use of language. When Peter described teacher-taught learning as good, but at the same time said, with pride and preference "what I know, I know myself," it was my perception from his tone that he judged knowledge given to him as different from knowledge he makes himself. Further research might go beyond the acquisition of knowledge and skills necessary to produce a product, a boat, music or captains' papers to enter into examining the way the knowledge to build the boat was constructed. The thoughts, feelings and ambitions expressed in the findings suggest a complex interweaving of factors beyond mechanical mimicking of observed tasks. Thus, such research could offer possibilities for examining atmospheres conducive to creating knowledge. While self-taught achievers from the last century and the first part of this century are often held up as exceptional examples of what a person can do, at the same time as credentialism is criticized as stifling and not indicative that real learning has occurred, many studies of persons who are self-directed learners are undertaken in formal settings. Since there are still learners available to tell of learning from scratch, opportunities to meet and talk with those informal learners in their informal settings should be seized as often as possible.

The findings also indicate that interesting study could be done in exploring the place of narrative in fostering memory and recording learning (McEwan & Egan, 1995). Was story telling or the habit of framing examples into story a substitute for written

reference texts? Since many of our educational ventures have become individual, what models of mentoring and coaching could be designed to fit current environments.

In all these explorations of different ways of approaching different learners, deconstructing familiar stereotypes should be a first step. My work once involved organizing a national workshop for federal employees of Human Resources Development Canada. We titled that workshop "Valuing our Diversity." I realized as I worked on the development of this workshop how subtle the power imbalances (in this case related to the inclusion of women, aboriginal workers, persons with disabilities and people of colour within government employment) are in all situations where one is the giver and another the receiver. In examining all practices in which systemic power imbalances appear and the learning environment is one, if statements like "I did it my way" are important to learners and a source of pride, are we not then challenged to explore who exactly owns our learning? Who evaluates it, who certifies it and, and perhaps most importantly, what is the dominant value supported by the structures in place? I was privileged to meet participants in their eighties whose eyes sparkled with curiosity and openness. Having met these architects of their own knowledge, these "other" learners, I believe we cannot afford not to explore what they have.

Validating traditional knowledge and exploring a rich diversity of voices not only preserves history for its own sake but more importantly, in capturing, understanding and building upon inherent valuable practices, we become grounded. We gain a confident awareness of our unique strengths and capacity. "The power of education is intimately bound up in the social and cultural traditions within which education is set (Applebee, 1994, p.1)." Often, to tap into that power, we just need to ask.

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APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

My name is Maureen Walsh and I am a candidate for the Master of Education degree at Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN). I am currently conducting research into learning initiated by individuals - independent of learning offered and assessed by educational institutions. The purpose of this research is describe and learn from experiences of independent learning.

I am requesting your permission to meet and talk to you, to ask questions regarding your feelings about your learning and happenings which contributed to or hindered your self teaching; as well as the steps or ways in which you gained knowledge or taught yourself a particular skill. I expect the interviews to cover one or two sessions, about 90 minutes each. I would like to audio tape our interviews to help my memory of important detail. The tapes will be destroyed within two years after the study is complete.

Information you provide will be kept confidential in that neither your name nor your community name will be used. Your participation is voluntary; you may refuse to answer any particular question or withdraw your consent at any point. You will have an opportunity to review the completed study, if you wish.

I, _____, hereby consent to participate in the study, Recognizing the Expertise of the Uncertified Learner, undertaken by Maureen Walsh. I understand participation in this study is entirely voluntary; I can refuse to answer any particular question or withdraw at any time. Personal identifying information (my name and community name) is confidential and will not be included in the study.

Participant

Researcher

Date

The research has been approved as meeting the ethical guidelines of the Faculty of Education (MUN). Dr. Rosonna Tite, 709-737-3322 is the supervisor of my research.

You may make any inquiries regarding the nature of my research to Dr. Linda Phillips, Associate Dean, Graduate Programs, MUN, 709-737-8587.

APPENDIX B
REFERENT CONSENT FORM

Dear Referent:

My name is Maureen Walsh, and I am a graduate student at Memorial University in the Faculty of Education. My studies are focused in the area of post-secondary education. A great deal of my work over the past year has involved studying adult learning.

I plan to research learning processes used by self-directed independent learners who taught themselves knowledge and skills independent of formal schooling. I plan to conduct with each person one or two in-depth interviews which will be audio-taped. My preference is to meet with individuals in small communities on the Burin Peninsula, and I hope to conduct my interviews during December and January.

I am seeking your help in locating people to for interview.

I request your permission to briefly record for my study your reason for referring a particular individual and to mention to the person that you provided their name.

Please be assured the interviews which result from your referral(s) will be conducted with the utmost respect.

Your assistance with my research is very much appreciated.

I, _____, agree to be interviewed by Maureen Walsh for the study "Recognizing the Expertise of the Uncertified Learner". I agree that, while my name will not be used in the study, the researcher can mention to the person referred that I made the referral.

Referent

Researcher

Date

The proposed research has been approved as meeting the ethical guidelines of the Faculty of Education at Memorial University of Newfoundland. Dr. Rosonna Tite (737-3322) is the supervisor of my research.

You may make any enquiries regarding the nature of my research to Dr. Linda Philips, Associate Dean, Graduate Programs, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 737-8587.

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Wording of the questions or choice of questions may change entirely depending on the pilot interview and later, participant focus. They may be later grouped, based on the pilot interview, to focus on the purpose of the study and perceived best format in which to collect data. An introduction to participants will be prepared explaining further the purpose of the study.

1. Tell me about your first learning experience? Who was there? What do you remember seeing/hearing?
2. What do you remember about this important learning experience? What did you do? What did you do next? Was it Ok? How did you know it was okay?
3. Tell me about some other things you've learned? Tell me about how you decided what was important to know? How old were you when you began to teach yourself?
4. How would you describe the process you follow?
5. Do other people help or hinder your learning?
6. Why do you think so and so sent me to talk to you when I asked to meet an independent learner? What's your opinion of that?
7. What started your interested in knowing/learning? What of your learning do you think was motivated by necessity or crisis; what from a wish to know?
8. Would you describe yourself as a curious person?
9. What challenges you? Discourages you?
10. Are you as interested now in learning as always? What do you do? What keeps you interested?
11. What do you do when you come across something you think is really complicated? Examples?

12. What were some of the high/low points in your learning?
13. What has been a most important learning experience for you?
14. Give me an example of one time you needed to search out information/help? What type of information did you need at the time?
15. How do you go about finding what you need in order to learn (give examples)?
16. Tell me what it felt like when you saw what you had made, done?
17. How do you know when you get it right? What tells you? How do you study the result? How do pieces fit together for future work or new learning?
18. How do you go about planning?
19. Have you had learning experiences important to you happen which you would call luck? Tell me about that experience?
20. When people talk about that spirit that keeps Newfoundlanders going, what are they talking about?
21. What would you tell someone else in your community who asked you how to learn something new?
22. What makes learning/doing new things important in your life?
23. What in your environment helps you? Example?
24. How important was family influence? The role of early teachers(school or other teacher...parent, relative, friend, boss?
25. How would you describe yourself?
26. How do you think your learning may have influenced people around you or your community?
27. How do you compare your learning to what you see of formal education?



