

HOW OLDER RURAL ADULTS UTILIZE
SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING IN LATE LIFE ADJUSTMENTS

by

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(Under the Direction of SHARAN B. MERRIAM)

ABSTRACT

The increasing numbers and influence of older adults is causing many segments of western society to re-evaluate the concept of old age. Medical advances and personal lifestyles have resulted in older adults living longer and healthier lives. As one ages, adjustments in work, family, and health must be made. Self-directed learning (SDL) is one way of negotiating these changes. There is a need for more research about older adults and self-directed learning, and there is a lack of research concerning the link between SDL and late life adjustment. The purpose of this study was to understand how older, rural adults utilize self-directed learning in the adjustments of late-life.

This research study employed a descriptive qualitative design that used in-depth, semi-structured interviews for data collection. The sample of ten purposefully selected older adults from a rural area reflected diversity in gender, race, education, and employment. The age of the participants ranged from 75 to 87. Four research questions guided this study: (1) What is the nature of the SDL of these older adults? (2) What is the process of SDL? (3) What are the late life adjustments of these older adults? (4) How does the rural context shape the SDL of these older adults?

Data analysis guided by the constant comparative method revealed the following findings: The nature of self-directed learning is highly engaging, variably structured,

collaborative, and goal-directed. There is a specific process of self-directed learning beginning with an incentive to learn plus an interest, leading to accessing resources; with systematic attention and adjustments in their learning, some projects ended while others remained ongoing. There is also a catalyst, usually another person, interspersed in this process. The rural setting provided a constructive atmosphere for learning. Helpful aspects were the quiet and simple atmosphere, nature, and the people; negative comments centered on lack of resources.

Three conclusions were drawn related to how older adults incorporate self-directed learning: late life adjustments are a primary incentive for self-directed learning, self-directed learning is an integral process in the lives of older adults, and the rural environment is a predominantly positive context for learning.

INDEX WORDS: Self-directed learning, Late life adjustments, Rural, Process of learning, Qualitative research, Older adult, Adult development

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2003

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this manuscript to my parents - Donald N. Roberson, Sr., and Idelle H. Roberson. Thank you for your interest in my education and the example of your own personal pursuit of knowledge. You provided for our schooling in many ways, from early morning breakfasts before class, to help with math problems, to resources for college. And thanks for setting an atmosphere at home where learning and new experiences were encouraged. Since we have all become older, I returned to school, and you have continued to learn on your own. You also model the principles found in this research by continually meeting the challenges and situations of life by learning what was necessary to age successfully.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to acknowledge Sharan B. Merriam. Thank you for your timely input and helpful suggestions for this document. I would like to also thank Allen B. Moore who contributed to this process in its initial phase. I want to thank the committee members, whose input and suggestions helped to mold this work. Thanks in general to the Department of Adult Education at The University of Georgia. The staff and faculty as well as other students have added to my experience at the University. You model and set forth the principles of lifelong learning.

Second, I would like to acknowledge the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at The University of Georgia. During time in this department I began to realize the connection between recreation, leisure, and education. Thanks to the faculty for your input.

Third, I want to acknowledge Campus Crusade for Christ, Intl. Thank you for allowing me to remain on the staff and to attend school full time. I will remember your flexibility.

Fourth, I want to acknowledge the participants in this study. Thank you for your time and effort in being involved in this research. You have demonstrated that anyone can adjust and adapt to the difficult process of aging through personal efforts of learning. I enjoyed the time we had together.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH

“Four things are small on the earth,
 But they are exceedingly wise:
 The ants are not a strong folk,
 But they prepare their food in the summer;
 The badgers are not mighty folk,
 Yet they make their houses in the rocks;
 The locusts have no king,
 Yet all of them go out in ranks;
 The lizard you may grasp with the hands,
 Yet it is in king’s palaces.”
 Proverbs 30:24-28 (New American Standard Bible).

During the fourth grade, in the midst of Little League, camping, and Boy Scouts, I also started piano lessons. My parents made it clear that if I learned to play the piano it would be up to me. I began to understand unless I practiced and somehow learned this skill, I would not become a piano player. This style of learning, self-directed learning, seemed to describe many of my activities from sports to music.

Deconstructing this miniature-learning episode, one becomes aware of complex issues surrounding personal learning. For example, a piano at home, an enjoyable teacher, and encouraging parents who paid for these lessons, are subtle, yet substantial foundations for this scenario of self-directed learning. The significance of two sisters and friends who played, the belief that I could do this, and the discipline to practice were also important aspects of acquiring this skill.

This personal, intentional, self-directed learning seemed to thread itself across this rural community, mirroring one’s individual situation or stage in life. A close friend was

learning to repair shoes; his Dad had turned a vacant building into a learning venue for his sons. Returning home from school, language books scattered on the dinner table indicated my Mom's personal attempt to learn French. My Dad was continually reading motivational books as well as obtaining new information on farming, and my two sisters would spend time every day completing homework after basketball practice. These self-directed learning projects were more than temporary fads; rather, they were an integral part of one's life course, helping each person adjust to new situations.

As referred to in the introductory quote - ants, badgers, locusts, and lizards are wise, because they incorporate self-initiative to meet the demands of their lives. The power of these creatures is an internal, instinctual, and self-driven self-direction. This research is an attempt to explore and understand more about learning and self-direction.

Self-Directed Learning (SDL)

SDL can be described as learning that is self-initiated, personal, and intentional. This learning is evident in individual systematically planned learning projects as well as in on-going personal interests (Lamdin, 1997). Although SDL can begin unintentionally, from happenstance or even a required class, the defining characteristic of SDL is that the person eventually takes charge of his or her own learning (Carre, 2000). Lamdin, who researched learning of older adults or Elderlearning, states "The important thing is that these projects are 'owned' by the learner who is in control of what is learned, when the learning starts, where it goes, and when it is complete" (p. 118).

On a large scale, self-directed learning has been described both as the momentum for change throughout history, but also as the day-by-day learning throughout one's life (Candy, 1991). Some writers have pointed out how what begins as personal learning

projects can have an impact on the larger social culture. For example, SDL is not only evident in historically monumental events such as the invention of the light bulb by Edison, but also obvious in everyday events such as how to repair a leaky faucet or learning to play golf (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991). This intentional and personal learning matters, and merits the attention of research because of its impact on one's daily life and because of its widespread occurrence in various cultures (Candy, 1991).

Self-directed learning has been linked to many factors, especially that of the philosophy of lifelong learning. Some writers refer to learning throughout one's life as self-directed lifelong learning (Kasworm, 1983, 1992). From the University of the Third Age, to a declaration of UNESCO, to individuals seeking knowledge at home, the concept of lifelong learning reflects the importance of one's personal education (Candy, 1991; Gelpi, 1995; Hatton, 1997; Long, Apps & Hiemstra, 1985; Merriam & Brockett, 1997; Schrader-Naef, 2000; Spear & Mocker, 1982; Stanage, 1995; University Continuing Education Association, 1998). Longworth and Davies (1996) write:

Lifelong learning is the development of human potential through a continuously supportive process, which stimulates and empowers individuals to *acquire* (italics added) all the knowledge, values, skills, and understanding they will require throughout their lifetime and to *apply* (italics added) them with confidence, creativity and enjoyment in all roles, circumstances, and environments. (p. 22)

The words "acquire" and "apply," help to delineate the role of self-direction in this process of lifelong learning. Similarly, N.F.S. Grundtvig mentioned continual learning as the solution for the problems of Denmark as well as the pressing needs of the individual (Brownwell, 1946; Malone, 1940; Manniche, 1952, 1969; Thrasher, 1927). The concepts

of self-directed learning and lifelong learning are often interchanged, yet there is a subtle difference; self-directed learning is the personal embodiment of lifelong learning.

Many authors have written on self-directed learning. From Lindeman's (1928/1961) perspective on adult education, to Houle's (1961) inquiring mind, to Tough's (1971, 1979) learning projects, to Knowles's (1970, 1984) adopted term of andragogy to Candy's (1991) introduction of the term autodidaxy, the concept of self-directed learning (SDL) has evolved to include various ways that adults learn. The defining issue of self-directed learning is that the locus of control for learning resides within the individual rather than an institution or system (Garrison, 1997; Lamdin, 1997; Mocker & Spear, 1982). However, self-directed learning, is rarely a solitary event, from reading material to classes to conversations, this personal endeavor is actually socially situated (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Candy, 1991; Wenger, 1998).

To be self-directed means that "the learner chooses to assume the primary responsibility for planning, carrying out, and evaluating those learning experiences" (Merriam & Brockett, 1997, p. 16). Self-directed learning involves establishing personal goals, utilizing various resources, and becoming personally responsible to learn. Kegan (1994) discusses how self-directed learning is essential for lifelong learning and that the self-directed learner can examine self, culture, and develop critical thinking. This examination of one's interests through a self-directed learning project (SDLP) and reflection provides valuable insight for the learner and his/her topic of importance (Brookfield, 2000; Jarvis, 2001). For example, during the pilot study for this research, one older adult continues to learn about her self as well as other countries through reading, taking classes, and by housing international students. This reading, taking

classes, and housing international students have become lessons of discovery about other cultures as well as her self.

Knowles (1970, 1984) writes that the main emphasis and cornerstone of andragogy is self-direction. From Knowles's perspective, adults learn through the personal pursuit of knowledge. Knowles goes on to state that one of the defining aspects of an adult is that they are self-directed. The first assumption of andragogy is that as a person matures one's self-concept develops from dependency on others to self-direction. Self-directed learning is the natural, individual distillation of education of adults. Self-directed learning implies that one takes personal initiative or individual steps to learn. Furthermore, Merriam (2001) confirms that self-directed learning and andragogy are the foundations of adult education.

The decreasing hours in the western workweek during the past century (deGrazia, 1962; Quadagno, 1999) have resulted in more time for older adults, especially those who are retired. These additional hours provide opportunity for engaging in self-directed learning as well as other leisure activities (Goodale & Godbey, 1988; Jarvis, 2001). Retirement is the time when many adults attempt to pursue various dreams that may be facilitated by SDL; some adults are even motivated to work harder during middle age in order to retire early (Quadagno, 1999). Two of the fastest growing educational programs involve older adults – that of Elderhostel and Learning in Retirement (Barber & Kozoll, 1994). The older adult has time to pursue learning projects garnering helpful information for the changes and adjustments of one's life.

Older Adults and Late Life Adjustments

The increase in life expectancy is a significant demographic change for citizens in the USA. Some people are living a full 25 additional years, from age 60 to 85 in good health. This has resulted in longer life spans and many older adults are experiencing a delay in the debilitating and negative aspects of aging. Because people are living longer and healthier lives, society must be prepared to handle an aging population.

Gerontologists display staggering statistics that reflect an aging population. For example, in 1990 there were 37,306 centenarians (someone who reaches 100 years of age) in the USA, in 2000 there were 50,454, by 2020 the predication is there will be 214,000 (Feldman, 2000; www.census.gov). A commonly used statistic is that life expectancy, because of a variety of reasons, has increased by a full 28 years from 47 in 1900 to 75.5 in the 1990's.

In addition, the latest census indicated that the percent of people 65 years and older living in nursing homes declined for the first time. Interestingly, the highest percentage of decline was in the oldest-old category, adults 85 and older. The number of individuals over 85 has become the fastest growing segment of the population (www.census.gov). This indicates the aging adult in the USA is healthier, living longer, and is more independent than previous generations.

This is not just a North American phenomenon. In 1970 it was estimated there were 307 million people in the world over 60. There were 500 million in 2000, and in 2020 it is estimated to be one billion (Bee, 2000; Lamdin, 1999; Quadagno, 1999). In addition, Westerners must begin to acknowledge and prepare for the complicated dynamics when India and China, which comprise almost one half of the world's

population, begin to reflect similar demographics (Quadagno, 1999). Unlike other marginalizing factors in education, such as race, gender, and sexual orientation, addressing the needs of older adults is an important topic because aging affects everyone - every person participates in the aging process.

An imminent consideration for society will be the ramifications of death and dying of the baby boom generation. Issues of health and spirituality will become common topics as various support groups help prepare this large generation to adjust to various issues of aging. Not only are boomers aging, but there is also an increased longevity among the very old, which contributes to the prediction that by 2030 one fifth of all Americans will be 65 or older (Quadagno, 1999.) Lower death rate, longer life expectancy, and an aging population characterize the current post-industrial era. One concern is that the depleting funds for social security and other resources may lead to intergenerational conflict over the rights for contested and limited assets.

Some writers have suggested that rural older adults in particular are susceptible to more difficult situations than urban dwellers (Krout & Coward, 1998). For example, data suggest many rural elders live in communities where the economic and social fabric can no longer support needed services due to depopulation, job loss, and a lower tax base. In addition, many rural elders have fewer service and health care options. Despite the stereotype that older rural adults slide into their golden age swinging on the front porches of quaint farms, many are disadvantaged in regard to health, housing, income, and access to services (Dooley & Shea-Miller, 2001; Hill & Moore, 2000).

Although there has been some research on rural older adults, this is an important topic because of the higher percentage of older adults in rural areas (George & Bylund,

2002). In contrast, another interesting aspect of rural or nonmetropolitan adults is that the scarcity of other people may force them to become resourceful and create unique ways of adapting (Penrod, Gueldner, & Poon, 2001). For example, in Leann's (1981) study of rural adults, the participants would often describe learning while carrying out chores, being in natural surroundings, and living in the quiet atmosphere of rural settings. Of unique interest to rural settings is the influence of this natural context, especially the lack of distractions, quiet, as well as nature (natural surroundings and animals) on learning. In addition, the influence of one's neighbors and the potential to learn from them is an important factor in rural settings. Although research concerning older adults in rural settings seems to be negative, recent research by Walzer and Sutton (2001) in Illinois, reported a higher quality of life in rural areas than in urban. They speculate this may be due to the increased access of technology in rural areas.

Older adults experience various changes as they age, although obvious in a child or teenager; this is subtler in older adults. Many of these changes associated with aging can also be seen through the lens of adult development. Adult development views adulthood as a series of predictable stages or changes from infancy through death (Bee, 2000). The change, and its ensuing adjustment, is often an adult's impetus for learning (Pineau, 2000). For example, retiring forces the older adult to adapt and adjust to more free time as well as the loss of an identity based around work. Many of these situations bring about important lessons of life or teachable moments (Havighurst, 1972) where each person can learn specific lessons based on a need to learn (Fisher, 1998).

Knowledge of older adults reflects a variety of academic fields and disciplines, especially that of science and medicine. Yet, the complex dynamic of aging is actually an

integrated combination of social, physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental disciplines (Jensen, 1999; Mason, 1974; Neikrug et al., 1995). SDL has the potential to address the wide variety of issues facing older adults and to provide information to empower and motivate older adults (Boud & Miller, 1996; Cusack, 1996; Foley, 2001; Hansen, 2000; Long, 1993; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Adjustment to change is an integral part of life for older adults. Having lived 65 years encountering various changes, older adults eventually become masters of adaptation. Many of these adjustments become the impetus for personal learning projects and often revolve around retirement, new work roles, leisure, grand parenting, death and dying, sickness and health (Jarvis, 2001; Quadagno, 1999). These diverse situations in the older person's life can spawn creative and energetic reasons for living. As these older adults are motivated to learn how to adjust to various changes in their lives, they also become empowered to handle the dynamics of new situations in late life (Lamdin, 1997).

As older adults continue to age, biological and physical limitations become more pronounced; yet, many citizens become more active and vocal. Despite stereotypes and some misleading information, most people continue to learn and grow all of their life (McGuire, Boyd, & Tedrick, 1996). For example, older adults are the most active age group in such community-oriented areas as voting, politics, and volunteering (Barber & Kozoll, 1994; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

The following developmental changes of older adults is not exhaustive or in any significant order. Each change has its own set of positive and negative factors with an overarching theme of adaptation. For example, a common experience of older adults is retirement, the person must adapt to the new situation of free time. A positive factor can

be the potential of fulfilling personal desires; the negative factor is that the person may become lonely and disenchanting in a world that values work.

One developmental change is the influence of one's children (generativity) and the attempt to leave a legacy for the next generation (Erikson, 1950; Erikson, Erikson, Kivnick, 1986). Another is the internal struggle to feel positive about one's life and the choices (ego integrity) that one has made (Antonovsky & Sagy, 1990; Creamer, 1996; Erikson, 1950; Fowler, 1981; Kohlberg & Shulik, 1981). Third, the older adult faces the impact of continual degenerative change in one's body (Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Havighurst, 1972; Kleiber, 1999; Peck, 1956) and the reality of eventual death (Erikson, 1950; Fisher, 1993; Havighurst, 1972; Peck, 1956). Fourth is the impact of repetitive loss – loss of social respect, loss of one's mate or friends, loss of health (Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Fisher, 1993; Havighurst, 1972; Peck 1956). And fifth is the struggle to adjust and to adapt to the variety of changes in late life, the most obvious for western older adults being that of retirement and more time (Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Creamer, 1996; Fowler, 1981; Iso-Ahola, Jackson, & Dunn, 1994; Kleiber, 1999; Kohlberg, 1981; McClusky, 1963; McGuire, 1985).

As the older adult encounters these changes, the impact on learning is significant. The adult life is a series of stages and transitions, each of which will force the adult into unfamiliar territory. From disengagement to reminiscence to selective optimization with compensation, there are a variety of theories that explain how older adults adjust to aging (Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Bee, 2000; Quadagno, 1999; McGuire et al., 1996). Each of these transitions helps to create a motivation to learn and SDL becomes the personal solution for adjusting to these various changes (Lamdin, 1997). Older adults utilize personal

learning to make the necessary changes during development (Kleiber, 1999; Tennant & Pogson, 1995). For example, Wolf (1998) discusses how helping the next generation (generativity) and feeling complete at the end of one's life (ego integrity) are crucial in the late-life development of older adults. This developmental perspective of adulthood recognizes that becoming an adult is not achieved instantly; this involves continual physical, cognitive, and social changes with accompanying issues of learning (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998).

Although research has tied the topic of development to learning (Havighurst, 1951) there is a lack of research that specifically relates SDL and late life adjustment. SDL can be seen as a creative way for each individual to learn what is necessary for personal empowerment and to negate the disabling impact of aging (Lamdin, 1997).

Problem Statement

The increasing influence of older Americans as well as the imminent aging of 80 million "Baby Boomers" is causing many segments of western society to re-evaluate the concept of "old age." Medical advances and personal lifestyles have resulted in older adults living longer and healthier lives (Haskell, 1994). Self-directed learning has an integral role in adult development as each change and adjustment in one's life often becomes the impetus for learning (Lamdin, 1997). In addition, education and especially self-directed learning has been positively related to higher satisfaction of life in older adults (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991). Self-directed learning is the primary way that adult learn (Knowles, 1984). The complicated late-life adjustments of older adults provide opportunities for self-directed learning projects.

Although SDL has been a focus of research in adult education, there is a lack of research concerning older adults and their personal learning (Lamdin, 1997). Most of the scholarly interest centers on older adults in formal learning such as higher education (Jensen, 2000), training in corporate settings (Foley, 2000), or semi-formal programs such as Elderhostel (Long & Zoller-Hodges, 1995). The most pervasive aspect of learning – personal and informal learning – warrants further investigation (Lamdin, 1997).

What is especially interesting is the potential of SDL to enable the older adult to adjust to change. Not only is there a scarcity of research about older adults and self-directed learning, there is a lack of research concerning the link between SDL and late life adjustment.

In addition, research often sidesteps rural populations by filling samples from nearby towns and university communities. However, rural older populations are important to consider. Not only are they unnoticed, but also there are a higher percentage of older adults in rural areas. Further, research suggests those who reside in non-metropolitan areas have a strong sense of community, self-reliance, and harmony with nature (Hill & Moore, 2000). Leean's (1981) extensive research of rural adults pointed out the interesting context of learning in pastoral settings. Her study pointed out the value of a rural context on adult learning, a setting where inhabitants live close to nature, depend on each other, learn by doing, and have time and quiet for reflection.

In summary, this research matters because of the universal dynamic of aging, the increasing numbers of older adults, and the powerful potential of SDL to specifically address concerns of older adults.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to understand how older, rural adults utilize self-directed learning in the adjustments and changes in late-life. The following research questions guided the study:

- 1). What is the nature of SDL of these older adults?
- 2). What is the process of SDL of these older adults?
- 3). What are the late-life adjustments of these older adults?
- 4). How does the rural context shape the SDL of these older adults?

Significance

The United Nation's Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has continually referred to lifelong learning as having the potential to help solve various problems around the world, as well as being instrumental in the personal fulfillment of the individual (Field, 2001). Lifelong learning is the philosophy out of which self-directed learning evolves (Kasworm, 1983). Self-directed learning takes place throughout one's life when the individual decides to learn more about some specific topic. This study will investigate this intricate topic of self-directed learning, especially in the older adult. Education has the power to be an agent of change, both individually and socially (Foley, 2001; Friere, 1970; hooks, 1995; Mezirow, 1991; Moreland, 1999; Rogers, 1969). Similarly, this research can isolate how learning can impact the older person's life.

Theoretically, this research is important because it will add to the body of literature on SDL and older adults, and in particular will address older adults in rural settings. Lamdin (1997) discusses how the largest and most pervasive aspect of learning

for older adults, personal learning, seems to be overlooked or ignored by educational institutions. Despite its limitations, academicians continue to emphasize the importance of SDL even stating it is foundational to adult education (Merriam, 2001). This research will contribute to a better understanding of the impact and influence of self-directed learning in late life. This merits the attention of research because self-directed learning empowers learners to make sense of and act on their environment.

Practical significance of this research is its usefulness to anyone who is aging. Every institution concerned with issues of older adults, from senior centers to country clubs to medical centers to places of worship, can utilize the information in this research. Because of the constantly changing dynamic of today's world, self-directed learning has emerged as an integral component of successful aging. This ability to be self-directed has emerged as part of our individual and collective survival as we attempt to keep pace with the changing world (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). The rapid expansion of the older adult population throughout the world demands that adult educators address their learning concerns in new and creative ways.

Practitioners in every fabric of our society can incorporate the information from this research. Adult educators who work with older adults will gain insight as to how one's stage in life affects learning. Those who work closely with older adults can understand the importance of incorporating the philosophy of self-direction into one's class or program. Specifically, librarians could design a center of self-directed study utilizing their resources. Medical and educational practitioners could include self-direction into their programs; this will shed light on how self-directed learning can meet the variety of needs of the aging adult. For example, the medical community could begin

to employ adult educators or adult counselors who specialize in self-directed learning. This practical situation could help each older adult craft his or her own personal project for better health from Internet resources to personal exercise projects. Another powerful dynamic of learning is one's community. Cloaked behind the name of self-direction is a foundation and community of friends and family; book clubs, health clubs, investment clubs are based on this overlooked social dimension of learning (Wenger, 1998). In summary, this research will help practitioners learn how to encourage the skill of self-directed learning across the lifespan.

Definition of Terms

These are conceptual definitions that relate to the study. Chapter Three contains more specific operational definitions.

Late-life adjustment is how an individual adjusts to the variety of changes around one's life. This often involves positive elements such as retirement, connecting with children and grandchildren, as well as negative issues such as the death of one's spouse and friends, loss of traditional work, reduced income, declining health, loneliness, and approaching death (Bee, 2000; Quadagno, 1999).

Lifelong Learning is an overarching term encompassing the attitude and desire to continue to learn throughout one's lifetime (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Rural Adult is a flexible and changing term indicating someone who lives in a county with a population of 50,000 or less. Definitions of rural are often changed depending on various issues, and recent writings may exchange the term "rural" with "non-metropolitan."

Self-directed learning (SDL) is intentional (Hake, 1999) and self-planned (Tough, 1971) learning, where the individual is responsible for (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991) and in control (Carre, 2000) of the learning. This personal learning can manifest itself in a variety of ways or projects from formal, informal, to non-formal, but is most often informal (Candy, 1991). “The important thing is that these projects are ‘owned’ by the learner who is in control of what is learned, when the learning starts, where it goes, and when it is complete” (Lamdin, 1997, p. 118). SDL can be evident by short-term projects lasting hours (Tough, 1971), as well as continuous and lifelong efforts producing experts (Cusack, 1995; Garrison, 1997). The words personal, intentional, and self-planned are used interchangeably to refer to self-directed learning.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to understand how older adults utilize self-directed learning in late life adjustment within a rural setting. This review of the literature represents writings found in three broad areas – adult education, self-directed learning, and adult development. More specifically, this review of literature encompassed research with older adults, especially that of self-directed learning and adjustment.

The purpose of the review of the literature was three fold. Part One – To establish the historical perspective and foundation of self-directed learning. Part Two – To summarize the major theories of adult development and late life adjustment that relate to this research. Part Three – To review recent research on self-directed learning that focuses on older adults.

The formal investigation into this literature review was through the university library; key words of self-directed learning, aging, and late-life adjustment led to various authors and information. Two journals that were especially helpful were *Educational Gerontology* and *Adult Education Quarterly*. In addition, a large number of the articles incorporated in this study were found in literature reviews and summaries on SDL. These are Brockett and Hiemstra (1991), Caffarella and O'Donnell (1988), Confessore and Long (1992), Long and Redding (1992), Long and Associates (1988, 1992a, 1996, 1998), and Merriam and Caffarella (1999). A helpful tool has been various websites that focus on self-directed learning. This information over the Internet is often updated and leads to

other interesting sources. Two addresses are [www.angragogy.net] and [http://home.twcny.rr.com/hiemstra/sdlhome.html] Last retrieved on April 11, 2003.

Part One – Historical Foundations of Self-Directed Learning

Many writers (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Long, 1988; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999) refer to similar works that have laid the foundation of self-directed learning. Of special interest is an extensive survey conducted with researchers concerning the most significant writings on SDL by Confessore and Confessore (1992). The results of their survey listed the following authors in order of significance: Tough (1971), Houle (1961), Long and Associates (1988), Brookfield (1985a), Knowles (1975), Long and Associates-1989, Spear and Mocker (1984), Tough -1978, Long and Associates-1990, Brookfield -1986, Caffarella and O'Donnell (1987), Tough -1981 (as cited in Caffarella & Caffarella). These important writings have been taken into consideration in this discussion.

The following synopsis of foundational literature includes an overview of the following books and research activities. These include *The Meaning of Adult Education* by Eduard Lindeman; *The Inquiring Mind* by Cyril Houle, *The Adult's Learning Projects* by Alan Tough; *Andragogy in Action* by Malcolm Knowles; *Self-Directed Learning: From Theory to Practice* by Stephen Brookfield; and *Self Direction for Lifelong Learning* by Phillip Candy. A brief summary and analysis of each book is included as well as its contribution to the development of self-direction.

The Meaning of Adult Education

Lindeman (1928/1961) sounds the bell for a new type of education by expressing that “education is life” (p.4). He clearly states that the student's resource of highest value

is one's experience rather than required classes. Written in 1920, Lindeman's (1928/1961) new and radical ideas on education questioned current trends, especially authority of the teacher and importance of exams. According to Lindeman, education is more than a classroom; it is the daily life of the student. Lindeman was creating a social agenda in education when he stated the goal of education is to improve self as well as to change the social order. Lindeman also emphasizes the creation of new methods and incentives for learning.

Education can be an attempt to negate the various forms of authority around student's lives. Lindeman (1928/1961) stresses this is accomplished by learning important lessons in the context or situation of one's daily life. Although vocational education can help the learner arrive at specific knowledge, true education is that which will reflect one's individuality and uniqueness. He states education should extend beyond the classroom to incorporate self-expression, recreation and leisure.

This combination of personal choice and education can impact the life of the learner. This road to freedom involves a greater degree of self-knowledge by understanding that personal frustrations and barriers are often self-constructed. One's education can be the context for personal creativity that prevents boredom and helps create what Lindeman describes as a beautiful life. This creativity is active, especially focusing on creating new culture and even art appreciation (Lindeman, 1928/1961). He stresses the need for group discussion in classrooms as well as new textbooks and teachers that reflect this perspective on learning from experience.

Lindeman's (1928/1961) philosophy on life and education was originally written in 1921, a short and personal perspective composed in three weeks. Lindeman's emphasis

that life is education, and that education is broader than vocational training was unpopular with traditional schools of thought. Although the term self-directed learning was not used in his literature, his focus on the experience and situation of the learner helped to lay the foundation for the concept of personal learning. His perspective on self-expression and freedom relates self-directed study to the field of education. Freedom is a result of studying and learning about one's personal situation in life, rather than a topic decided by some authority.

This pivotal and creative text asks us to consider the true meaning of education. Lindeman (1928/1961) challenges us to think beyond the decisions of faculty and traditional vocational education and learn from the context of one's life. His ideas set in motion a new perspective on the meaning of education; this influenced many researchers, and among them was Cyril Houle.

Discovery of Inquiring Minds

Forty years after Lindeman's book, Cyril Houle (1961) wrote about people who continue to learn throughout their life. He felt the desire to learn is not equally shared by learners and wanted to explore those who learn to a greater degree. This includes those who continue to learn in a variety of ways such as in group discussions, organizations, museums, radio or television, and even travel. Houle wanted to learn about those who have open and inquiring minds. His book is based on a sample of twenty-two individuals who were purposively chosen to participate in in-depth interviews.

After these interviews, Houle (1961) divided the twenty-two participants into three groups: goal oriented learners, activity oriented, and learning oriented. The goal oriented learner attempts to use education in a way to meet a need or interest. Especially

important for goal oriented learners are various educational resources. The activity oriented, though not as easy to discern, seems to use the auspices of continuing education to help meet one's personal needs. Their participation in education may be an activity to meet people, to be intellectually stimulated, or for social contact. The learning oriented group seems different from the others; they feel they have been learning all of their life. Often they are avid readers since childhood, they are excited about taking classes, and if they travel, they make a production of it. The "desire to know" and the "itch to learn" (p.25) is a theme in the learning oriented.

Houle (1961) discusses how to answer the complex question of who is learning and why. This "cataract of consequences" (p. 55) involves a process of internal and external events that come together to form the inquiring mind. One of the main findings is that there is not a simple answer in the quest to find the inquiring mind. "Each person is unique with actions springing from a highly individualized and complex interaction of personal and social factors" (p.80). One of the significant findings is the influence of what Houle called "stimulators." Stimulators enjoy passing on their knowledge and encouraging others to begin to learn. Houle also discusses how these learners form communities called "enclaves" that also continue to support this pursuit of knowledge.

One important aspect of his writing is a new interest and knowledge of adult learning as a result of interviews with the 22 participants (Candy, 1991). This early example of qualitative research had a significant influence in adult education by breaking away from traditional research as well as gaining new insight from the interviews. Similar to Lindeman (1928/1961), Houle (1961) was ahead of his time, delving into the personal constructs of how and why people learn. This study led to other important

research such as adult learning projects, orientation of adults to learning, various statistical measures, and information on those who oppose learning (Candy, 1992).

Perhaps the greatest contribution of Houle (1961, 1984, 1995) is the influence he had on two of his students, Malcolm Knowles and Alan Tough.

Adult Learning Projects

The concept of adult learning projects began when Alan Tough carefully studied the transcribed interview data of Houle's (1961) research on the motivations of learners. Tough's study in 1970 was based on interviews with 200 people and more detailed interviews with "60 or 70 people" (p.17). Through in depth interviews and quantitative analysis, this research uncovered highly deliberate efforts to learn in nearly every segment of society. Tough's (1971) survey disclosed that most adults complete one or two learning projects a year, and the average person completes eight. Each learning project consisted of a minimum of seven hours of learning within a period of six months. These seven hours contained separate learning episodes at least 20 to 30 minutes in length. These learning projects are a major, highly deliberate effort to gain certain knowledge and skill. The average learner (eight projects a year) may spend a staggering 700 hours of time in these projects, yet some people (high learners) may devote as many as 2000 hours a year. In addition, several projects may be occurring simultaneously on a variety of subjects. In these projects they discovered that 70% of the learning is planned by the individual, with the rest by professionals, amateurs, and friends.

According to Kasworm (1992), Tough (1971) used the term self-planned more than self-directed. This self-planned learning involves significant and powerful learning

episodes carried out in large and specific amounts of time. This learning does not occur in isolation; this self-planned learning is a collaborative effort in a facilitative environment.

Self-planning is the predominant means of adult learning because of a variety of reasons (Tough, 1971). The learner knows what is the best course of action, or feels he/she would lose time by consulting someone else, may not trust others, or they may be more highly skilled than others. The learner decides details of the learning activity and is prepared to pay the cost. Similar to Houle's (1961) stimulators, Tough found that most learning projects include four or five other human resources and most of these are amateur, especially friends, neighbors, or acquaintances. Non-human resources are also paramount in this process from television, to specific books, and other printed material like pamphlets or newspapers.

Tough (1979) continues his crusade for self-directed learning by discussing how to promote self-directed learning from small groups to large companies. Tough ends the second edition with a call for people to understand the importance of self-directed learning and its prevalence throughout society. He believes any survey will reveal 90% of the population will have participated in at least one learning project, and that 70% of each learning project will be primarily self-planned. Because of this he encourages practitioners and educators to incorporate SDL in their programs.

Tough's foundational study helped to solidify the widespread use of self-directed learning throughout all segments of society. His detailed analysis isolated the dynamic, complex, and interlocking aspects of self-planned learning. Although there is some discussion in the literature if this study is qualitative or quantitative, it is obvious he is using both paradigms to display the learning efforts of adults. As discussed earlier, this

self-planned learning involves significant and powerful learning carried out in large and specific amounts of time (Kasworm, 1992).

Although Tough (1971) identified learning as an everyday affair, his positive outlook on adult learning may be somewhat unrealistic. There is an underlying assumption that everyone wants to learn, can read, and is excited about personal learning projects. Also, during the interviews it seems hard to distinguish between learning projects and meaningful activities. A great deal of learning on one's own is for pleasure and recreation, yet it seems Tough was forcing this to become one of his learning projects. Although he does discuss the difficulty of interviewing people, as well as discerning learning projects, his perspective that someone may not know if they are learning is interesting. Tough's cohort, Malcolm Knowles, continued these ideas by writing about a new way to teach adults.

Adults Learn Differently from Children

Knowles (1970) was ardently attempting to educate young adults in vocational skills and could sense there was a specific difference in educating adults than children. He began to search for information that could help explain these phenomena. After a series of work experiences, returning to school, the influence of Eduard Lindeman and Cyril Houle, Knowles began to verbalize his ideas about a different kind of education that worked with adults. Interestingly, a friend from Yugoslavia, said, "You are doing andragogy...." (Knowles, 1984, p. 6). Andragogy had been used as a term in Europe for years to identify education with adults (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Andragogy not only captures the popularity of the adult education movement, but its perspective is timeless and applies to adult education in a multicultural world.

Since most educators are familiar with pedagogy, Knowles (1984) defined andragogy in contrast with pedagogy. He outlines the familiar hallmarks of andragogy: the learner is self-directed, the vast experiences of an adult is an important part of one's education, the learner is at a stage in life where he/she is ready to learn, adult learning is problem centered, and the adult is internally motivated. In addition, Knowles feels the facilitator of adult learning should create a climate conducive to learning, the learner should participate in every phase of this process, and that each learner should have a learning contract to carry out the process (Knowles, 1984; Long, 1992b).

Similar to Lindeman's (1928/1961) connection of education to art, Knowles (1984) describes andragogy as the art and science of helping adults learn. This art and science of learning allows for the individual learner to incorporate one's unique culture and various ways of learning (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998). The facilitator will encourage active participation from learners and incorporate one's life situation into the learning process. Andragogy's informality allows the learner to be actively involved in the program and parameters of the learning experience.

Knowles (1984) has had pivotal impact in adult education by verbalizing effective conditions and methods of adult learning. However a critical reflection on his work leaves several questions. Does andragogy reflect the black and white, segregated world of Knowles, or is there diversity and color in andragogy? Is andragogy's emphasis on self-direction the genre of white-male privilege (McIntosh, 1988)? Can andragogy be a reflection of all adult learners? Or, are andragogical assumptions of self-concept, self-initiative, and self-direction a description of European and western ideals? (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995).

The critics of andragogy assume that these ideas do not meet the criteria of culturally based education, and in fact reflect a western mindset (Pratt, 1993). Culturally diverse education may be characterized by a relationship between learning and one's unique culture (Wlodowski & Ginsberg, 1995), an acknowledgement of the different ways of knowing (Goldberger, 1996), and the incorporation of indigenous education (Cajete, 1994). Also, one of the hallmarks of Knowles' (1984) work is the learning contract; however, Caffarella and Caffarella (1986) did not find this contract contributed to learning in higher education.

In summary, andragogy has been applied in a wide variety of settings and educational situations. Regardless of the postmodern trend to criticize andragogy, Knowles's (1970, 1984) perspective does not appear to be culture bound. Concepts of self-directed learning, andragogy, and learning contracts have been successfully implemented in various countries, socioeconomic backgrounds, and by technical science as well as the humanities (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998). Andragogy was originally defined in contrast to pedagogy, yet research has also shown andragogy's perspective is not age restricted. Of all the various aspects of this model, climate setting may be the most widely adopted, but self-directed learning, contract learning, individual instruction, and experiential learning are prominent practices around the world in the field of education (Knowles, 1984). Regardless, some writers are not comfortable with these ideas.

Skeptical Optimism

Like a forest ranger warning campers of a destructive fire, Stephen Brookfield (1984, 1985a, 1985b) sounds the alarm about the increasing popularity of self-directed

learning. Brookfield discusses the attractiveness of self-directed learning, and how Tough's learning projects (1971), Gugliemino's Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale (1978), and Knowles's (1984) delineation of andragogy have added fuel to the flame. He warns even though it has been exciting to join this popular bandwagon, we must consider if this concept actually represents adult education. Brookfield admits his pre-occupation during graduate school with Knowles's concepts in *Learning without a teacher*. Later, he questions his enthusiasm.

Like a skeptical optimist, Brookfield (1984, 1985a, 1985b) states self-directed learning has clearly put the adult learner on the center stage, and these writers have helped to solidify learning outside of formal interests. Yet, he stresses we must be aware of all that is lurking in the background. For example, where is the guidance of a skillfully crafted teacher in the self-directed process? Another concern for Brookfield is the rapid acceptance of the label – self-directed learning – by continuing and adult education. He adds that the term self-directed learning is actually a misnomer; there is always the influence of other people through the resources of the self-directed learner. Yet more important, SDL could subtly mirror hegemony by reflecting the white majority in the USA and Canada (McIntosh, 1988).

Brookfield (1985a) states many studies on self-directed learning represents one aspect of our culture. Many of the samples used in this popular research represent the middle class, such as university students, professional men, pharmacists, clergy, and nurses. He states that we cannot assume that these educationally advantaged adults will represent the ideas of adults from different classes and ethnic backgrounds. He challenges the reader to be skeptical of the findings from such culturally specific samples.

Brookfield (1985a, 1985b) continues his criticism by asking us to consider the effectiveness of self-directed learning. For example, he discusses that although Tough (1971) can count the hours of a learning project, he does not seem to gauge the effectiveness and significance of the learning. Are these learning projects mere ideas or information flowing in to the person? Is it wise to consider how to bake bread the same as how to teach an immigrant to read? Brookfield (1985a) challenges researchers to consider distinguishing between techniques of self-direction and internal changes in the consciousness of the learner. He states, “The most complete form of self-directed learning occurs when process and reflection are married in the adult’s pursuit of meaning” (p. 15). He closes these statements with the thought that a more complete form of self-directed learning occurs when the techniques of self-directed learning are combined with critical reflection. This reflection results in a creation of new personal meaning after the consideration of alternative frameworks and action possibilities.

Although Brookfield (1984, 1985a, 1985b) makes interesting points, one of his main concerns is critical reflection. Brookfield, as well as others that emphasize reflection (Candy, 1991; Jarvis, 2001), do not seem to acknowledge that many westerners are uncomfortable with silence, aloneness, and personal reflection. Perhaps, in the same way that Brookfield felt self-direction reflects western ideals; Brookfield’s thoughts may mirror an aloof and elitist academia. In spite of his criticism, self-directed learning continues to be discussed and researched.

The Cornerstone of a Learning Society

Candy’s (1991) comprehensive history on SDL bridges the extensive SDL research in the 1980’s and the need for future direction. This exhaustive book sets forth

the autodidactic learner as the cornerstone of the learning society. Invoking a historical name, autodidactic implies an individual's non-institutional pursuit of learning in natural societal settings. Candy discusses the social implications of this free learning and its potential to eliminate inequalities.

Candy (1991) outlines the various myths of SDL and especially the misconception that SDL is carried out in isolation. He writes about the social implications of learning and ways that SDL is situated in the social context of the individual. Despite the variety of research in the past 30 years, Candy believes the focus of SDL is the same - the learner is in control of their learning, and this personal learning is intentional in its expression.

Candy (1991) calls on the learner to apply critical reflection. Critical thinking in a safe atmosphere is the key to SDL. Similar to ideas of Brookfield (1985a, 1985b) and Jarvis (2001), all three authors encourage the learner to move beyond surface ideas to a deep learning that impacts one's world through personal learning efforts. SDL can be the format for changing society through self-directed educational projects (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991).

Candy (1991) also emphasizes that SDL is a process and a product. The process involves personal characteristics; the product involves one's personal efforts to learn. Candy outlines self-directed learning with four distinct phenomena. SDL is a personal attribute, especially that of personal autonomy. SDL is willingness and a capacity to conduct one's education, evident in self-management. SDL is a way to organize instruction even in formal settings, showing the learner has control even in formal learning. And SDL is an individual, non-institutional pursuit of learning in natural

settings. This auto-didaxy is a powerful learning tool, forming the foundation of the learning society.

Summary of Historical Foundations of SDL

In summary, self-directed learning is a significant aspect of adult education. On a larger scale, the concept of self-directed learning is synonymous with advances throughout history. Each author discusses the basic role of self-directed learning in history, as well as the potential of self-directed learning in the future. These researchers have discussed education outside of the classroom, the importance of personal reflection in learning, social dynamics in learning, and that self-direction is a naturally occurring process (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Candy, 1991; Confessore, 1992; Jarvis, 2001). Affirming these ideas is that self-direction is more than a historical fad of adult education, and these ideas of self-planned learning have remained as one of the pillars of adult learning (Merriam, 2001).

The preceding authors have contributed unique ideas to education and the concept of self-directed learning. For example, education occurs outside the formal class and within the context of everyday life (Lindeman, 1928/1961). Also, one of the central components of education is that of reflection, especially critical reflection (Brookfield, 1985; Candy, 1991). Although many people appear to learn on one's own, there is often a foundation of social support in self-directed learning (Tough, 1971). Essentially, self-direction is the natural way that adults learn (Knowles, 1984).

Lindeman's (1928/1961) frustration with vocational classes led to a realization that all of life is education. Houle (1984) saw people who were living their life in a way that characterized learning and inquiry, and he wanted to discover the secrets of their

pattern. Tough (1971) decided to study and classify these patterns as learning projects through interviews and detailed analysis. Knowles (1984) helped to popularize these ideas by writing about autonomous learners and describing a new way to educate adults. Brookfield's (1985) watchful eye has pointed to various concerns, especially that of overzealous researchers and samples that misrepresent the population. Candy (1991) claims we have laid the cornerstone for a new society through the empowering ability of self-directed learning. In sum, the meaning of adult education has been expanded throughout the world by careful research on personal learning efforts of inquiring minds.

Various authors have stated learning is actually a response to one's situation in life and that the particular stage or time in one's life becomes the context for learning (Lamdin, 1997; Kleiber, 1999; Knowles, 1984; Tennant & Pogson, 1995). An understanding of adult development and its link to self-directed learning provides insight into change and adjustment throughout one's life.

Part Two – Adult Development and Late Life Adjustments

“There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven. A time to give birth, and a time to die. A time to plant, and a time to uproot what is planted” Ecclesiastes 3: 1 – 3. From Solomon's description of a person's time in the book of Ecclesiastes, to Shakespeare's reference to the stages of life in *As You Like It*, people have been attempting to make sense of the different periods of one's life. “All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players; they have their exits and their entrances; and one man in his time plays many parts, his acts being seven ages.” (*As You Like It*, Act II, Scene 7, 139) (as cited in Erikson, 1997).

Development of the person is a lifelong process from conception to death with each period or time equally important, yet inherently different. This process traces the complex dynamics of change throughout the human life. Developmental tasks are links between the demands of society and one's individual needs (Havighurst, 1972). This human metamorphosis at first seems to be physical, yet beneath the surface there are complex mental and emotional changes that comprise the life of each person (Hoyer, Rybash, & Roodin, 1999). Solomon suggests each appointed time is equal, yet Shakespeare places men and women on a downward spiral. "Last scene of all, that ends this strange eventful history, is second childishness and mere oblivion, sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything." (As You Like It, Act II, Scene 7, 139) (as cited in Erikson, 1997).

A more modern synopsis of these changes is discussed in Merriam and Caffarella's (1999) explanation of development as sequential, life event, and integrative. Sequential models of development are a linear perspective, focusing on predictable change within the individual during their lifetime. For example, Levinson stated that men would go through predictable stages from age 17 until 60 (Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, & McKee, 1978). These include early adulthood, middle adulthood, and late adulthood with predictable transitions. Merriam and Caffarella discuss a variety of authors whose ideas are popular and influential, such as Erikson, Loevinger, and Neugarten. These sequential or stage theories help to order the change or chaos in one's life, yet life event and integrative models may be more diverse and inclusive.

Life event and transition theories reflect significant times or benchmarks in the person's life (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Major changes and the accompanying

transition in one's life include specific events such as marriage or the death of one's parents and give shape and direction to the unique aspects of one's life. Some of these authors, including Schlossberg, Sugarman, McClusky, and Gould, discuss the timing of these events as well as one's internal clock. One author describes these situations as anticipated, unanticipated, non-eventful, or sleeper events. These benchmarks of one's life, on time or off time, provide opportunities within the life cycle for learning (Lamdin, 1997); however, off time events usually result in more anxiety and adjustment.

On a wider scale, the integrative perspective on adult development acknowledges the intersection of biological, psychological, and socio-cultural factors. This inclusive view recognizes the complex and integrated role of the various dimensions on one's development. Looking beyond the individual to the context of one's life is considered essential in this life-wide view of adult development (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Peacock, 2000).

Late Life Adjustment

This particular research is focused on older adults; I have isolated specific writings that detail development in older adults. Of particular concern is how late life development may affect one's personal learning. The following list, though not exhaustive, summarizes the developmental topics of older adults. Each situation has its own set of positive and negative elements, with an overarching theme of adjustment. These include the influence and power of generativity, as well as the internal drive to leave a legacy (Erikson, 1950). The internal struggle to feel positive about one's life and choices that have been made (Erikson, 1950; Antonovsky & Sagy, 1990; Fowler, 1981; Kohlberg, 1976). The adjustment to degenerative change in one's body (Baltes & Baltes,

1990; Havighurst, 1972; Kleiber, 1999; Peck, 1956) and eventual death (Erikson, 1950; Fisher, 1993; Havighurst, 1972; Peck 1951). The impact of loss – loss of respect, loss of one’s acquaintances, and loss of health (Baltes and Baltes, 1990; Fisher, 1993; Havighurst, 1972; Peck 1956). And, the struggle to adjust and to adapt to the variety of changes in late life (Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Fowler, 1981; Iso-Ahola, Jackson, & Dunn, 1994; Kleiber, 1999; Kohlberg, 1983; McClusky, 1963; McGuire, 1985).

Leaving a Legacy

Erikson (1950) discusses the influence of one’s children, as well as the strong internal drive to assist the next generation. The seventh stage of his ideas presents the adult with a choice between stagnation and generativity. Initially this was understood as development and caring for one’s family. However, today it is interpreted in a broader realm, from leaving a legacy to grand parenting to caring for the next generation (Kleiber, 1999). Erikson wrote about a powerful human tendency, to leave something tangible behind for others (Hall, 1983).

The love and care of a parent for a child is a significant part of each parent’s life usually continuing throughout one’s life. In one research project, a 78-year-old grandmother stated, “You never quit being your parent’s child.” This may aid in the survival of the human race as well as foster hope, joy, and love in one’s family. No one denies the influence and grip of the parent-child bond, even when parents are absent. This powerful parent-child relationship is a natural part of being human.

Older adults will continue to forge relationships with their children and grandchildren. These relationships occupy a large part of their life and provide significant meaning. There is a strong desire of the older adult to care and help provide for the next

generation and to leave something behind. Perhaps this is something financial, something designated in a will, or maybe it is something that needs to be said (Sheehy, 1995). In order to understand older adults, one must realize this internal drive of generativity and remembrance. The term generativity reflects a parent or grandparent's drive and will to support their offspring. Yet, Erikson's perspective on generativity goes beyond this natural love for one's own children, to a humble and caring desire to generate the next generation, resulting in a goal of care.

Kleiber (1993) and Kleiber and Ray (1999) discuss how generativity can be evident in other ways. For example, Kleiber states that Erikson's (1950) ideas of generativity actually extend beyond one's family to embrace the next generation. The failure of the older adult to move in this way may be equated with personal pre-occupation that leads to boredom, denial, or endless busyness. Any activity that helps the next generation such as volunteering, mentoring, child-care, art, coaching, or teaching can also reproduce a similar expression of generativity.

Those with grandchildren have another opportunity to develop relations with the younger generation. Erikson's ideas of generativity have been re-formatted in the last 10 years because of smaller families and healthier grandparents. This modern grandparent is having a significant influence on the family unit. One of the fastest growing programs in Elderhostel and other older adult programs are intergenerational classes (Mills, 1993). Grandfathers and grandsons, grandmothers and granddaughters are attending classes, going on camping trips, rafting on rivers, and taking trips to Europe (Sheehy, 1995). These activities that reflect generativity may result in greater life satisfaction through this

high investment activity (Mannell, 1993) and have even been shown to help with the adjustments to bereavement (Wilhite, Sheldon, & Jekubovich-Fenton, 1994).

In essence, the internal drive to leave a legacy can be seen in older adults that are motivated to spend time with and care for the younger generation and especially one's children and grandchildren. In addition there is a strong desire to leave something behind to help the next generation. This powerful influence in the older adult's life has important implications for all adults as well as those without children.

Satisfaction About One's Life

Erikson's final stage in adult development is a conflict between ego integrity and despair. The task of ego integrity involves willingness to resolve the conflicts in one's life. Similar to writing an epilogue or journal, the individual hopefully can resolve the difficult issues and topics of one's life and unify these into a theme of acceptance, purpose, and integrity, the end result being wisdom.

Continuing these ideas is the latest book by Joan Erikson (1997) who adds a ninth stage to the conventional eight. In the tradition of Erikson's positive attitude (1950, 1986), she concludes this book with ideas called gerotranscendence. Introducing religion into the perspective, she states gerotranscendence is a shift in personal ideology from materialistic rationale to a cosmic transcendence resulting in life satisfaction. She encourages communities to embrace the older citizen, and for older adults to confront death and to become more in touch with their soul.

Influenced by Erikson (1950), Fowler (1981) and Kohlberg (1976, 1983) present to the aging adult an internal roadmap for an integrated life by developing one's faith and morals. Of Fowler's six stages of faith development, four occur in adulthood (Creamer,

1996; Fowler, 1981; Shulik, 1988). Similar to Kohlberg's ideas of moral development, both tap into the emergence of the individual's worldview across the life span (Bee, 2000).

Kohlberg and Fowler discuss the importance of morals, ethics, and faith in one's development (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Initially the individual is highly influenced by one's parents; he or she internalizes the ideas of their home environment and assumes or hopes others will. Eventually the youngster learns to accept others who don't hold to their beliefs, and they are willing to live in a world that does not accept their ideas. The last stage is when one begins to accept contradictions in one's own belief system (Fowler, 1981; Shulik, 1998).

Kohlberg (1976) presents the development of moral reasoning (Kohlberg, Levine, & Hewer, 1983; Blasi, 1990) showing that moral development is a trajectory from following one's parents, pleasing society, to internally embracing one's own morals. Based on fairly reliable longitudinal research, Kohlberg's ideas have indicated that one's morals strengthen across the lifetime (Bee, 2000). However, he states the top level of justice is rare, and that most adults assume the primary purpose of morals is to maintain social order.

The highest level of Kohlberg's (1976) ideas is when an individual seeks for an internal way to live that is consistent with one's set of morals, despite contradictions in society. This is a process of decentering oneself by setting aside personal desires and wishes for the greater good of society. For example, Martin Luther King was willing to go to jail to defend his beliefs. Kohlberg's focus is on the individual's choice of ethical

standards, whereas Fowler (1981) goes beyond this to the spiritual and supernatural aspects of development.

Fowler's (1981) writings state that each person creates a master story that enables the adult to make sense of one's life as well as participate in a personal and spiritual faith (Lawrence, 1983). The overall goal, universalizing faith, is a rare quality and marked by people who demonstrate love and justice, yet are willing to disrupt society to undo harm by others (Creamer, 1996). Examples include Gandhi, Jesus, Martin Luther, Jan Hus, and Martin Luther King. Fowler's faith development goes beyond moral development to a search for beliefs about the nature of connections with others and the world. Tying in with Erikson's (1950) ego integrity, this is when the individual learns how to answer personal questions about life. The individual develops from authority external to internal by living with a dialectical faith. Similarly, Jarvis (2001), Kleiber (1999), and Pieper (1952) emphasize leisure, life review, contemplation, and time for discovering meaning and wisdom as important topics for the older adult. Despite our fragmented post-modern world, the older adult with more time has the opportunity to pursue the sacredness of life and to contemplate the Being itself.

In summary, one can assume the older adult is undergoing a personal evaluation of their life. Regardless if they admit or acknowledge this process, the older adult is participating in an internal review of their life. Like a careful accountant trying to make the numbers balance, they are attempting to right the wrong, and to make sense out of their decisions. This may result in deeper spiritual interest or this may be seen in thinking and reconstructing one's ideas and beliefs. However, this may be too painful and result in the adult being withdrawn or avoiding time alone. If one can make sense of, or feel

positive about the decisions of one's life, then they are free to live the rest of their days in quiet comfort. Erikson clearly stated the older adult that has resolved this struggle would accept death knowing that the lifespan has been completed (1950, 1986, 1997).

The Impact of Continual Change in One's Body and Eventual Death

The psychological aspects of adult development can be better understood from a perspective on the physical dimension. Many of the adaptations within the person are the result of physical changes in the body (Peck, 1956). For example, the European oriented "Fourth Stage" of development is dedicated to the stage in life when the demands of the body become pre-eminent (Lamdin, 1997). Also, Jarvis (2001) sets the theme of his research on redirecting one's biography against the background of personal physical changes and one's ensuing adaptations.

It is natural for the older adult to experience physical changes, yet perhaps the word degenerative is too negative. Some of the stereotypes and misunderstandings of older people are the result of confusing normal aging with actual disease (Baltes & Baltes, 1990; DiGiovanna, 1994; Quadagno, 1999). Many of the physical changes of older adults involve changes in the nervous system, such as sleep patterns, dulling of senses, lessening of secondary memory, and less problem solving ability (Palmore, 1988). Yet unless one has dementia, such as Alzheimer's, or a chronic health condition, such as diabetes or cancer, the adult can negotiate these problems (Smith & Earles, 1996). Research has indicated the value of recreation, physical exercise, nutrition, mental exercise, and social support in adjusting to these normal physical changes (Bee, 1998; Dunn, Anderson, & Jakicic, 1998; Garry & Vellas, 1996; Higgins, 1995; Haskell, 1994; Haskell & Phillips, 1995).

The good news is that older adults can learn new strategies for combating the negative impact of failing health and a host of difficult scenarios in their unique journey of growing older (Dychtwald, 1999; Guigoz, Vellas, & Garry, 1996; Olshansky & Carnes, 2001) From gardening, to enrolling in local colleges, to Internet use, to daily exercise, many older adults around the world are rewriting their biography as a result of personal learning projects (Lamdin, 1999).

Fisher (1993) and Kleiber (1999) discuss how unexpected trauma or involuntary disengagement is often the trigger for development in the later stages of life. These traumas are often rooted in the changes of one's physical health in the later years. Each discusses how death and loss precipitate the potential for adaptation, adjustment, and learning (Havighurst, 1972; Lamdin, 1997; Schulz & Salthouse, 1999).

The physical aspect of aging that is often ignored is one's death. Although this goes against our drive to survive, we cannot deny the fact that we will die. Erikson, Erikson, & Kivnick (1986) state that those who are ready, or prepared to die have completed the tasks of generativity and ego integrity. In addition, a spiritual perspective often gives someone the permission to die and to prepare for another life. The world's religions continually espouse hope through eternal life. For example an often-quoted statement from the New Testament is: "Death is swallowed up in victory. Death where is your victory: O Death where is your sting?" (1 Corinthians 16: 54-55, New American Standard Bible). Regardless of one's particular religion, it is important for each adult to reflect on his or her life and to prepare to die; this results in the willingness to accept this natural part of life (Erikson, Erikson, Kivnick, 1986).

Peck (1956) and Fisher (1993) have amplified the last stage of Erikson's (1950) ideas. Their focus on sickness, dependency, and eventual death add an important and honest perspective to the final stage of one's life. Peck states the final journey is a conflict of ego transcendence over ego pre-occupation; Fisher similarly states the final period is marked by dependency, mortality, and an adaptation to the finality of death.

It is natural for older adults to discuss the loss of physical health and to attempt to compensate for this natural function through self-directed learning projects focused on one's health. However, our youth oriented society does not readily accept or acknowledge the difficulty of these issues (Quadagno, 1999).

The Persistence of Loss

The older adult usually continues in the comfort of middle age until encountering an unforeseen loss. Fisher (1993) and Peck (1956) discuss how older adults stubbornly cling to middle age values and lifestyle even though they may be in their late 70's. Peck discusses this important middle age conflict as the valuing of wisdom over one's physical body and socializing over sexualizing. These two conflicts enable the older adult to accept the limits of their physical body and to creatively use the mind to negate these losses. He discusses the emotional aspects of the aging adult by outlining the conflict of cathetic flexibility over cathetic impoverishment, and mental flexibility over rigidity. These two conflicts reflect the importance of emotional flexibility as one becomes older, by shifting emotional investment from one person to another, and by controlling one's emotions.

Peck (1956) and Erikson (1997) stress the importance of one's attitude toward pain and sickness. Peck names this conflict as body transcendence over body pre-

occupation. This is evident by the older adult who can accept their failing body and live with pain and change. Easier said than done, no one can really prepare for these daily struggles of walking, cooking, or sleeping with pain. This time period is also marked with continual loss, not just with one's body, but also in society (ageism). Some adults who have lived in the center of social life experience this marginalizing process of being overlooked or as a source of humor for the first time.

Most authors delineate specific steps that take place during these times of loss. These may include decline in one's physical health, less income, and the death of one's partner (Havighurst, 1972; Peck, 1956). Other researchers continue these thoughts with an emphasis on responding to these setbacks with revisions and transitions in one's lifestyle and mindset (Antonovsky & Sagy, 1990; Fisher, 1993). Yet, each older adult has been a student of adjustment and change, from one's earliest days each person has dealt with setbacks, disappointments, and loss. Hopefully, the adult arrives at old age with an emotional armor to handle these situations.

Fisher (1993) states that the pursuing of one's retirement plans and an attempt to continue an earlier lifestyle reflects how the young older adult strives to continue with middle age. The early transition is often the result of some involuntary transitional event, especially the loss of health, friend, partner, or death. In response, the older adult realizes middle age is over and incorporates specific voluntary transitions to meet this change. The third stage is a revised lifestyle evident by adaptation to change, socialization with other active older adults, and a more stable life that is appropriate for older adults. The fourth stage or later transition is shown by a loss of autonomy, a need for assistance, and a loss of health. The final period is marked by dependency, mortality, and an adaptation

to the final end of life. In stages one, two, and three the older adult is fairly independent, whereas the final two reflect a loss of control and dependency on others.

In summary, the older adult is often facing various situations where their world is shrinking due to losses that are often out of their control. Loss of work, loss of health, loss of friends, loss of partner, loss of income, loss of social esteem become the personal headlines in the everyday world of older adults. Older adults who are already on the margins of society, such as those in rural areas, those with disabilities, those without family, or from other cultural backgrounds may have greater struggle. However, these setbacks can be negotiated by the pursuit of specific learning projects.

Learning How to Adjust and Age Successfully

People usually arrive at old age as masters of adaptation because of continual internal and external battles that have been fought throughout one's life. These developmental tasks often arrive at a time when one is especially sensitive to learn. "When the body is ripe, and society requires, and the self is ready to achieve a sensitive task, the teachable moment has come" (Havighurst, 1972, p. 7). Havighurst (1972) states there are three developmental tasks for the older adult - new social affiliation, new social roles, and new living arrangements. Havighurst had his pulse on the older adult, naming specific tasks that were significant in the mature person's development, but even more, his timeless concept of the teachable moment helped to delineate the impact of development on willingness to learn.

Baltes and Baltes (1990) incorporate an integrative paradigm of selection, optimization, and compensation to explain how older adults have blended the physical, social, and mental dynamics of one's life to adjust. This choosing to cut back (selection),

choosing something positive (optimization), and choosing something to help (compensation) seems to be the repeated theme of development and successful aging. This acknowledges the influence of one's health, the timing of events, as well as relations with others (Hoyer, et al. 1999; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). This dialectical view on development includes a continual state of flux between gains and losses. This process is an active dynamic of making choices among limited options.

Baltes and Baltes's (1990) strategy, based on medical and biological research, sets forth an integrated solution for successful aging. Incorporating a healthy lifestyle with a variety of personal solutions leads to the increase of one's reserve capacities. Education helps the individual to understand how to overcome one's limited reserves and to compensate for losses through knowledge and technology. These continual adaptations can help create more gains than losses resulting in a more resilient self. In summary, selective optimization with compensation is a general process of adaptation that occurs throughout one's life, but is especially important in older adults because of the loss of biological, mental, and social reserves. Successful aging, based on selective optimization with compensation, becomes an "individualized coalition between one's mind and society to outwit personal biological constraints" (Baltes & Baltes, 1990, p. 27).

Continuing these ideas on successful aging, Kleiber (1999) creates a triage for successful aging based on three theories of aging - disengagement, activity, and continuation. Cumming and Henry's (1962) disengagement theory is based on the premise that as adults become older they will disengage voluntarily from meaningful activities, and society in turn disengages from them. Hooyman and Kiyak's (1996) activity theory states that successful aging occurs in proportion to the amount of activity

the individual is able to maintain. Atchley's (1993) well-documented continuity theory is the attempt to "preserve and maintain existing psychological and social patterns by applying familiar knowledge, skills, and strategies" (p. 5). This perspective mirrors Erikson, Erikson, & Kivnick's (1986) admonition of vital involvement in old age by stressing continual activity.

Kleiber (1999) cites research indicating people are most fulfilled in direct proportion to the amount of their activity, that voluntary disengagement is part of the older person's life, and that continuing with one's established ways of thinking and living allows the individual to use existing psychological social patterns. Kleiber states rather than disengagement, older adults should be involved in engagement and selective disengagement. Engagement is the perpetuation of current interests and especially enjoyable leisure activity; selective disengagement involves redirecting one's time and energy to that which is meaningful. Perhaps the final stage in adult development is learning how to disengage from activities no longer fulfilling, staying engaged with activities that are personally fulfilling, and willing to come to the end of one's life.

A variety of authors refer to McClusky (1963) as one whose ideas on adjustment continue to resonate with older adults (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). This theory of margin states the individual must have positive emotional energy in spite of negative setbacks, in order to continue to learn, change, and adjust. In order for a margin to occur, the losses in one's life have to be negated by gains. These teachable moments may become lessons of failure if the older adult no longer has the social or emotional support needed for change.

McClusky's simple, yet profound concept, states that each person has internal and external loads or demands. External load involves those issues outside of self such as work, family, and ones' community. The internal load involves the internal mindset of the person and the individual goals he or she sets. Power consists of all the aspects of one's life that contribute energy to this person's life. This power can be generated in the physical, spiritual, mental, emotional, and social aspects of one's life. In order to compensate for the losses, the older adult must make a variety of these adjustments in order to add margin to one's life. "Having a margin is essential to the mental hygiene of adulthood" (McClusky, 1963, p. 17).

The good news is that many older adults are living lives of freedom and vital involvement because they have learned how to adjust to the variety of losses in their particular context (Sheehy, 1995; Tennant, 2000).

Summary

The influence of generativity and the momentum to leave a legacy (Erikson, 1950) is a driving force in the older adult. The older adult struggles to feel positive about their life and the choices that one has made (Antonovsky & Sagy, 1990; Erikson, 1950; Fowler, 1981). The impact of continual change in one's body (Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Havighurst, 1972; Kleiber, 1999; Peck, 1956) and eventual death (Erikson, 1950; Fisher, 1993; Havighurst, 1972; Peck 1951) is a daily reality for the older adult. This is further complicated by the impact of loss of social respect, one's mate or friends, and health (Baltes and Baltes, 1990; Fisher, 1993; Havighurst, 1972; Peck 1956). In order to survive, the older adult must learn how to adapt to the variety of changes in aging (Baltes &

Baltes, 1990; Fowler, 1981; Iso-Ahola, Jackson, & Dunn, 1994; Kleiber, 1999; Kohlberg, 1976; McClusky, 1963; McGuire, 1985).

The most common thread through all these theories is the issue of change and adaptation. Some older adults make radical changes in their life due to the difficulty of their situation. Mezirow (1985, 1991, 2000) links the role of transformation and adult development, yet is careful to distinguish between the two. Change due to adult development and change due to transformation should not be confused, as development can extend beyond its normal trajectory to include personal transformation (Tennant, 1993; Tenant & Pogson, 1995).

The most consensual perspective may be the socio-cultural view of development. This integrative view includes physical, social, mental, and spiritual dynamics and embeds the person's development within a contextual lens allowing for varieties of directions and paths (Baltes & Baltes, 1990). Timely advice from theories of successful aging adds insight from continuity, disengagement, and activity theories (Kleiber, 1999) into specific strategies of adaptation, change, and adjustment. These perspectives, especially the integrative, can expand to fit the issues and dynamics of the older adult's life.

Adult development can take many paths. Seemingly linear from birthday to birthday, this physical growth may mask the subtle and multidirectional forces of development. However, the hallmark of development consists of change, discontinuity, and perhaps chaos. On an individual scale this complex growth may appear chaotic and painful, yet on a wider scale may show great numbers experiencing similar change (Fisher, 1993). The time in history, the family, the expectations of local community, and

even uncontrolled events in nature all play a vital role in the gradual process of development (Bee, 1998; Quadagno, 1999).

In order to survive, each person must learn to adjust and adapt to these changes, each person must submit to change with age (Kleiber, 1999). From a child's first tooth, to eventually pulling the same tooth, life is fraught with bloody, painful, and fleshy changes in the scenarios of daily life. Yet for the older adult, some of these changes can be monumental, pulling teeth seems inconsequential to being asked to retire or burying one's life companion.

A great deal of these changes in middle and late-life are adaptations to the physical decline that accompanies the older adult. However, this failing and slowing flesh may masquerade continual development in the mental, emotional, spiritual, and social aspects of the older adult. The good news is that the creative human potential to change and transform may transcend Shakespeare's "second childishness and mere oblivion" and turn these harsh changes into teachable moments of wisdom, love, and acceptance (Havighurst, 1972; McClusky, 1963; Peck, 1956).

One common theme across these theories is that of adaptation and adjustment. In order to survive to an older age, the individual must become a master of change, incorporating personal learning at every phase of chaos. This compensation may be seen in personal self-directed projects where the older adult is learning how to age successfully. Rather than change in a negative sense, these self-directed lessons have the potential to enable the older adult to learn what is necessary to age successfully.

Part Three - Current Research on Self-Directed Learning

From the beginning of history, people have gathered together to discuss, to plan, and to learn for a variety of reasons (Candy, 1991; Dewey, 1995; Field, 2000; Foley, 2001; Hansen, 2000). This natural process of learning was an active part of the Greek society called “*scholē*” meaning leisure and school. This ideal learning, guided by Aristotle, was a personal and civil self-improvement program focusing on individual excellence and virtue. Education was referred to as a personal and deliberate molding of one’s character that continues throughout one’s life. The end result of this personal and civil education was a more cohesive society and supportive community. These early roots of self-directed learning attest to the power and influence of personal education over the lifetime (Goodale & Godbey, 1988).

Self-directed learning has the potential to promote change. Some learners have helped to change their community to a more democratic and just society as a result of its emphasis of learning throughout the lifespan (Connelly, 1998). Also, SDL is the natural way for adults to learn (Knowles, 1984), and this personal learning is evident in a variety of cultures (Lamdin, 1997). SDL is more than an activity of discovery or homework; it is actually a part of the human experience, and a normal part of each adult’s life (Confessore, 1992).

This review of current self-directed literature is based on 146 articles, 412 abstracts, and several literature reviews through the lens of Brockett and Hiemstra (1991), Merriam and Caffarella (1999), Long and Associates (1988, 1992a, 1996, 1998), Confessore and Long (1992), Long and Redding (1991), and Caffarella and O’Donnell (1987).

As a result of this information, we know Tough's (1971) description of highly deliberate and self-planned efforts to learn isolated the phenomena of SDL. His work is lauded in each literature review and is acknowledged as the beginning of research on self-directed learning. The influence of Gugliemino's Self-directed Learning Readiness Scale (SDLRS) (1988) allowed researchers to quantify these popular ideas. This led to numerous qualitative paradigms that have attempted to uncover SDL in overlooked groups such as rural, elderly, and uneducated. Because of this research we know SDL is widespread, SDL is positively related to life satisfaction, formal learning can be a predictor of SDL, and SDL is the primary way that adults learn (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991).

More important to this study, there is an overall lack of attention to older adults in this literature. The 412 abstracts covered in this literature contained two qualitative studies and 14 quantitative studies on older adults; this pales in comparison to other samples incorporated in this research. This research is important because of the common issue of aging and the increasing number of older adults.

The purpose of this section of the literature review was to focus on recent academic research and other related material on self-directed learning and older adults. This research on older adults and SDL can be grouped around the following five themes. First, SDL increases life satisfaction in older adults. Second, SDL is a means for older adults to gain specific knowledge. Third, SDL is a potent force against premature decline and dependency. Fourth, each learner manifests SDL in unique ways. And, fifth, SDL occurs within the context of leisure.

Life Satisfaction

There has been a great deal of interest in the topic of life satisfaction and older adults. In addition, there has been a focus on the correlation of SDL with life satisfaction. Life satisfaction is a human tendency, and activities contributing to one's life satisfaction are deemed important (Maslow, 1970). Brockett's (1985a, 1987) research on readiness for learning, with a combined sample of 124 with minimum age of 60, indicated a significant positive relationship with life satisfaction. The Salamon-Conte Life Satisfaction in the Elderly Scale (SCLSES) and the Self Direction Learning Readiness Scale (SDLRS) was positively correlated in these two studies. Confirming Brockett's research is Fisher (1986,1988) whose study showed a positive relationship between formal education and SDL. Fisher's sample of 786, with a minimum age of 55, shows the impact of continued involvement in education. To be in the study the participants had to engage in at least one program designed for older adults outside of the home. Results indicated active older adults had a significant positive relationship with educational attainment, less anomia, the propensity to engage in SDL, and awareness of SDL activities.

Long (1993) discusses SDL oriented dissertations conducted from 1966 to 1991. Out of 173 dissertations, four dealt specifically with older adults, self-directed learning, and life satisfaction. Three of the four dissertations employed the use of the SDLRS. These various dissertations continued to confirm that SDL has a positive influence on life satisfaction, specifically the elderly in subsidized housing (East, 1986; Estrin, 1986) and with Spanish speaking immigrants in Florida (Diaz, 1988).

Sears' (1989) dissertation continued Tough's (1971) work by interviewing 120 people incorporating Tough's interview guide. Starting from a pool of 20,032, eventually 400 were chosen for the study, and 120 agreed to participate. Rather than looking at learning projects over the lifespan, they focused on learning projects of the previous year. The sample had a minimum age of 50. There was an average of two learning projects per person and findings revealed, similar to Tough (1971), books, pamphlets, and newspapers are a primary source of information for older adults. Older adults value SDL and are motivated for self-planned self-directed learning projects. Sears summarizes the role of SDL and life satisfaction:

The result of this study indicate the older adults value self-directed learning as a major source of *self-fulfillment* [italics added] in their lives and are motivated to develop new knowledge and skills through self-planned, self-directed learning projects. (as cited in Long and Redding, 1991, p. 51)

Two recent dissertations by Gregg (1996) and Jensen (1999) showed different views concerning life satisfaction. Gregg's research revealed the pursuit of education in a formal environment did not seem to improve life satisfaction, showing that most older adults pursuing these educational activities already have high levels of self-esteem. It seems their educational activity was a continuation of important activities (Atchley, 1993). The study found that older adults, regardless if they were attending college or participating in other types of activities, had high levels of self-esteem, life satisfaction, and knowledge about participation in education. This indicates these adults already had high levels of life satisfaction and self-esteem before they were entering these programs, rather than because of these programs.

However, Jensen (1993) showed the mental stimulation and transitions to the college atmosphere impacted the life satisfaction of older adults in a positive way. This dissertation investigated the experience and meaning of older adults receiving a college degree. Similar to a later study by Little (1995), this study of seven narratives revealed an enhanced self-esteem of the older adult. This was evident by increased energy from association with younger generation and mental stimulation by the challenge of the coursework. Interestingly, these adults who returned to college found a great deal of acceptance, instead of the expected social rejection or ageism.

The impact of the SDLRS (Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale) on research and knowledge of SDL is important to consider (Guglielmino & Guglielmino, 1988). The attempt to understand more about SDL led to this and other scales that resulted in more research. The SDLRS is designed to measure the presence of attitudes, abilities, and personal characteristics that are important for SDL (Guglielmino, 1977). These personal characteristics of readiness to learn include enjoyment of learning, self-concept as independent learner, tolerance of ambiguity, personal creativity, potential of lifelong learning, initiative to begin learning activities, awareness of learning needs, and responsibility for learning.

However, this scale is not without controversy, some researchers feel the scale (SDLRS) may be inappropriate for samples with low formal education and does not allow for learning in natural settings (Brockett, 1985b). Other scales, though not as popular, have been created to fill in various gaps such as the Oddi Continuing Scale (Oddi, 1986,1987). In order to improve the SDLRS, Long and Smith (1989) attempted to rework the scale's face validity with older adults. They employed different ways of

testing older adults and concluded assistance to older adults during the exam could help utilize the measure. Although these scales have seemingly proved that SDL is related to life satisfaction, an interpretive paradigm will enable researchers to learn more about this topic (Lamdin, 1997).

Researchers, practitioners, and older adults should consider the impact of these studies. As harbingers of spring, these forecasts of good news have spread the gospel of SDL on the bleak road of growing older. Life satisfaction unequivocally improves as a result of self-directed learning. Not only have these studies shown an improvement of life satisfaction, less anomia, but also that SDL is a part of every segment of society.

SDL as a Means for Gaining Specific Information

The powerful potential of SDL is its applicability to any subject and any learner (Grow, 1991). Older adults have a need to learn about many different topics because each person has a unique set of experiences, interests, and problems. Long's (1993) discussion of dissertations pointed out research on the relationship of SDL to such specific and varied topics as back pain, myocardial infarction, and finances. In addition there are studies that relate SDL to learning information over the Internet (Garrison, 1987), distance education (Timmerman, 1998), and in various situations in the workplace (Confessore, 1992).

Similar research by Yamanda (1994) indicated how SDL adds to formal programs for the elderly. Because of SDL's positive impact on life satisfaction, she encourages the use of SDL in these programs. Long and Zoller-Hodges (1995) have shown the positive impact of formal education such as Elderhostel. SDL can be an integral part of formal educational programs such as Elderhostel to augment personal study projects. There are

benefits for older adults and society as older adults continue to learn; educators should consider how to incorporate SDL within these formal programs (Long & Zoller-Hodges, 1995; Withnall, 2000).

There have been writings stating intentional learning may be the key to survival (Hake, 1999). Because of our rapidly changing world, there is a need for continual education in every field. SDL allows the learner to adjust the focus of study at will and need. Because of this malleability, self-directed and self-planned learning will increase in popularity and meaning. Despite controversy, SDL has the potential to include more people than formal efforts, even marginalized adults, such as the oldest-old, minorities, and those with less education (Verduin, Miller, Greer, 1986). Many people receive mental stimulation during work; those who are retired are often left behind in a work-oriented society. Hiemstra's (1975, 1976) foundational work implied that SDL provides a way for people to continue to learn various tasks and skills to survive. His findings indicated the widespread and natural phenomena of learning throughout the lifetime.

Gibbons, Bailey, Comeau, Schmuck, Seymour, & Wallace's (1980) research on experts without formal training takes personal learning to a deeper level. It is a liberating concept to consider that SDL can enable anyone to become an expert on any topic; this social emancipation is based on motivation of the learner. This is similar to ideas of Kroth and Boverie (2000), whose research identified the strong motivation of adults with a purpose and mission for specific learning.

SDL is a Potent Force Against Premature Decline and for Empowerment

Similar to a physician who dispenses medicine and counseling, various writers have declared the power of SDL to empower older adults as well as help to prevent

premature decline. Neikrug et al.'s (1995) research focused on the influence of learning in oldest-old adults. This fast growing segment of the population has different needs than young-old adults, for example many of their grandchildren are adults. Interviews of 43 participants with a minimum age of 81 indicated these oldest-old are more involved with their own life, enjoy time with friends, and have learning projects at home. These models of late life revealed the potential of an active life after 80; each person in this Israeli study was motivated to continue to learn and to stay involved in their life. Also, Lamdin's (1997) research indicated that SDL in older adults is more prevalent and substantial than previously thought, and it is the basis for solving problems of older adults. This recent cross sectional survey of 860 participants represented ages 55 – 96. She discusses how self-directed learning projects can range from specific skills (such as a how to learn golf) to never-ending issues (such as genealogy). She continually affirms that SDL is a powerful force for prevention of early decline and dependency.

Other writers similarly have discussed the empowering potential of learning throughout the lifetime. Personal learning can extend beyond projects of arts and crafts to personal change, social justice, as well as challenging the status quo for a better world. This personal empowerment will enable older adults to meet the challenges of their lives as well as design personal projects to meet personal needs, rather than waiting on traditional institutions to offer classes or seminars for their particular needs. This education can result in changes in one's community by challenging hegemony and bringing social change. Learning throughout one's life is more than hobbies and part time jobs. This continual personal learning can provide a way for older adults to continue to fulfill their ambitions and to have an impact on their world (Callender, 1992; Collins,

1995; Cusack, 1995; Field, 2001; Friere, 1970; Foley, 2001; Mason, 1974; Withnall, 2000).

Hiemstra (1998) links SDL with the margin of power that McClusky (1963) describes in his perspective of adult learning. In a review of the writings in *Educational Gerontology*, Hiemstra singled out McClusky's theory of margin in understanding how education can be a powerful influence in one's life. This margin of power delineates how the adult has energy to pursue activities of learning. Kroth and Boverie (2000) also found that older adults energetically pursue education because of one's life mission; SDL was a means to an end, they had a mission to accomplish. This qualitative study on older learners indicated a positive relationship between one's life mission, SDL, and transformation. This interesting study of five diverse participants, with an average age of 77, explains the role of learning with a purpose.

Health and wellness are intertwined with empowerment. SDL can be a tool for motivated patients to learn what is necessary for physical change. Baltes, Kliegal, and Dittman-Kohli's (1988) study focused on adult learning; results revealed a large share of training improvement in fluid intelligence. The sample of 147 older adults with an average age of 73 was divided into comparison groups. They found that SDL has potential to help older adults with specific health related issues. Because fluid intelligence is often compromised before crystallized intelligence, this study provides insight how SDL can lessen the impact of aging in the brain.

Another important consideration is the extensive and pervasive nature of SDL in older adults. Simply stated, there are so many older adults continuing to learn. A study by Hiemstra (1975) showed that older adults are active learners; yet, this self-direction may

be masked to the researcher. This research involved a sample of 256 older adults at least 55 years of age. Four hypotheses were tested with these adults; the results seem to counter the prevailing stereotypes about aging. This study revealed learning interests, activities, and obstacles of older adults. Also Ralston (1979) compared the differences between an older white and non-white sample on learning projects. Research did indicate more white participants, but the most important finding was that rather than race, the amount of formal education was positively correlated to SDL. This research involved 110 participants with an average of 2.45 learning projects per year. Similar to Fisher (1988) and Ralston, Hassan (1982) investigated rural adults in Iowa and found SDL was a way of life for this population. These adults were involved in 9.7 learning projects a year. There was a sample of 77 and 37% were 55 or older. Similarly, Estrin (1986) showed SDL is a way of life and is positively related to life satisfaction by examining a sample of older women living in subsidized housing.

These researchers have made positive links with SDL in specific areas that delay the negative impact of aging. These bearers of good news believe there are significant options for older adults, and that they can be empowered by learning projects aimed at specific needs. SDL empowers older adults by allowing them to choose what they want and need to learn; SDL is a potent force against premature decline.

The Self-Direction Experience is Unique for each Learner

Even though many writers in a variety of fields will describe older adults as a similar group, a closer look reveals the uniqueness of each older adult (Lassey & Lassey, 2001; Quadagno, 1999). The basic premise of SDL is its focus on the individual learner.

Each person arrives at old age vastly different because of the varieties of paths each has chosen to take (Eisen, 1998).

Jarvis (2001) states each older adult is different because of 65 years or more of personal growth in one's intellectual, emotional, physical, and social context. Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (1998) have attempted to describe the process of andragogy as a flexible perspective. The flexibility of andragogy fits with the unique situation of each older adult. Each person is different in cognitive make up, personality, and prior knowledge. Also, with each passing year, these differences increase. Therefore, it is important to understand that each person will vary in their "approaches, strategies, and preferences during learning activities" (p. 165).

SDL is a unique experience that varies from person to person. Leean's (1981) extensive research investigated SDL in rural adults in Vermont with less than 12 years of formal education. This 18-month project involved case studies with 14 participants. Three researchers spent 14 hours with each participant. Although this research did not focus on older adults, the findings are significant for this study. They found SDL occurs in non-rational means and in the activities of everyday life, when one is alone, and through individual thought processes and impressions. Researchers felt the participants described personal learning similar to Maslow's (1970) peak experience.

Similar in scope is the research completed by Lamdin (1997). The findings from this cross-sectional survey update and confirm the vast extent of SDL in older adults, or as Lamdin states "Elderlearning." The Elderlearning Survey mailed to 3600 participants with 860 usable surveys, helps to provide a snapshot of current older adult learning. The survey focuses on the who, why, what, where, and how of older adult learning. These

learners cited reading as the primary mode of learning; other sources are public television, radio, computers, travel, and other people.

This Elderlearning survey revealed SDL is far more prevalent and substantial than previously thought, and that the potential is significant of SDL to impact ones health and lifestyle. The findings also showed the most popular subject of older learners are arts and crafts. Lamdin (1997) emphasized the importance of talking with the participants to gain more information and that in-depth interviews could add to the information. Lamdin's participants indicated they were involved in formal learning programs 17.5 hours a month and informal (self-directed) learning 28 hours per month.

Similar to Lamdin (1997) is Jarvis' (2001) process of learning in older adults. Jarvis summarizes the current issues of gerontology and sets forth a positive perspective on aging:

Learning involves people changing and adapting to the social situation in which they find themselves, a process whereby their experiences are transformed into knowledge – skills – attitudes – values – beliefs – emotions – senses, it involves changes in their biography as they age and develop. (p.28)

The main purpose of Jarvis' (2001) writing was to attempt to delineate how older adults are learning. As a result of various surveys and interviews, Jarvis presents a complicated graph focusing on adult learning that incorporates self-reflection. Jarvis inspires the older adult to continue to learn despite one's circumstance or situation and emphasizes that we continue to change and develop throughout our lives. Jarvis cites other research that substantiates the role of learning in many aspects of aging from improving mental fitness by playing games to developing one's possibility for new work.

Similar to Hake (1999), Jarvis stresses the possibility to redirect one's personal biography as a result of personal learning. In a world that is changing daily, we too can change, our biography can be modified and we can continue to grow and learn. Jarvis also emphasizes the role of spiritual dynamics and personal faith in the redirection of one's biography.

Older adults may feel marginalized as well as a lack of confidence, which also contributes to the unique aspect of older adults. Pevoto's (1989) study focused on thirty-three older participants and attempted to discover why these individuals were not participating in organized learning activities in senior centers. Findings indicated low self-image, a lack of interest in the topics, and a preference for SDL over a formal class prevented over half from participating. This insightful study on non-participation revealed that many older adults want to continue to learn but are not motivated by the usual arts, crafts, or bingo. He states the importance of allowing the older adult to learn new technology especially involving computers and other technical skills. His findings also showed the importance of continuing education in older adults.

Unique situations of learning are evident in Spear and Mocker's (1984) research that showed SDL is pervasive even among the less educated. Their sample included all ages of adults without a high school education and indicates how one's personal learning is organized around the unique circumstances in one's life. This research also discussed the role of chance or fortuitous circumstances in personal learning. Perhaps one's learning may not be as linear as Tough (1971) or Knowles (1984) would indicate, rather learning forms around the specific circumstances in one's life (West, 1992).

SDL Often Occurs in Leisure

Many older adults have retired or are in the process of retirement and consequently have more leisure time. SDL often occurs in one's leisure time, and researchers may overlook this interesting aspect of SDL. Verduin and McEwen (1984) and Verduin, Miller, and Greer (1986) have shown how leisure time is often utilized by older adults for SDL. One of the main arenas of adult education is to provide adults opportunities to learn about experiences that will enrich their life. With adults living longer, retiring earlier, and having more free time, there is greater amount of leisure time, as well as recreational pursuits (Kelly, Steinkamp, & Kelly, 1986). Specific recreational activity such as golf has been shown to contribute to successful aging (Siegenthaler & Thomas, 2001). SDL is particularly suited for learning topics of self-enrichment and can take place at home, libraries, outdoors and other nontraditional places of learning (McGuire et al. 1996). Kleiber (1999) discusses the compelling evidence of the leisure experience in coping with the loss and limitations of aging as well as leisure's role in adult development.

If an older adult desires to learn some topic not available in a formal program, they may turn to SDL. SDL and leisure are similar because both involve personal direction, free time, and moral constraint (Goodale & Godbey, 1988). This blending of education and leisure is experiencing increasing interest, especially from adults 50 years and older (Verduin, Miller, and Greer, 1986; McDaniel, 1986). This is evident by Learning in Retirement (LIR) programs, educational travel, and Elderhostel. Elderhostel is one of the fastest growing adult education movements. These one to two week programs have pupils with a minimum age of 55. Elderhostel has expanded worldwide

and offer various programs from art history in Paris to ecology in the Okefenokee Swamp. On a broader scale, the University of the Third Age has been a part of the European culture even longer. This “university” for those in retirement, the third age, has been offering classes since the beginning of the 20th century.

It is also important to consider the implications of outdoor education (Rubenstein, 1987) as well as the influence of being outdoors on personal learning (Leopold, 1970). Leisure activities that combine travel, learning, and being outdoors are some of the most popular attractions for older adults. Programs such as eco-tourism, intergenerational activities, biking trips, and ocean voyages are adding to the depth of their trips by including discussion groups, on site experts, and specific classes. Older adults enjoy learning in leisure through volunteering (Stergios & Carruthers, 2001), personal reflection (Foley, 2000), and travel (Roberson, 2001a, 2001b). For example in Lamdin’s (1997) extensive research project, travel was listed as the favorite way older adults learn. One participant stated:

Travel is the best revenge against aging...when we take a trip and enter unfamiliar settings, we reconnect with our childish sense of wonder and discovery, and we discover an unexpected bonus, the clock slows down and life seems to expand. (p. 139)

“Leisure is living in relative freedom from the external compulsive forces of one’s culture...to act from internally compelling love in ways which are personally pleasing, intuitively worthwhile, and provide a basis for faith” (Goodale & Godbey, 1985, p. 9). Leisure includes one’s free time, but it extends into the emotions and well being of the individual. Critical reflection, which often occurs in undistracted leisure, is an integral

part of learning (Brookfield, 1985). Leisure is free time, undistracted, where adults have the freedom to “stand back from it and reorder it, using concepts like power, conflict, structure, values, and choice” (Foley, 2000, p. 78). This critical reflection, which is so important to education and learning, takes place in one’s leisure time (Brookfield, 1985; Fisher, 1998; Jarvis, 2001).

Volunteering continues to expand as an important part of the American landscape. Older adults volunteer more than any other group and volunteering will occur in leisure time. Volunteerism is its own powerful force in the older adult’s life and has the potential to influence the individual as well as helps to formulate constructive aging practices (Jarvis, 2001; Lamdin, 1997; Stergios and Carruthers, 2001). Although without pay, volunteers can choose those areas and activities they long to be a part of. In addition these delayed wishes, may provide a special arena for renewed learning. From docents in galleries, to high school coaches, to building churches, to counseling in jails, many older adults are finding fulfillment and learning during volunteering activities. In addition to learning, these exciting, personally chosen activities may become intensely arousing and even negate some of the negative impact of modern life (Della Fave & Massimini, 1988).

Leisure scholars have an interest in older adults and have made an interesting array of findings linking leisure philosophy and personal learning. For example, Pedlar, Dupuis and Gilbert (1996) incorporated action research to enable a resident of a nursing home to relearn former life roles by resuming previous leisure habits (Pedlar, Dupuis, & Gilbert, 1996). Mannell (1993) has shown the positive impact of high investment activities in leisure on life satisfaction, Adams (1993) has revealed the role of friendships as contributing to social context of learning and leisure, and various research has

indicated how widows have learned specific strategies in overcoming grief in leisure (Lopata, 1993; Wilhite et al. 1994). Since SDL occurs in leisure, educators should be aware of constraints to leisure (McGuire, 1985; Wearing, 1995), benefits of leisure (McPherson, 1991; Tinsley & Tinsley, 2000), and meaning of leisure for the older adult (Iso-Ahola et al. 1994; Lawton, 1993).

Leisure however, is not only a time for self-directed learning projects. Leisure can also be fraught with frustration, boredom, and loneliness (Kleiber, 1999). Because older adults have more leisure time, these negative dimensions can be combated through Erikson's (1950) concept of generativity. Generativity extends beyond raising children to caring for the next generation. This can be seen outside of one's family through mentoring, volunteering, even child care (Kleiber & Ray, 1993), and can be a part of any older adult's life, with or without a family. Leisure is not only a self-indulgent or contemplative endeavor but also agency for opportunity to engage with others.

A popular and common activity of many older adults is religious activity. Pieper (1952) similar to Jarvis (2001) emphasizes the impact of worship and contemplation of the Divine. This leisure activity extends beyond the person to the supernatural and promises new life and hope beyond death for the older adult. In summary, leisure is more than idle time from work. Leisure is a significant opportunity for the selective involvement of meaningful learning activities of older adults.

Conclusions

Recent indicates SDL can improve one's life satisfaction, and it is appropriate for discovering specific topics. This personal learning is a powerful force against the negative aspects of aging, each adult older learner is unique, and SDL occurs within the

agency of leisure. SDL is an attractive, complex, and ambiguous concept known by its progressive element; it focuses on human potential, the tendency to change behavior, and critical analysis (Danis, 1992). Brookfield (2000) discusses how understanding the political dimensions of this personal learning could help SDL to be one of the more effective tools in the field of adult education. SDL is an evolving concept from a focused project of seven hours (Tough, 1971) to an idea of personal responsibility that can impact one's society (Caffarella, 2000).

A statement by Candy (1991) identifies the evolving and complicated phenomena of self-directed learning:

Self-directed learning is at once a social and psychological construct, a philosophical ideal, and a literal impossibility; an external manifestation and an internal tendency; both the beginning and end of lifelong learning; the foundation stone and keystone of the learning society; a supplement to and substitute for the formal education system; a vehicle for the mastering of established knowledge and for the transformation of personal understanding; simultaneously a process and a product; a pre-condition and a purpose. (p. 424)

The purpose of this research was to understand how older rural adults utilize self-directed learning during late life adjustments. This review of the literature has revealed how personal learning is a part of history, self-directed learning (SDL) is used to meet personal needs of the older adult, and how malleable SDL is for any learner. We have discussed the variety and type of adjustments older adults encounter. Self-directed learning is evident in various projects designated by the individual to adjust to the particular change in their life (Pineau, 2000).

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Self-directed learning (SDL) has been the means for creative and innovative change throughout history, yet it is also used to describe the acquisition of knowledge in everyday life (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991). SDL can be defined as intentional acts of learning evident by personal learning projects (Lamdin, 1997; Tough, 1971). However, SDL also may be initiated by unintentional or even accidental events that prompt further investigation. This intentional and self-initiated learning deserves the attention of research because of its utilization by people around the world, and also because it is often these daily projects of learning that direct the future.

The purpose of the study was to understand how rural older adults utilize self-directed learning during late-life adjustments. This research addressed four overlapping areas: the older adult, self-directed learning, late-life adjustment, and the rural setting. In this chapter I outlined the design of this study, the criterion of sample selection, how I selected the sample, data analysis, and the importance of validity and reliability.

Design of the Study

Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) challenge researchers to expand the knowledge base of SDL through qualitative research. This “going beyond the iceberg” (p. 83), through participant observation, or case study, or in-depth interviews, encourages

researchers to study SDL in a natural setting. Qualitative research is an inductive process that attempts to understand the meaning of one's process or experience.

Houle (1961) calls on the investigative society to consider a different style of research that will focus on new paradigms by isolating the voice of the individual. Kuhn (1970) similarly invites the research community to go beyond traditional means of research and consider different ways of arriving at evidence. Kuhn encourages researchers to welcome and attempt to understand the anomalies that may occur in one's investigation. Houle adds, "The history of scientific investigation is littered with the wreckage of ideas that once seemed wholly logical...it is time to discover what they [adult learners] are doing" (Houle, 1961, p.34). Similarly, this research was a discovery of what older adults in this rural setting are doing. Qualitative research has contributed new information, especially from various samples that have been previously overlooked (Mason, 1996). A qualitative perspective can help to capture the nuances of SDL in older adults by welcoming anomalies in the discussion and by focusing on actual activities. Qualitative research enables scientists to actively participate in problem finding, to clarify the complexity of difficult situations, and to develop new theory. This is the "goodness" of qualitative research (Peshkin, 1993).

Lamdin's (1997) extensive cross-sectional survey of older learners discusses the need for detailed interviews and qualitative data in research on SDL. A total of 3,600 surveys were sent to various senior mailing lists, such as AARP (American Association for Retired People) and Elderhostel, 912 surveys were returned. She describes that many of the 860 usable surveys contained hand-written comments extending to the margins - the participants were trying to communicate with the researchers about their personal

learning. Lamdin points out that detailed interviews could have supplied more information on older adults and SDL. Similar to Tough (1971), she concurs that it often takes concentrated probing to enable the participants to understand SDL, recognize it, and name it. “The enormous numerical advantage of self-directed learning over formal learning would have been even greater had the respondents been interviewed face-to-face rather than asked this question in a paper-and-pencil exercise” (p. 127). This is an open plea for extended, in-depth interviews with older adults concerning personal learning. My research attempted to supply more information and to probe older adults and their learning.

In addition, this research was a basic qualitative design, which “seek[s] to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and world views of the people involved” (Merriam, 1998, p.11). Data was collected primarily through interviews, but included some observations and documents. The results of this research were a combination of the data from the interviews and an analysis based on the research questions.

This research was an attempt to understand more about self-direction and learning. As a result of the interviews, this detailed probing exposed more about the older adult’s learning project, nature of the learning, process of how it was carried out, and the relationship between adult development and learning (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). Two interviews with each participant provided me the opportunity to discern the self-directed learning in this sample.

The primary instrument in qualitative research is the researcher. The entire design of the study was filtered through my subjectivity. Bogdan and Biklen (1982, 1992) urge

researchers to be persistent, flexible, and creative. The character of the researcher is important to consider, for example, as primary researcher I attempted to model the professional nature of this work, respected the participants, and was committed to truth and honesty (Patton, 1990).

The interaction between the sample and the researcher is a vital aspect of the research process. This includes the difficulty of relating to another person, phone calls, interruptions, and surprises during this process. This acknowledges the human side of research from the emotional frustration inherent in the work and extends to friendship that can develop in the process (Cotterill & Letherby, 1994). In addition, Seidman (1998) challenges researchers to have a genuine interest in others. I attempted to get to know the participant during the two interviews, demonstrated an interest in the person, and acknowledged there will be a mutual relationship as a result of this interaction (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davies, 1997).

Criteria Used in Selecting the Sample

In order to arrive at a sample that has been purposively chosen, the researcher must have a set of criteria. This involved carefully creating a list of attributes for the sample based on the purpose of the study and its theoretical lens (Merriam, 1998). Like a coach crafting a team by scouting for specific recruits, the researcher should be diligent to have a sample that reflects the purpose of the study. Four criteria were chosen for sample selection: age, rural dwelling, ethnic and sexual diversity, and evidence of SDL.

Age

Books that describe the older adult are full of interesting and often contradictory descriptions of age. Older adults may be characterized by a variety of categories and

descriptions; also the ages for these descriptions may change from author to author. For example, the young -old adult category may range from 55 – 70 while someone 70, 75, even 80, who appears well and healthy, may be placed in the oldest-old category (Feldman, 2000). Literature often defines age categories in increments of 10, starting with 55, 65, 75, and 85 (Krout & Coward, 1998; Yntema, 1999).

Studies focused on older adults specify a variety of ages in the sample; various research projects on older adults include samples that start at age 63 (Long & Smith, 1989), 60 (Brockett, 1985, 1987), 55 (Lamdin, 1997), 55 (Hiemstra, 1975), and 40 (Gregg, 1996). For example, Lamdin's (1997) study has participants from age 55 to 96. The purpose of this study was to focus on older adults who are experiencing late life adjustment. Today, in 2002, people are living longer and healthier, and many people are not experiencing late life adjustments until the age of 70 or beyond (Quadagno, 1999). Adults in the young-old category (55 - 65), and the middle -old (65-75) category are becoming stronger and healthier. Neikrug et al. (1995) felt that research on older adults should extend beyond the age of 60, and that perhaps the 60's have become an extended middle age. With increased health and medical advances, many of these adults (60-70) are experiencing the continuation of middle age (Fisher, 1993; Peck, 1956). Therefore, this study included adults who were at least 70.

Someone who is at least 70 years old will have been born in 1932 or earlier. An important consideration is the history of this generation. Understanding more about the history of one's generation allowed me more insight into the context of the participants' life. Cohort influence has a significant bearing on one's perspective (Bee, 2000; Grabinski, 1998; Quadagno, 1999; Sheehy, 1995). These depression-era children, born

from 1924-1942, are called the Silent Generation. People in this generation have learned to be self-reliant, to work hard, to be industrious, to save money, and to resist change.

According to Sheehy, this group prefers traditional organized teaching.

Rural (Non-metropolitan)

Although there has been some research on rural older adults (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991), the majority of research is focused on samples from cities and university towns (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Jensen, 1999; Kroth & Boverie, 2000; Lamdin, 1997) or senior centers (Brockett, 1985, 1987; Cusack, 1996; Long & Smith, 1989; Neikrug et al. 1995; Pevoto, 1989; Yamanda, 1994). Even more alarming is the seeming lack of recognition of the locale of the sample and its influence on the results.

Definitions of rural and urban are continually contested. Many definitions depend on the point the writer is trying to make. In addition, the demarcations between urban and rural are becoming more and more blurred. Improved transportation, technology, communications, expanding urban areas, television and radio, as well as Internet use are also having a significant impact on the definition of rural (Hill & Moore, 2000).

The rural population may be more resourceful than people that dwell in cities or urban areas. Residents who live in small towns may depend on themselves and one another to provide learning or entertainment (McLaughlin & Jensen, 1998). This creativity, innovation, and personal resourcefulness are more evident when typical resources are not available. For example, Leean (1981) focused on SDL in rural adults in Vermont with less than twelve years of formal education. This study found that SDL occurs in different and creative ways such as when one is alone and in the typical

situations of everyday life. This extensive research project linked SDL with rural and under-educated adults.

As mentioned before all the information about older adults in rural areas is not necessarily negative. In fact, during the last decade (1990-2000) for the first time, there was a general shift in population from urban back to rural areas [www.nal.usda.gov/ric/faqs/ruralfaq.htm]. Some research shows that rural areas may allow for a stronger and more extensive informal personal support network that may compensate for many of the problems in these areas [www.house.gov/emerson/crc/overview/faq.html].

However, most rural (non-metropolitan) areas are not characterized by such positive descriptions. Rural areas typically have less economic opportunity, less social services available, and a higher proportionate number of older adults. In addition, rural areas are dominated by low wage industry and rural incomes are lower than urban. Health care and education is a greater challenge in rural areas because of less financial support and distance. Concerning seniors, managed care and obtaining prescription drugs can be significant problem. One of the contributors for this is the lack of public transportation in rural areas; nearly 80% of rural counties have no public bus service [www.house.gov/emerson/crc/overview/faq.html]. Because many younger adults leave these areas for various reasons, there is less financial support base for these aging citizens (Krout & Coward, 1998).

This sample was comprised of older adults who live in rural areas. Varieties of definitions of rural can confuse the issue. For example, there were 8 million older adults that lived in rural areas in the USA in 1996 (Krout & Coward, 1998). Rather than

attempting to delineate among the myriad of definitions and demographic issues from metropolitan- rural-farm to nonmetropolitan-rural-nonfarm, I limited this sample to participants who lived in the same non-metropolitan county in Georgia. I conducted the research in south Georgia.

This county is where I am from. Although I have not lived here since high school, I have family that lives here and I return to this area frequently. Having grown up in this area, I was familiar with many of the topics the participants discussed. In essence, I was not a stranger to the area or to the participants.

In the U.S. Census of 2000, this county had a population of 16,235. There are no metropolitan areas in this county; there are 35.9 people per square mile. In addition, this county and all of its surrounding counties were also listed as rural [www.census.gov].

Diversity

This sample included the two main races in the state of Georgia. One of the main criticisms of research in SDL is its lack of diverse samples (Brookfield, 1985). This attempted to represent the variety of the population of Georgia.

In 1996, the state of Georgia had a total population of 7,874,792. There were a total of 350,660 that were 75 and older. Out of this number 279,113 were White (79.6%), 65,967 were Black (18.8%), 3,354 were Hispanic (1%), 1,661 were Asian (.5%), and 565 were Native American (.2%) (Yntema, 1999).

In the 2000 Census data, Georgia had a total population of 8,188,453. In the USA 12.4% of the population are over 65, in the state of Georgia 9.6% of the population are over 65; in this county 12.5 % of the population are over 65. As mentioned earlier, there are a greater proportionate number of elderly in rural areas. In the year 2000, the USA

had 75.1% white population, the state of Georgia 65.1%, and this county 85.5%. The USA had 12.3% black population, the state of Georgia 28.7%, and this county had 11.4%. USA had 12.5% Hispanic population, Georgia 5.3%, and this county 2.4% [www.census.gov]. There was an overt attempt to have a diverse sample, with approximately 10 participants, with each race represented as well as both genders. The sample contained 10 participants, five male, five female. Three were Black and seven were White. I did not include Hispanics as none were referred to me and most have recently moved to this area. In addition this sample included a mixture of widowed and non-widowed participants.

Self-Directed Learning

The purpose of the study was to understand ways that older adults utilize SDL as a result of late life adjustment. Two assumptions were made: that late life adjustments were occurring (Feldman, 2000) and that SDL was occurring (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991). Within the telephone interview both were obvious; if not, the person would have been dropped from the study or the focus of the study may shift. I was looking for a purposeful sample that represented SDL and late life adjustment. Each participant was referred to me from a reliable source as an older adult who continues to learn. I attempted to discern before the first interview if there had been a learning project. I asked the potential participants specific questions – Have you been involved in an activity you have gotten a lot out of? How much time have you spent on this? This took place during a telephone interview, which is outlined in Appendix B.

In Sear's study (1989), participants must communicate prior to or during the first interview that they had participated in a personal learning activity of 10 or more hours

within the previous 12 months of the interview. These 10 hours must consist of self-planned and self-organized learning, which occurred primarily on one's own. Although Tough (1971) used seven hours as a criterion, Lamdin (1997) felt that using 10 hours helped to eliminate questionable situations such as learning how to operate a VCR or engaging in some hobby. Similar to Tough (1971), the 10 hours, should comprise SDL episodes of at least 20 – 30 minutes. Personally chosen classes, groups, or lectures can count as SDL, yet if someone decides to attend a program like Elderhostel because of an invitation of a friend, this would not count. This self-directed learning project must have occurred within the last three years and consist of at least 10 hours of learning on one's own. Each participant clearly communicated that they were currently involved in at least one learning activity.

I was looking for an expression of personal learning motivated by late life adjustment; this would be informed by the literature on late life development. This study is not a measure of activity of older adults; it is a focus of self-directed learning in response to late life adjustment. Therefore the researcher must distinguish between significant personal activities and personal learning projects motivated by late life adjustment.

This is important for me to consider because of the tendency of older adults to continue or resume previous meaningful activity (Atchley, 1993). Older adults may accumulate a variety of skills or knowledge that may be dormant because of various reasons. From piano, to sewing, to bridge, the older adult may decide to renew a former interest; this resuming or re-learning could also represent self-directed learning. To be included in this research, the participant must be involved in a new activity or in the

relearning of a previous activity. Significant hobbies or meaningful activities will be included if this is also a learning situation. For example, one participant, Dora spends approximately three to four hours every day working in the yard. This at first seems to be an enjoyable leisurely activity, but upon closer inspection I became aware that this was also a learning situation. In another situation, Robert enjoys mowing the grass. This provides some exercise, but in contrast to Dora, it is just an enjoyable activity he has done for many years. Income, marital status, education, children, or grandchildren were not selection criteria, but became an important part of the demographic information (Lamdin, 1997).

In summary, I attempted to discern the participant's learning project before the interview; each participant indicated several learning activities that were ongoing at the time of the interview. The primary learning activities are listed on Table 2 in Chapter Five. This research involved 10 active, older adults who were at least 70, lived in a rural county in Georgia, reflected the diversity of the State, and showed evidence of self-directed learning. Also, the participants were a mixture of widowed and non-widowed status, and there was a mixture of the various living situations in this county (i.e. farm, rural nonfarm, town, etc.).

Sample Selection

The sample selected in qualitative research is the result of a careful, purposive, and collaborative process. Purposeful sampling was used in order to address the problem of this research. Purposeful sampling is a process whereby the researcher carefully chooses participants that will provide information rich cases (Patton, 1990). These cases supplied considerable data for analysis based on the focus on this research.

The purpose of this research was to describe, discover, and understand, rather than predict, control, or test the topic of learning and older adults. As a result, I selected participants who could provide in-depth examples and practical knowledge about their learning. This purposefully selected sample met with me twice for a total of 20 interviews and provided specific, detailed, rich and thick descriptions. This type of sampling resulted in information from those who could best explain their self-directed learning as well as the issues they confront as older adults.

I wanted a diverse sample with an even number of men and women, a mixture of widowed and non-widowed participants, and a mixture of living environments (i.e. town, farm, rural-non farm, etc.) in the sample. I also wanted to have three African-Americans, representing this population in the state of Georgia. I began collecting names for the research two months before the interviews began. The initial key informants were the staff at the local library, the cooperative extension service staff, the staff of a local church, a member of the county school board, and the director of a senior adult program. I visited or called each informant, explained the study, and asked him or her to think about referrals. Some gave me names at this time. A week later I called the informants for other referrals. One of the informants was African-American to ensure there would be African-Americans in the study.

The key informants identified the participants by answering the following questions: Do you know someone who is an active older adult, 70 or over, who would be interested in participating in this research? Are you aware of someone who continues to learn? Do you know of an older adult who has participated in some activity they have gotten a lot out of?

The key informants produced 16 names for this study. Several of the informants listed the same person, and one person was living in a nursing home. From this list I chose eight names who satisfied different combinations of the criteria and who were most highly recommended by the informants. For example, the librarian gave me five names. She pointed out one particular person that I should get in touch with: "She is in here all the time and takes home a pile of books." This particular person, Sue, met other criteria goals such as female, Caucasian, widowed, rural-farm. Another person, Wilbur, was on a list of recommended people from the school board. I chose Wilbur because he also helped to meet the goals for the sample such as male, African-American, married, rural-urban.

I determined if these people were interested in the study and confirmed that they met the criteria. This telephone questionnaire is in Appendix B. I set up four interviews to be conducted in August and telephoned the participants for a confirmation the week before. After these interviews I called four more participants. From the original 16 names there were eight that I did not interview.

I mailed the eight participants a letter explaining the purpose of the study; this letter is in Appendix C. The interviews were set up at a time that was convenient for the participant. I met each participant for two hours on consecutive days. For example, I usually interviewed one person from 10 a.m. to 12 noon on the first day, and the same time the next day. A second participant was interviewed on the same day in the afternoon from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. The general plan of research activities is listed in Appendix A.

At this point I had interviewed eight people. This included four men and four women; three were African-American and five were White. In order to expand the list of

potential participants, I also asked the local probate judge, the former school superintendent, and the director of the chamber of commerce for referrals. The purpose of this was to make sure I had not overlooked someone. They gave me a total of 14 more names. One person had already been interviewed, one person had already been submitted on the first list, and one declined to be interviewed. From the remaining list I decided to call the two referrals that I knew the best. These two interviews combined with the others resulted in a total of ten interviews.

The data collection process was guided by analysis of the data, which occurred simultaneously during the process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Merriam, 1998; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). For example, after two interviews I transcribed the data. Then I analyzed both sets of data based on the research questions. The next two interviews were influenced by the findings from the previous set of interviews. The entire process took place from August 10, 2003 until November 1, 2003. A distinct pattern of findings was detected after the sixth interview. Especially apparent was the richness of the data concerning late life adjustments and personal learning. Four more interviews allowed me to confirm this and to have the diversity needed in this research. With the data from these ten participants I was able to more than adequately address the research questions.

Data Collection

Collecting data can be compared to walking a tightrope. I attempted to balance between the world of the participant and the research process. The dialectic of joining the participant's world - yet remaining detached, or learning from the participants - yet not becoming like them was a part of the interview process (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The data collection involved three methods, primarily interviews, but also documents and

observation. I tape-recorded and transcribed the interviews; it is important to consider the impact of using a tape recorder, as well as becoming familiar with its use (Ives, 1988).

Interviews

The primary data collection technique for this research was through interviews. Seidman (1998) offers appropriate information for interviewers. Like a prophet preaching a code of conduct, he lists several suggestions for obtaining productive and quality data:

Listen more, talk less...Follow up on what the participant says...Avoid yes, no and leading questions, use open-ended questions...Don't interrupt a response, but follow up with a question...Ask the participant to tell a story about the subject... Keep the participant focused and ask for details...Pretend as if you are someone else, and have him or her talk to you in this way...Don't take things personally... Avoid reinforcing certain responses, especially those that you like...Follow your hunches...Use the interview guide...Tolerate silence.... (pp. 63-77)

In qualitative research, the interview is often the main source of data. Therefore, all aspects of the interview are carefully attended, from the initial walk through the front door to the final transcription. Patton (1990) discusses using an interview guide where topics and issues are specified in advance, yet the interviewer will decide the sequencing and wording during the interview. The outline allows for the collection of data to be somewhat systematic for each respondent, and if there are gaps, they can be anticipated and closed. The interview should remain fairly conversational and situational. The flexibility of this format can allow for change in the sequencing and wording of questions.

In addition, an informal conversational interview can add important dimensions (Patton, 1990). This natural flow from the immediate surroundings permits an informal interview that takes advantage of the context of the moment. This also allows for observation as well as flexibility so the interviewer can adapt the interview to the individual. A blend of an interview guide and informal conversational interview was incorporated. The interview guide is in Appendix E.

Kroth and Boverie (2000) and Seidman (1998) went beyond the traditional one interview and included three interviews to gain insight for in-depth interviews. This approach is based on open-ended questions and intends to build and explore the participant's response to the questions. Hopefully the participants can reconstruct his/her experience within the purpose of the study. These three interviews are life history, details of the experience, and reflection meaning. I used two interviews in this process. I felt having the interviews spread over two days gave the participant and myself time to reflect on the discussion. Since the interviews, I have returned to visit each participant and have talked with them on the phone.

Merriam (1998) suggests a semi-structured approach for the qualitative interview. This description is a mix of open ended and structured questions. Questions should be carefully considered, they are the key to the door of data. The questions during this interview were based on late life adjustment and learning. There are several general areas from which I asked specific questions; these included one's specific learning activities, brief life history, experience as an older adult, and the impact of one's learning as an older adult. The interview guide can be found in Appendix E.

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) suggest intense listening during the interview. “Treat every word as having the potential of unlocking the mystery of the subject’s way of viewing the world” (p. 98). Creating an environment where the person feels at ease is important; perhaps refreshments, laughter, telling stories, or looking at old photographs may help move the conversation. In the participant’s home, the researcher can break the silence by asking them about various objects displayed in the home. I attempted to be a patient detective by fitting bits of verbal clues together to understand how this person used self-directed learning in late life adjustment.

Based on previous pilot studies, I used the first interview to establish rapport, become comfortable with one another, and to answer the first research question. Consent forms were signed during this time; this can be found in Appendix D. Also, in order to understand one’s context, I videotaped a brief life history of the participant. The tape recorder was explained as well as the purpose of the research. How and what questions were preferred over why questions. The main focus of the research was introduced. This was also a time to make sure the participant fit the criterion of the study. The second interview concentrated on the remaining research questions and took place the following day. I used a set of pre-determined, yet open-ended questions.

Observation

As mentioned earlier, SDL may be hard to discern or observe (Tough, 1971). I was careful to attempt to understand the context of the setting for the interview and observe the SDL of the participant. For example, one person discussed how he enjoyed learning about the Civil War activities of a relative. I videotaped some of the material they used in this activity. Another person discussed gardening; I videotaped them

showing this garden. Field notes were taken to outline the details of this observation. The field notes and videotape were incorporated as another data source. In Chapter Five there is a listing of some of the learning activities of the participants; I observed some segment of each of these activities.

Documents

During this experience I asked the participant to share any document that may be available. This was some object that related to their personal learning. Personal documents are an important data source; these inert artifacts of learning can provide a specific link between SDL and late life adjustment. Seeing and videotaping these documents added credibility and triangulation to this work (Patton, 1990). For example, one of the participants, Betty, showed me a notebook that she had been writing in for many years. While she was talking about this general search for more information, I asked if she would show it to me. I really did not know what she would provide; she walked into her room and brought out this detailed and chronicled personal notebook of information on various segments of knowledge.

I asked each participant to show me his or her learning. One led me to a pen of goats, another showed me a notebook souvenir of a trip out west, and another showed me a wreath she had made. Each document personally disclosed one's learning activity.

Pilot Study

I conducted a similar study in November 2001 in order to help prepare for this research. I interviewed four older adults about learning. The sample included one couple, one widow, one widower. This helped to formulate the questions of this study, as well as

enabled me to be more comfortable with this research, especially asking older adults questions about their life.

The results of that study helped to lay the groundwork of this research. The content and amount of their participation in learning was surprising. Not only were they active in their community, they were involved in multiple projects of learning. Similar to previous research, I sensed the difficulty of discerning learning projects. I also sensed the anticipation of the participants to please the researcher and to be involved in this research. Focusing on specific learning projects helped to eliminate some of the problems that could arise in this research.

In the pilot study, one man had built a historic village on his farm in memory of his wife. I asked to see the village. This helped to make tangible the mysterious motivations of this man's life; it gave context to the study. Because of this observation, I could ask more specific questions on learning and late life adjustment (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). This observation and artifact helped me to understand more about this man's learning project. Similarly, field notes are an important part of this work. During other research projects, field notes added depth and clarity to the data. I wrote in a journal my thoughts and impressions. After each interview I wrote down a variety of information about each discussion. I tried to include the information that was not recorded.

Data Analysis

“Data analysis is a process of making sense out of the data” (Merriam, 1998, p. 178), becoming intimately familiar with data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992), and being able to handle large amounts of information (Patton, 1990). This process is a systematic way for the researcher to learn the details of the data and to organize the material. This process

begins during data collection and intensifies during the research. Although there are a variety of ways to analyze data in qualitative research, I incorporated the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Continually reviewing biographical information helped me to keep the details on each participant straight.

As I read through the transcribed interview, I was looking for common units of information that are related to the research questions. The research questions focused on the nature and process of SDL on the older adult's life. This inductive analysis took place as soon as possible after the interviews. "Inductive analysis means the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis come from the data; they emerge out of the data rather than being imposed prior to data collection" (Patton, 1990, p. 390).

There were several specific steps to the constant comparative method. I was constantly comparing the incidents in the data and various categories emerged. This was a detailed process where I systematically went through each unit of information. Each interview was separately analyzed; observation and documents added veracity and depth to the findings. I became intimately acquainted with the data in the interviews, field notes, and documents. I considered one data set, such as one interview, and then compared one episode or data bit with another within the same set of data (Dey, 1993). I made detailed notes about specific units of data on separate sheets of paper. In this laborious process, the various units that have something in common were grouped together forming a category. Each category was labeled. These categories reflect regular patterns that are in the data. This process continued until all the notes on the data had been assigned to various categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Merriam, 1998). After this

process had been completed within each data set, then comparisons were made across data sets.

After initial categories were defined, they were compared with each other to determine a possible relationship. These categories were divided into properties by further comparison. This process of continual comparison enabled me to develop themes inductively from the data. These were continually refined and integrated in order to construct the final themes of the data; this process involved renaming previous categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). For example, initial data analysis indicated all of the participants experienced various sorts of difficulty and hardship through their life. After reading this in all of the interviews, I compared these various episodes from becoming widowed to the death of a child to the loss of health, and determined some common themes. This became a category under the description of life of an older adult. This was eventually named “adjustment to loss.”

This was a detailed process whereby I read the data through the lens of this study and considered how this information answered the research questions (Merriam, 1998). Then I discerned themes and eventually named these categories. These categories reflect the purpose of this study and comprise a majority of the data. In summary, data analysis was a detailed, time-consuming process of understanding the data. I deliberately considered how to coordinate a large amount of material into a narrative account that others may understand (Wolcott, 1990). This analysis involved developing categories and themes that helped to interpret this data.

Validity and Reliability

I made an effort to provide information that is reliable and valid. Also, it was a rigorous and deliberate attempt to conduct research in an ethical manner. I gave careful attention to the formation of this study as well as how the data were collected, analyzed, and interpreted (Merriam, 1998). Patton (1990) emphasizes that the credibility of a study is supported by rigorous techniques and methods for gathering high-quality data, the credibility of the researcher, and a philosophical belief in the qualitative method.

Validity was an important concern in research. Internal validity, or credibility, is an attempt to make sure the findings are consistent with reality. This is important to consider because qualitative research allows for a wide range of interpretations by the participant and myself. This research incorporated four particular strategies to insure internal validity: triangulation, member checks, peer examination, and a clarification of the biases (Merriam, 1998).

Triangulation took place in this study by using several data sources in order to improve the validity. By using these various methods the research converged on a single perspective (Patton, 1990). Methods triangulation involved interviews but also included documents and observations. Denzin (1978) emphasizes that by combining multiple observations, methods, and data, researchers can overcome biases that may come from a single method or observer. The purpose of triangulation is to increase the veracity of the study in a world that is critical and suspicious of small samples. By increasing one's methods of obtaining information through interviews, observations, and documents, the research is more accurate.

The second strategy for internal validity involved member checks. The member check took place on Saturday, January 25, 2003 at the local library. Six participants

attended. Several of them gave me minor corrections in their personal profile, which I had sent earlier. All of them agreed with the findings that were presented. There was a lively discussion especially about retirement, losses in older adulthood, as well as one's attitude as an older adult. Many of them shared various learning experiences that have helped them in the adjustments of older life. This collaborative confirmation strengthened the findings of this study.

The third strategy was that of peer examination, which came from colleagues in this field as well as committee members of this research. Similar to a member check, I wanted to confirm that another person agrees with my analysis of the data.

Another strategy was that of stating my experience, biases, and assumptions so the reader can understand how the data were interpreted. Not only does this help the reader to understand more about the researcher, but this also helped to keep me in check concerning personal subjectivity.

Reliability, or dependability, in qualitative research is a focus on consistent and dependable results from the data (Merriam, 1998). Reliability is construed from the data, when the findings accurately reflect the participant's perspective. It was my responsibility to accurately record and transcribe the interviews, and to use appropriate quotes that represented the subject (Peshkin, 1993). In order to enhance the reliability of the research, I incorporated four strategies. As discussed earlier, methods will be triangulated, peer review by professors and colleagues will be incorporated, and my assumptions and biases were disclosed.

A careful description of the decisions made will allow the reader to piece together the findings. This audit trail "describe[s] in detail how data were collected, how

categories were derived, and how decisions were made” (Merriam, 1998, p. 207). This chapter detailing the methodology is the audit trail.

External validity in qualitative research refers to how the study may be incorporated in other situations (Merriam, 1998). This transferability of the information is an important goal of the researcher. Qualitative research often focuses on unique situations, in this case, approximately 10 older adults who live in rural Georgia. The main strategy for external validity was for the researcher to provide detailed, rich and thick descriptions. This descriptive material enables the reader to understand the context of the situation and to make comparisons to their situation. User or reader generalizability was sought through careful explanation, intimate detail, and sufficient quotes.

Assumptions and Orientation of the Researcher

Personal biases and personal subjectivity may be reflected in biographical information. I am a white, single, middle-aged male. I grew up in a small rural town in south Georgia, and as an adult I have lived in various states in the USA and a brief time in Central Europe. I have been employed with a student Christian organization for 28 years.

I recognize I needed to be careful to not emphasize or become sentimental toward my particular interests. Taming one’s subjectivity creates a more open climate for interaction. Since I have a tendency to be focused on responses that lean toward health, recreation, and religion, personal monitoring enabled me to keep focused on the purpose of the study.

Entering this study I assumed that self-directed learning and late-life adjustment are occurring. My background in recreation and leisure, as well as studies in gerontology

reflects personal interests and knowledge about older adults. Having conducted various research projects with older adults, I was comfortable talking with older adults and interviewing them. I was positive about older adults, felt comfortable around them, and enjoyed talking with them.

This research occurred in my hometown. Although I have not lived there in 30 years, I am a frequent visitor. Several members of my family live there and are known in the community. Being an insider in the community helped me to understand the people in the study, they were comfortable with this research, and they were open with me. However, I realized the participants might make comments based on the fact that they know my family or me. Because of these issues, the sample was carefully selected based on recommendations and not personal choice. Of the ten participants, I knew one fairly well; I was acquainted with three participants and the rest I did not know. All of the participants except for one were acquainted with my family or parents.

Summary

The purpose of the study was to understand how older adults utilize SDL during late life adjustment. The individuals in the sample were from 75 to 87 years old, reflected the rural demographic of the state of Georgia, and showed evidence of self-directed learning. This qualitative research primarily focused on interviews, but included documents as well as observation. The interviews were spread over two sessions and reflected a semi-structured format with open-ended and flexible questions. The analysis was based on recurring themes as well as the theoretical framework. The researcher conducted this investigation in an ethical manner; the work reflected reliability and validity from an interpretive perspective.

CHAPTER FOUR

PARTICIPANT PROFILES

Self-directed learning takes place throughout one's life when the individual initiates personal learning on specific topics. The purpose of this study was to understand how older rural adults utilize self-directed learning in late life adjustments. Understanding the background of the participant enables the reader to gain a more complete picture of the participant's life and their involvement in learning.

Each member of the sample participated in two interviews. Each interview lasted approximately two hours for a total of four to five hours with each participant. All interviews took place in their homes. During the interviews the participants were encouraged to show evidence of their learning.

This research primarily focused on interviews but also included documents as well as observation. The interviews were spread over two sessions and reflected a semi-structured format with open-ended and flexible questions. A brief life history of each participant was video recorded, all but two of the participants agreed to be videotaped. The names of the participants have been changed; an appropriate first name was chosen for each participant. This chapter outlines the background and current information about the ten participants. The next chapter will detail the findings of the study based on the research questions.

Introduction to Participants

Ten older adults, who live in a rural south Georgia county, participated in this study. This sample reflects diversity in gender, race, education, employment, and financial situation. These participants were referred to me by several community members including the local librarian, an employee with the county board of education, the Director of the local Chamber of Commerce, a staff worker at a local church, the probate judge of this county, and the director of a local organization of senior adults.

This group of people nominated a total of 26 participants and some of the names were repeated. Ten were interviewed over a three-month period after various phone calls, juggling schedules, and the criteria of the study. I would set up the interviews two weeks beforehand and reminded them of the interview before I drove four hours to this county where they lived. The first ten that met the criteria and wanted to participate were in the study. I made sure that there was a diverse sample.

In order to have African-Americans in the study, I asked an African-American who serves on the local Board of Education to nominate several people. Seven participants are Caucasian or White and three are African American or Black.

Two of the participants were interviewed with their wives. Although the husband was the primary source of information, their wives contributed to the interviews. Five of the participants were male and five were female. The age of the participants ranged from 75 to 87, and the average age was 79.2 years. The participants are presented in the order in which they were interviewed. Table 1 is a brief synopsis of each participant's biographical information.

Robert

I drove rather timidly to Robert's house. Since this was the first interview, I was waiting for something to go wrong. Having checked the recording equipment and the interview questions, I took a deep breath and drove to the east part of the county. I was surprised at how far their house was from town. The 12-mile trip to their home wandered

Table 1

Biographical Information

Name	Gender	Marital	Age	Education	Work (Current/Former)	C-GC-GGC*	Race
Robert	Male	42 years	75	Two year college degree	Retired/Bookkeeper	2(3)-4-0	Caucasian
Norman	Male	Widowed	83	Two year college degree	Retired/Jeweler	0(1)-1-2	Caucasian
Betty	Female	54 years	76	College Degree plus Certification	Retired/Librarian	3-6-0	Caucasian
Sue	Female	Widowed	87	One year college	Retired/Secretary	3-7-11	Caucasian
Bill	Male	Widowed	82	5 th grade	Retired/Handyman for Georgia Power, Started his own business	1(2)-3-0	African-American
Hattie	Female	Widowed	76	High School Degree	Retired/State Mental Health Worker	6-19-15	African-American
Dora	Female	Widowed	79	Two year college degree	Nursing Home Assistant/ Housewife, assist husband in business.	3-8-2	Caucasian
Wilbur	Male	48 years	75	Sixth grade, GED Certification	Handyman	3(5)-3	African – American
Charlie	Male	56 years	84	College Degree	Retired/Postal worker.	4(5)-10-1	Caucasian
Thelma	Female	Widowed	75	Two year college degree	Housewife	5-11-0	Caucasian

Note. *This indicates children – C, grandchildren – GC, and great-grandchildren – GGC. The parenthesis indicates original number. For example 3(4)-5-10(11) indicates the participant had four children originally, three are living, there are five grandchildren, originally there were 11 great-grandchildren and 10 are living.

through farmland and timber. Cotton fields and pine forests surrounded their yard and home. The only other home nearby was an abandoned house under large, old oak trees; I later learned this was where he was born. The yard was green with the color of summer; I turned into the makeshift driveway toward the garage. I could see a tractor parked in the back; I walked past several antiques and knocked on the door.

Robert and his wife were waiting for me, and as soon as I walked up to the house he came to the door. We exchanged pleasantries and talked about people that we both knew in this county. She looked at me and said, “Well you have come to talk to him, so I will leave,” and thus we began the interviews.

Robert is a 75-year-old White male. He has been married for 42 years. They have two children, and four grandchildren. He and his wife live on a farm that has been in his family for three generations. “We like it out here, it’s peaceful, and quiet.” In 1988 he retired from the Civil Service at a local air force base. His wife retired from teaching school in 1996. He is in good health; he continues to mow the grass on the large plot of land surrounding his home. He is typical of many farmers today; he rents the farmland to another farmer, and he had another regular paying job away from the farm. He worked as an accountant and bookkeeper at a nearby air force base. Robert stated his wife was a “part of all of this.” Although she is a few years younger than the sample, I invited her to join us in the second interview.

Robert is a third generation educator. Not only did he and his father serve on the local Board of Education, his grandfather also built a school in the rural part of this county. From reading the newspaper, “I don’t scan it, I *read* it,” to taking classes, to learning how to use the Internet, Robert is continually learning. He is motivated to learn

on his own, and this self-directed learning occupies the main part of his life. After answering some questions about this research, Robert seemed to relax and enjoy the conversation. He discussed several learning projects, especially a recent trip out west, as well as the genealogy of his great grandfather. He and his wife spent approximately 40 hours driving to libraries and reading on the history of this distant relative. One of the aspects of retirement that he and his wife enjoy is travel. He discussed how the recent trip throughout the western states was not so much a pleasure vacation as a learning trip. “Before we would reach an area, we would watch a video on it, study a map, and the [tour] leader might give a talk.”

For Robert and his wife, retirement has resulted in extra time to become late life students. Retirement has allowed them to enter their own personal college. This university of their “third age” is full of self-directed classes on travel, civil war, religion, and family. They were always curious people, yet because of retirement they have the time to pursue this learning.

Robert is an avid reader of the Bible. Active in his church, he often studies the Bible in order to prepare for a talk or some presentation. “Yes, often on Sunday morning, I will read the Bible for one or two hours, and compare it with what the Quarterly says.” The inherent character of self-directed learning for Robert is a personal “passion” for learning. He said during the interview, “I sort of have a passion about that.” He was discussing how every time he came across a word he did not know, he would stop, look it up, and try to incorporate it.

They attend weekly church activities that motivate both of them to study the Bible. These individual study sessions may last for hours each week, and they want to be

prepared for the Wednesday evening discussion as well as the Sunday school classes. The study of the Bible is ongoing, perpetual, and continual. Robert states his conviction in the following quote:

I don't think that people are just put here for the temporary time that we live, and that is all we ever have. Uh, I guess you might say, I believe in the hereafter, and so, uh, I am studying for a permanent reason, rather than a temporal one.

Some of their learning activities are never over. Robert states, "I don't ever want to catch up, when you catch up with work or quit learning you are not going to be around here."

This attitude was manifest in various ways. Usually he will spend three to four hours keeping informed of daily and current events around the world. This is through reading the newspaper and watching television. In addition, if something comes up they do not know, they will drive 11 miles to the local library and look it up on the Internet.

The other significant aspect of being an older adult for Robert is being a grandparent. They continually discussed the importance and excitement of being a grandparent. "Right now, this project is on standby, and because since that time we have had four grandkids and one thing and another..." This reflects the priority of grandchildren; other activities become "standby" in the presence of a grandchild. This enjoyment of grandchildren adds hope to their life and gives them something to look forward to. "We do it because we enjoy the grandkids...you have more time with your grandchildren, in a sense, seemingly do more and enjoy them more [than your own children], you don't love them any more, but uh, you just have more time for them." Robert is hoping he can live until they all graduate from high school.

They discussed a variety of benefits of living in a rural area, especially the peaceful atmosphere. The quietness and the lack of distractions that surround their home is a normal part of their life. Robert's wife states, "Well, I love it out here, it's peaceful, [voice goes higher] that is why I like it out in the country...a relaxed, relaxed atmosphere, no pressure, and you hear the sounds of the birds singing, and you have the peaceful scenery." Another important aspect of the rural area is the bond they feel with other farmers and their neighbors. Like a fraternity, these people in this rural part of Georgia look out for each other and feel close. This bond is intensified within a variety of churches scattered across the sandy soil of this county. "We all go to the same church right here in this community." He states, "You have a closer relationship, even though you live further apart. People in the country tend to more or less bind together...and if a family is in some need we will take up an offering at church."

They have learned that it is important to keep active. From keeping the mind active with crossword puzzles, to mowing grass, to driving to town for aerobics, this couple seems to know that to remain an active older adult they must pursue physical activities. They also discuss the challenge of doing this. "I think the biggest change is to stay mentally alert to what you should and shouldn't do as an older person. And then keep on trying to do things. I think, uh, that change in the way you were able to do everything and anything from a younger person to reducing it to what you can handle...." His wife emphasized that you keep young by being active. "I think everyone continues to learn, there is something new you can learn everyday of your life, if you want to...the more you use your brain the better off you are."

Before I left on the second day of interviews, she offered me a glass of iced tea. We sat around their kitchen table sharing stories about life in south Georgia.

Norman

Norman is an 83-year-old White male. He lives on a quiet street within the city limits. When I left his house I noticed his neighbors carefully watching me leave. His neatly arranged home was full of interesting objects. There was a room for miniature trains; a computer in the kitchen, and a hall lined with packaged Nascar toy racecars ordered over Ebay. His home and yard are also a sanctuary for birds; two hummingbird feeders keep window watchers entertained as birds pause for a taste of honey. We sat in the front room of his house. He sat in front of the window from which I could see his neighbor's homes, large pine trees, and a bird feeder. He was somewhat reserved and concerned about participating in these interviews. On the wall facing me was a large picture of his granddaughter. Not only has Norman outlived his wife but also his son. He has a granddaughter and great grandchildren who live in another state.

He operated and ran a local business for 40 years. He was a meticulous worker, attending conferences, as well as subscribing to various publications in order to learn more about his craft. He enjoys putting small miniature things together; this is also evident by his interest in toy trains. He has been working on model trains for over 40 years. In addition, he has belonged to organizations, taken publications, as well as attended seminars on model trains.

The most comfortable room in the house seemed to be the kitchen. He is excited about his computer, which is placed near the kitchen table. This is more than a hobby; it is a vehicle for learning. Norman has been learning to work the computer for the last two

years, and just before I came over he was “defragmenting the system.” The kitchen seemed to be full of life, plates in the sink, papers piled in various places, and the hum of the computer. Another important part of his life is church activities; “I go three times on Sunday, to both services, and to Sunday School.”

Norman grew up in the rural, mountainous part of North Carolina. He eventually married and soon graduated from a business college in North Carolina. He worked for a while in this area before moving to south Georgia. He described his personal health as “fair.” He has been retired since 1993. He often discussed a brother who is in a hospital at the current time, and who lives in Kansas. In fact, it was this brother that got him interested in the computer. (His brother has died since the time of the interview.) He clearly states that the main activity he has learned in the last few years has been how to use the computer. After I left him the first day, he was eager to go “to the library and to the grocery store.”

Norman described his learning activities as interesting and entertaining. He relates his activity on the computer as “amusement or a fun thing.” Later, he described how he enjoys the activities of swapping e-mails with friends. It is clear that he is having fun. He has learned to communicate interesting topics with friends through “clicking on this and clicking on that.” The computer not only sends amusing anecdotes, but also his mailbox is often full of prayer requests or important information about recent terrorist activities.

Norman has created a place where the learning environment is conducive for intense activity. The computer is in the kitchen and close to the refrigerator, and it’s also a well-lighted room. Out a window one can see a bird feeder, and he is usually listening

to music during his three or four-hour segments on the computer. Interestingly, I had a difficult time telephoning Norman because he was often on the Internet.

Another daily learning venture for Norman is keeping abreast of current events. Like an investigator searching for clues to world events, he reads a variety of newspapers. These vary from newspapers that come over the Internet to local papers at the nearby library. He goes to the library “five days a week - it is not open on the weekend.” This association with the library as well as the two ladies that work in the library, confirm that this older adult has entered the school of self-directed learning. Going to the library is something Norman looks forward to; when asked if he had been to the library that day, he said emphatically, “I am going.”

Norman kept discussing the changes in becoming an older adult. From memory loss, to lack of energy, to letting younger people take over activities, to balding hair, and less physical strength, he seemed to continually discuss and bemoan the physical fate of the human. However this 83-year-old man who gets around the community seems to escape many of the things he was discussing. He had a scalp full of hair that was thicker than mine.

Norman discusses the importance of keeping active and busy. He states that he feels he has lived to be 83 because he keeps busy. “In my thinking, if you sit around, you will downgrade your system.” This is a busy man, occupied with computers, bird watching, driving to the library to read papers, attending health seminars, working on model trains, collecting Nascar models on the Ebay, and sending or receiving prayer requests over the Internet.

Norman has been through various difficulties. He is the sole survivor of his family; his wife and son have both passed away. I felt his perspective on these losses was important. “You have to kind of keep a positive attitude, and uh, not let some things kind of get you down, so to speak.... You sort of have to accept the fact that it is, what it is, will be....” I asked Norman specifically about his wife who was killed in a car wreck. “Well, first of all, you have to, have to remember that it is an act of God, it is done, you miss them, you loved them, but there is nothing you can do about it!” They had been married 40 years.

Norman’s positive attitude and outlook is contagious. Hope, amusement, and fun are part of his daily life. Rather than bemoan the fact that he lives alone, he has learned to be creative with this extra time. He mentioned several times, “There is no one here to talk to,” and “There is nobody here (home).” This may be a basis for investing so much time in the computer. “For me there is nobody here, and I am not going to sit around and procrastinate what may happen or how I feel, and uh, get sorry for myself, I don’t intend to do that.” Norman has always been interested in birds and model trains, but the most recent learning activity has been an interest with the computer. Norman states that because of the computer he is able to increase his knowledge about subjects he is interested in such as health, religion, government, and bird watching.

Betty

Arriving at 10 a.m., Betty stuck her head out the door and she told me where to park. Trees, shrubs, birdfeeders, gardening, and an antique car surrounded the house. I felt comfortable talking with Betty; I have known her and her family since I was a small boy. She seemed comfortable discussing her life and her desire to learn.

At twelve o'clock noon, we could hear the city siren announcing lunchtime. But more important, she knows her husband would soon drive up. She said with affection, "Here comes my honey." They have been married for 56 years, and she is devoted to him. She admits he is having some relapses of memory, but he continues to practice law and to be involved with the community. She is spending more and more of her time assisting and helping him.

Betty is a 76-year-old White female. She grew up in another area of rural south Georgia; they lived five miles from town, "out in the country." The center of social life of her Scotch/Irish family was the local church. Her family was religious and they expected their children to follow these ideals. She was the valedictorian of the high school and attended the state university, studying journalism. She got a job in Atlanta and was working for a publishing company; she had always wanted to be an editor. She had met her husband during college and he was eager to get married. Soon they left Atlanta, and they moved to south Georgia.

One of the first things they did was to join a church, and they are still active today. After marriage Betty taught school for two years, then spent a few years at home until her youngest child started school. At this time she returned to work as secretary for her husband. Eventually she returned to college to become certified as a public school librarian. She and her husband had three children and she was very involved in their lives. When the youngest started school, she also went back to work.

After the three children left home for their careers, she especially felt the need to do something different. They picked a site and built a home that reminded her of her rural childhood. This became a special place, something like a retreat, where she felt close to

nature and had the freedom to pursue topics of interest. She and her husband were both very satisfied living here and often wandered the surrounding woods. They even rode motorcycles through the thick forest.

After moving to the home in the country, Betty states she finally had the time to learn the things she had been wanting to know more about. Seemingly self-sufficient, she was always comfortable with time alone. She seems to seek the quiet of woods and libraries. Perhaps there she is most comfortable and can create an environment for learning. A recent difficult but necessary change has been moving from this site to town. She felt since they were getting older, it was the best thing to do.

They were involved in their children and six grandchildren's lives, although none of them lived nearby. She described this time as "very happy." She states "my husband and I lived very happily...we had a good marriage." They especially enjoyed traveling in a road vehicle or "RV" to pre-selected campsites with a group of friends who were also square dancers.

Learning the computer was a natural response for this organizer of knowledge. From being a journalist, an attorney's secretary, to a librarian, she has always been comfortable arranging and sorting through large amounts of material. The computer and the Internet literally brought the access of libraries into the bedroom of this lifelong learner. Since her children have left, she would often spend two hours every morning, "in the quiet," organizing and seeking answers to her questions.

Betty has been a busy woman involved in many activities especially those of her family and work, but also church, gardening, piano, reading, and making doll furniture. Yet her overall learning activity has been this "groping for" or search for knowledge. She

has always felt close to God, and her overall personal learning is a self-motivated drive to gain answers to “life, the universe, and the world.”

She showed me a notebook in which she had been writing notes for 20 years. “Donny, I have never shown this to anyone.” I was holding in my hand a worn blue notebook full of handwritten notes and ideas. This personal groping for knowledge has motivated this grandmother in rural Georgia to attempt to understand more about the profound issues of life. She showed me her copy of *Ions - Noetic Sciences Review*. This academic journal’s purpose is to promote the discovery of truth. She carefully reads the contents and often uses this as a source for more information.

She told a story about her enjoyment in learning. When taking a class for the certification to be a librarian, she would walk by books in the library about religion, theology, philosophy, and psychology. She would feel compelled to bring those home. In addition to her class on library science, she was simultaneously drawn to a personal quest for knowledge. She also signed up for a college class on philosophy at the age of 68. With pride she showed me the final paper; she had received an “A++.” She said she didn’t take any more classes because “it was just too difficult and far to walk.”

As I was leaving her house, she wanted to show me recent pictures of her children and grandchildren. We went to the kitchen, where many parents have converted refrigerators into galleries of their offspring. Proudly she showed me each of her children and grandchildren. Since these interviews she has e-mailed me several times, sending me a variety of information she thinks is important. She also wrote me a letter saying how much she enjoyed the interviews.

Sue

Sue is an 87-year-old White female. She describes her personal health as “pretty good,” although recently she had a four-month body cast for two broken vertebrae. She slipped while running around her house to do an errand. She lives alone, and her husband has been deceased since 1988. She has three daughters, seven grandchildren, and 11 great grandchildren who are scattered over the southeast; none live in Georgia. Although she has a variety of interests, her main activities are raising dogs, goats, and chickens.

Sue has lived in many places before moving to this rural area. She was born in Louisiana, but since her Dad was a medical doctor who worked in various international organizations, she lived in Ceylon, India as a child. She attended high school in Miami, Florida. After her parents divorced, she lived with her adventuresome Mom in Miami. After one year in college, she decided that was not for her. Then she worked as a secretary. After marriage she and her husband had two children. This marriage did not work out and she eventually remarried a fellow co-worker. “I decided someone you can work with day to day, it’s a good sign of someone you would enjoy living with.” They had a happy life together for 37 years. Loving the sea and the tropical area, she and her husband moved to the Florida Keys. Living a simple life, she learned to be resourceful by gardening and raising animals. She would often take her family to community activities such as fairs, museums, and festivals. She and her family enjoyed living close to the sea and experienced a variety of situations with hurricanes. She pointed out watermarks on the furniture from various hurricanes.

She stated her second husband treated her two daughters the same as the daughter they had together. His job relocated them from the Keys to Jacksonville. After retiring

they bought some property in rural Georgia; they found an area with lower taxes, fewer people, and room for animals and gardening. They eventually moved closer to their daughter who was working at an Air Force base.

Sue warned me that “her place was in a mess;” she did not have time to clean because she has been in a cast for four months. She had slipped and broken two vertebrae; the body cast had limited her activity. Having the cast recently removed, she was enjoying this new freedom. Next to the sofa, which seemed to be converted to a reading lounge, was a large pile of papers. On closer inspection you could see periodicals, catalogues, and books on every possible topic. This pile of information was as large as the sofa.

She welcomed me into her home and after the first interview she gave me a brief tour of her “critters and jungle.” During the interviews the air was full of the bleats and barks of animals. She led the way using a walker with wheels and a seat. I toured the garage, the pens of prize Dachshunds, met the new puppies, the goats, as well as the champion chickens.

This 87-year-old has an optimistic attitude and excitement about her life. She usually sees one daughter weekly. She drives from Florida and brings her daughter, one of Sue’s grandchildren. Her daughter also raises goats so they have a lot in common. Her daughter makes sure everything is all right and takes Sue shopping. Sue also spoke of the importance of her neighbors and how helpful they had been while she was in a cast. She describes how she has enjoyed learning about computers, especially so she can record some of the stories she has written. She has no television, “I don’t have time for it.” She

is avidly interested in nutrition, alternative medicine, and is convinced that goat milk has helped her arthritis. She is continually making plans for her animals as well as her yard.

I was struck by Sue's optimistic attitude. Seemingly alone, and having some difficulties, she has an exuberant spirit. She loves life and optimistically approaches each day. She loves her animals, and she has gained expertise on raising Dachshunds, goats, and chickens. She revels in the quiet and natural atmosphere of this rural environment. She said with conviction, "I could never live in town." From eating eggs from her hens, to having a neighbor come by for help, to giving a goat to a friend, Sue feels close to the land and to the people that live around her.

Sue is busily occupied with many activities and she especially loves to read and to write. She is attempting to write a book and has taken various computer classes to learn how to put these stories together. Interestingly, at the age of 83 she took a class to become an assistant nurse. She finished the class and was employed for a while at the local hospital and a nursing home. She will often attend library sales to buy discounted books, and she asked that the videotape of the interview to be in front of her books. August is a hot month in south Georgia. As I walked up the recently built ramp to her home, I could hear the hum of a fan. She explained, "I don't want air conditioning, it makes you soft." "We have too many conveniences now," she explained, "and if you come in here and get comfortable you don't want to go back outside."

Surrounding her home are several small buildings she calls barns. In addition there are various pens for the animals. It is a small farm yet completely overgrown with trees and bushes. It helps to provide shade from the intense sun, but also natural food for the goats. During a recent conversation she pointed out one particular bush that was a

good source of protein for the goats. She and a friend recently attended the Sunbelt Exposition. She proudly said, “This is the largest agricultural display in the USA.” They also have a variety of agricultural related seminars. She said with enthusiasm, “We went right for the goat tent.” The first lecturer was speaking on native trees and plants that are helpful for goats.

She misses her husband and describes her life as a “lonely freedom.” She often referred to him and would reminisce about their life together. She sporadically attends a local church but emphasizes she is closer to God in the outdoors. She described how watching the birth of her dogs or in a blade of grass you can sense the presence of God. She is busy with a variety of activities and especially the animals. But she also enjoys her neighbors and they often do things together. Down the road from her house is a community center where she attends the monthly meeting.

This lady of 87 seems to have boundless energy and enthusiasm. However, she states she has slowed down because of arthritis and the recent fall. On my last visit she was explaining to me how she and her daughter have come up with a plan for making goat cheese that would benefit her health.

Bill

Bill is an 82-year-old Black male. He states that he and his wife enjoyed many years together; they married after he returned from World War II. He has been widowed for 13 years. He describes his personal health as “okay.” He lives alone, and he has been retired for about 14 years. He has one child and three grandchildren.

Some of Bill’s favorite activities in the last several years have been helping to enlist people to register to vote and to run for office. He was recently involved with a

Habitat for Humanity program; mainly he wants to help the Black community. His favorite pastime is to advise younger people about life. He enjoys talking about the “old days” when he was a younger man and people we both knew. He helped to bring an important business to the Black community that continues today. His son has taken this over, and his grandson is in training.

Bill states he had to work a lot when he was a child; he was a sharecropper. He did not really know his parents because they both died early in his life. During this time, school lasted about three months of the year. After the fifth grade, he decided to spend all of his time working. He felt he needed to help with his five brothers. Later, he enlisted in the Army during WWII and served in Europe. He returned to south Georgia after the war. He married, and he and his wife had two children. He worked with the local power company where he would grind stumps for gunpowder, and he had a job with the local housing authority.

He worked various jobs but also wanted to do something to help the Black community. “So me and my wife scraped together everything we had and started a funeral business.” Before this time, the black community had to take someone who died to another town, or hire someone to come there to bury them. This “tough row to hoe” was one of the first Black businesses in this 87% White community. After he retired from these jobs, Bill started a small cooking business. He and his wife worked long hours, saved money, and eventually built one of the nicest homes in this community.

After both of the conversations, Bill wanted to show me about the “quarters.” We drove slowly through his community and he pointed out many interesting aspects about the Black community. He gave me a tour of the home that he built, some of the property

he owns, as well as the Black mortuary. He was excited to show me around, and he wanted to stop and talk with people that we saw. Both days I drove him to the local senior center for older adults where they supplied a meal. Bill was full of optimism, good spirit, humor, and zest for life.

During the interviews, Bill discussed some of the difficulties in his life. He explained how there were no buses for Black children, how far they had to walk to go to school, and that the school for Blacks stopped at the ninth grade. But more than this, I was impressed that this man, who quit school in the fifth grade, had achieved all he did. There was a great deal of learning taking place in Bill's life, but not in the traditional manner. When someone wants something in the Black community Bill is often called for assistance. This may involve the police, voting, or general information. Bill says, "I learned to fit in with the system," and that the way to succeed was to comply with the existing social structure. He wants to help his community, and he has a great deal of expertise in how to start a business. He discusses how he will walk around the "quarters" and encourage parents and their children about the importance of school. He even stated he might have arguments with some of the parents over the importance of school.

When I drove to his house, he was sitting on the front porch waiting for me. He asked me to come at nine a.m. instead of ten a.m. Out his window you could see a forest of trees and a field of cotton. Birds were chirping and the autumn sun was warming the room. The table where we were sitting was full of medicine and pamphlets about health. He said jokingly, "Since I am a bachelor now, all I do is keep house." Usually, he is not at home during the day; he likes to get out to talk with people and to spend time with others.

Bill's overall drive has been to survive. As a young Black boy in the 1930's he learned to succeed. "You have got to fit in with the existing system." Although life for him was difficult as a young boy, he felt that eventually it would improve. He told many stories of how the overseer on the farm took care of him and his family. Even though he quit school in the fifth grade, he learned to work hard and to survive.

Hattie

I arrived at Hattie's house about 2 pm. As I parked my car in front of her home, I noticed two people in a car that were leaving. I wasn't sure if it was Hattie or not. She recognized me, backed up the car, and said she would be back in 30 minutes or an hour. I drove around the area and returned in 45 minutes. She came to the door, and with a big smile she welcomed me into her home. She explained she was taking the passenger grocery shopping and to the bank. "He is one of the people I help, he is, you know, mentally disabled." Hattie's house is close to the road and during the interview you could hear cars driving by, especially the noise of large trucks. She has a fenced in lot, and her neat home was full of pictures of her family.

Hattie is 76-year-old Black female. She described her health as "perfect, real good." She has six children, 18 grandchildren, and "too many to count" [15] great grandchildren. Since retiring from her job with the State of Georgia, she has decided to run for City Council. She has a deep desire to "help others to improve their life."

Hattie was born in 1925 and was raised by her Mom. Because of difficulties in her mom's marriage, they moved to this town where her Mother's sister lived. Hattie finished school in this county, and during those days there was only provision for Blacks to finish the ninth grade. In order to complete high school, Blacks had to travel to nearby towns.

Hattie graduated from high school in a larger town 30 miles away. In order to do this, she had to live away from home during the week, and she had a part time job to help pay room and board.

Hattie married after high school to a man in the military, and they lived in the town where she still resides. They had six children; they both worked, and she says life was busy and somewhat hectic. Compounding her situation, her husband had “trouble with alcohol.” While five children were still in school, and Hattie was 38, he “passed.” She said, “I didn’t remarry, because I didn’t want my children to have a step-dad.” She was working at a dry cleaner in town and was skilled in pressing shirts. She continued to work to make sure her children would be able to complete school. She is proud that she never had public assistance to raise her children.

Someone who knew Hattie recognized that her talent for relating to people was not being utilized. The state of Georgia had given money for an adult mental health facility to begin in this county and they were told they had to have an African-American on the staff. This person called Hattie. Her desire to help others was fueled in this very practical way to assist adults who had mental disabilities. Upon retiring she received a plaque for 31 years of excellent service.

I spent two afternoons at Hattie’s home. She was able to buy the home after her husband’s death with money received from his military service. She went into detail about this story, how she learned to trust others, and how she became a homeowner. She is proud of her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. Hattie is energetic and excitedly talked about the many projects she hopes to fulfill when she gets elected to the city council. (Since the interviews, Hattie did not win the election.)

Hattie talked about the job she had held for 31 years with an adult mental health facility. Recently retiring, she realizes how much this job meant to her and how she learned to help the disadvantaged adults in this county. Hattie “loves” to help those in need, and this job seemed to be a natural fit. This job also required additional seminars and education. She would travel to other parts of the state in order to learn how the system worked, as well as receive important instruction on working with adults with disabilities.

Several times she referred to a situation where she felt she was being overlooked because of race. During this difficult time, she talked with a variety of people, received advice, and was eventually promoted to her rightful place. Hattie is continually looking for ways to help her community and others that need assistance. Recently she has learned how to impact the community by attending town council meetings and getting people to support her in various projects. She told a lengthy story of how she helped to get sidewalks added to this part of town. However, she is still disappointed with the way they look. Her current aspiration is to help build a youth center in her part of town.

Hattie “loves” living in this town. “You know everybody, and everybody knows you.” One of her granddaughters lives with her, and one son lives nearby. Her family lives all around this community, and she enjoys walking to visit them and friends. She is also active in her church, and her relationship with God is important to her. She attends a weekly Bible Study, and she discussed how they would prepare lessons in order to learn more. There is often a lecture and a discussion. She also discussed how much she learns from “Ebony” magazine. This international magazine for African-Americans is having an influence in rural Georgia. She enjoys comparing and contrasting her situation with some

of the articles she reads in the magazines. She states this helps her to “Realize as a woman, I can have an influence.” She also discussed as each participant did, how much she enjoys reading the paper. She also emphasized how much she learns from watching “Court TV.” She related how she learns about the legal system as a result of watching this show.

During the second interview the phone continually rang; friends and family were calling her to talk or get some information. Hattie has lived through difficulties, learned many lessons, and gained respect within this community.

Dora

Dora is 79-year-old White female. She lives on land inherited from her parents; her house is on eight acres of manicured lawn. Her mother told her, “Never sell the land.” As I turned into the driveway, on my left was a cotton field, and the yard was surrounded by pine forest. She was happily married for four decades; she has been widowed for 14 years. She has three children, eight grandchildren, and two great grandchildren. She has lived in this county all of her life. She attended college for two years, and she taught in the local school for several years. Eventually, she joined her husband in business.

Dora’s home was an interesting modern design with solar panels for heating water. She greeted me at the back door, I walked around the house after finding the front door abandoned. We greeted each other and were comfortable talking about family and life in this town. I thought here is a person I have known all of my life, yet this may be our first conversation.

Dora was carefully dressed and seemed comfortable. Her house was roomy and built for a family. We sat around a large dining table with a view of the yard. You could

see varieties of plants in bloom framed by the tall south Georgia pine trees. The center of her home is a spacious den with television, fireplace, and comfortable furniture.

Symmetrical stacks of books, pamphlets, crossword puzzles, cookbooks, magazines, and inspirational literature surrounded one particular chair. She laughingly described this over-stuffed chair with gold fabric as “my nest.”

Dora’s typical day is fairly predictable. She continues to work at the local hospital’s nursing home as Assistant Social and Activities Director. She is involved in this about six hours a day. This interest in helping others started almost 40 years ago as a volunteer activity through the organization called “Pink Ladies.” After work, she comes home around four-thirty in the afternoon. Then, “I change clothes, grab a jug of tea, and go outside.” She loves to work in the yard. Her gardening process of “trial and error” has resulted in a wealth of knowledge about her yard and in creating beauty in nature.

She discussed how this gardening and working in the yard provides a sense of rest as well as work. She describes how this enjoyable activity of working in the yard is also checkered with spontaneous decisions of “what to do here or there.” This is also time for leisurely thoughts and concerns. Ideas or views about the day, or her life, can freely float in her mind, and be nurtured or discarded. In addition, this provides a healthy form of exercise.

After a day full of working with older patients and the yard, and “when it gets dark,” she comes inside and changes clothes for another activity. Like a schoolgirl going to class, she has changed clothes, eaten, and sits down in the chair. This “nest” is a safe place and a comfortable forum for inspirational, intellectual, and fun activities. She has a routine involving television shows, books, and magazines.

In addition to these activities at home and work, Dora is involved in a host of activities. Church, Sunday school worker, Sunday night Bible Study, “Senior Circle,” “Feeling Alive after 55,” and “SALT” (Senior Adults Living Truth) provide a community of older adults with whom she is comfortable and enjoys being around. In addition, she joins family members two times a week and usually every Sunday they will eat together. One of her daughters, two grandchildren, and a great-grandchild live “down the road.” She has another daughter who lives three hours away and a son who lives in Florida.

Dora has a realistic, yet positive perspective on life and on growing older. Enjoying a full and active life, she sees aging as a “pleasure and a challenge.” She talked openly about the changes and adjustments of her life. For example, she told how she misses her husband and that it took her several years to recover from his death. It is obvious she has moved on and is engaged in her life. She is a hard worker and likes to be busy.

One of the dominant aspects of Dora’s life is an emphasis on spiritual growth. She is a very active member of her church. And she has contributed to this group in many ways. For example, she has worked in the nursery of the church on Sunday mornings for over 50 years. She has made friendships and grown older with a community of people who are like-minded and have similar morals and spiritual beliefs. She daily reads the Bible, Sunday school lessons, and various other Christian literature sent by her church. Her church has a senior organization called SALT – Senior Adults Living Truth. This is an important aspect of her life. More than Senior Circle or Feeling Alive After 55, this particular group openly adds a spiritual dimension to the concepts of life and aging. She especially enjoys praying for missionaries and carefully attends to suggestions for prayer

in the Southern Baptist literature. For example, she excitedly talked about praying for and perhaps influencing people she did not know who lived in Seattle, Washington for an upcoming evangelistic campaign. Without leaving her home, this woman believes she is influencing the world through prayer. Her faith gives her hope and inspiration to continue with the challenge of aging.

This busy woman has created a world full of enjoyable activities. These activities contain a certain segment of learning such as watching the news, crossword puzzles, and new information for her yard. She also looks for opportunities to improve her life. For example, she attended a lecture on a portable oxygen unit thinking that one day she could use the information. As I was leaving she excitedly showed me a toy she had ordered on a cable network-shopping channel. This television show of shopping has simplified her ability to buy gifts for others, especially grandchildren. Before I left she asked for a copy of the interview tapes.

Wilbur

Wilbur is a 75-year-old Black male. His parents came to this county when he was a small child from a nearby area. He has been married 48 years and he and his wife have a close relationship. They had five children, and three are living. They also have three grandchildren. He is in fair health. His wife was an integral part of the interview. She listened attentively to the questions, and often Wilbur would ask what she thought. She added several important points.

Wilbur's mother lived 98 years, but his father "passed" at 56. His mother washed clothes for "White people," and Wilbur would deliver them. His father did not have a typical job, but often would deliver groceries to "White families, by toting them on my

back.” Wilbur quit school in the sixth grade to help provide for his family. As a small boy he remembers how he would “get wood everyday for the fireplace and water from the well, and we had a outdoor closet.” Like many Blacks in this area, he was a sharecropper, “I would work hard for small wages.” For fifty cents a day Wilbur worked on farms, with pulpwood, and plowed mules. His parents taught him how to “make a small amount go a long way.” His parents also stressed “treat others with respect and never lie.” These lessons learned long ago are a part of his character; he continually referred to this during the two interviews.

As a young man, Wilbur wanted to complete his high school education. While married he realized the difference education had made in his wife’s life. After work, he eventually completed the GED equivalent for high school by spending approximately 900 hours attending evening classes held for adults in this county.

Tragedy struck their household when a fire broke out in the home. This fire destroyed the home and money that they had kept in the home, but the worst situation was the death of two of their children. His wife said it took 20 years before she could talk about this misfortune. Wilbur was scolded at work because he missed two days to bury his children. Wilbur felt he could no longer work for this man, and he resolved to quit this job. He soon began working on a farm for another White family. His new boss saw his positive character, hard work, and over time their relationship grew. Wilbur said with pride, “We were like father and son, father and son.” With a new job, a resolve to rise above the difficulty of their loss, and “with the Lord’s help,” their situation began to improve.

Wilbur and his wife were active in the community. He became involved in the parent's organization at school, but more important he wanted to somehow help his friends and neighbors. Anytime there was a fire, he would get in his car and follow the fire trucks to see if he could help. He especially wanted to make sure that Black families were taken care of. The influence of integration was seeping into every corner of the south, and eventually one of the firemen said to Wilbur, "Apply to be a fireman." He tells this story with pride and joy.

Wilbur was the first Black to be a fireman and later the first Black to be elected to city council. This is a post he has held for 20 years. He has acquired such a reputation that he usually runs for office without opposition. His growing confidence in life resulted in the development of other projects such as a security business and being asked to serve on various civic organizations. Wilbur is a happy and optimistic man and he "loves" living in this town. With a big smile and often laughing, he tells many stories about people he knows in this town. Wilbur is also an active man. He is not interested in retirement, and he continues to work as handyman for the same family. At home he is often working in their yard, and he has a lifelong hobby of repairing antique gunstock.

Wilbur has learned a lot through various situations in his life. This includes the civic responsibilities, but also through the difficult times in his past. He continually referred to "that Bible" as the source of wisdom for his life, and he related the importance of learning more about the Lord and the Bible.

During both interviews he repeatedly discussed the importance of his faith. He openly discussed how "What is right there in that Bible" is what helps him the most when he is depressed. Learning about fulfilled Biblical prophecy is exciting to both he and his

wife. Wilbur has also learned specific knowledge through involvement with the fire department, the city council, and responsibility with the rural development center. The fire department is transformed every Monday night into a venue for learning about saving lives, the dynamics of a fire, and ways to use water to combat the fire. These volunteers for safety watch videos, listen to lectures, and practice to hone their skills.

This optimistic couple enjoys life; humor and fun was a part of both interviews. Despite stories told with difficulty, there was a sense of humor and light heartedness. He feels confident to do whatever he wants in an area that is 87% White. Although their life has had hardship, they have mastered the art of learning through some of life's most pressing lessons. Wilbur loves to talk about his grandchildren. All three grew up in this town, he and his wife both spent a great deal of time with them, and they have a close relationship. With laughter they told about their grandchildren's nicknames and some interesting stories about each one. They often wonder with surprise at the accomplishments of their grandchildren. All three are in college and are studying law, engineering, and education. Wilbur and his wife enjoy talking about the grandkid's future and where they will go. Regardless, they are thrilled and amazed at what the grandchildren are doing. Wilbur says, smiling and almost pleading, that he hopes that they will come back home to live. His wife, shaking her head and looking at her hands, says she is just not sure what will happen.

Charlie

Charlie is an 84-year-old White male. He has lived all of his life in this county. He was born in a house that was located very close to the center of the town. He and his wife of 56 years had five children. She is from the north, and they met during preparation

for World War II. Out of five children, there are four living, eight grandchildren, two step-grandchildren, and one great step-grandchild.

Charlie described his health as “unusually good” and that he is “very blessed.” He has been retired from the postal service for 21 years. Current activities include local election supervisor, gardening, fishing, and making pictures with the computer.

Describing his childhood, he says, “We made our own entertainment.” Laughingly he describes sliding down roofs “covered with lard” to making caves in the ground; his childhood was an exciting adventure. His grandfather was a farmer in a nearby town, and often Charlie would spend time on this farm. He became familiar with the land as well as farm animals. “No child could have had a better life than I did.”

This happy childhood was abruptly ended with the advent of the Great Depression and the untimely death of his father. Charlie assumed more responsibility for his family since he was the oldest. He states, “We lived on bananas, corn flakes, and milk from the cow.”

After high school he attended college, and he eventually graduated from the state university in accounting. Throughout his life he worked in the local post office. This experience was an important asset during the service and he was offered a postal job upon his return from the European Front. After the war he returned to his hometown and was married in a few months. “I had been home from Europe about a week, and then I took off to where she was...she said let’s get married in April.” His wife stayed home, took care of the children, and carried out many of the domestic responsibilities. They both look back with fondness at these times. Charlie continued working for the post office, and eventually worked two jobs to make ends meet with five children. This

additional job became a family affair when they opened a shoe store. He says he did this to help with finances, but mainly so his children would learn to work with the public.

Charlie was able to retire comfortably, and he states he has enjoyed this time. He has been very busy since retirement; from morning until late at night, he is involved in a variety of pursuits. Charlie especially loves to garden. There is usually some vegetable or fruit growing in his garden. He specializes in a winter garden, “since there are less bugs.” He also enjoys helping others with home repairs and is known for his adept ability to repair almost anything. He has two cars that he uses for these situations; he laughingly calls one of these cars a “moving tool box.”

Having served the country in World War Two, he continues to have an avid interest in topics of history and geography of Europe. In the evening his large television is often turned to the History Channel and he revels in hearing various perspectives of the European conflict. Charlie is the one who installed their entertainment system with the latest electronic equipment (DVD and CD).

Charlie also has the most recent computer technology, and he is quite adept in using the computer for various purposes. We walked into a bedroom that has also become a computer room. The set up for this computer stretched from one side of the room to the other. One of his favorite pieces of equipment is the digital camera for scanning and reproducing pictures of his family. This has also led to an interest in genealogy; he also enjoys playing games such as solitaire on the computer. Charlie is an avid reader; everyday he diligently reads two newspapers, the Valdosta Times and the Atlanta Constitution from front to back. He was asked by the local judge to head the voting

system of this county. This in turn has led to a number of seminars and classes on various issues of voting.

Although this man is an optimist, he has lived with difficulty and has survived difficulty. One of their children has died, plus his wife is a cancer survivor and has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. He also discusses the difficulty of seeing his friends die. Regardless, he has a big smile, a positive attitude, and a contagious energy.

This man is busy with various activities and he has a desire to continue to learn. He especially wants to know the latest in technology and will often drive to nearby towns to discuss the latest products with store clerks. He also wants to understand world events; he gave me an insightful portrayal of the recent conflict in the Middle East. Charlie's typical day involves gardening, walking (usually three miles with his wife), reading the paper, completing crossword puzzles, and helping others. He has adjusted well to the changes of older life; with a laugh he says, "I am just a nursemaid now." For example, he is constantly helping his wife, and he showed me how he writes on a bulletin board in the kitchen the date so she can remember. He also helps a close friend who is widowed to keep up with his medicine. Charlie wears a hearing aid and he excitedly explained how he uses the "closed captioning" segment of the television for programs he can't hear.

I asked him to show me his garden; we walked out the back of his house and past the pool he built. Behind some large bushes and trees, Charlie has a settlement of personal projects. This small, secluded village of activity and learning contained a garden, a compost pile, and plans for a water well. There were also three small sheds; each one is full of discarded and useful items such as computers, walking machines, and various tools. Objects that others may discard, Charlie seems to find a place or use for.

His favorite area is the garden; he enjoys seeing things grow, working with the rich south Georgia dirt, and eating something he has grown. He states with enthusiasm, "I love living in this town." He states he feels comfortable here, he has lived here all of his life, and he knows most of the people in this county. However, he discusses how much change is occurring in this small rural county. As I was getting ready to leave, he was preparing to drive a friend to the doctor in Tallahassee.

Thelma

Thelma's house is two and a half miles from the center of town and is on a large lot completely surrounded by pine trees. You can see the house of one neighbor who lives about 200 yards away. They share a common driveway and each morning the first one to the main road will pick up the paper for the other. Inside her home there are a variety of antiques and pictures of children and grandchildren. She also has an assortment of items she has made or is working on. There is proudly displayed an Olympic torch. She was chosen to carry the Olympic torch through a part of Georgia. Outside the window one can see the result of her handiwork. There is a natural backyard scene, including a fish pool, waterfall, and handmade fence. Thelma was easy to talk with; she had a strong laugh and a positive sense of humor.

Thelma is a 75-year-old White female. She describes herself as being in "great health." She has lived in the same house for 42 years. Her main responsibility was raising children and "keeping house." At times she did help her husband in his work. She is a native of this county and attended a nearby college. "I finished the program in five quarters, I was an honor student and on the basketball team."

Some of her favorite activities revolve around helping other people. She knows many people in the community, and when she is aware of a need, she will take the initiative to help. She discussed a recent trip when she drove a friend to a hospital in Florida. "I was happy to do it, it gave us time together, and I felt like I was contributing something important to her life." Thelma tries to live by the motto, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." She feels this is what is most important about her faith.

Thelma is involved in a variety of civic activities in this community. She has been an active member of her church throughout her life. She is currently a member of three bridge clubs. Perhaps her favorite activity has been participating in the "Woman's Club" for over 50 years. She has attempted to help the women of this community come together to improve this area. In addition, Thelma has been a part of a civic organization to improve the general atmosphere of this town. She has enjoyed these activities, especially the opportunity to come together with others to make a difference in the community. She discussed with excitement the upcoming Christmas displays as well as ideas she had about decorating the town. She showed me an "elf" she had crafted at home.

Specific learning has occurred as a result of a lifelong love of outdoors, nature, and especially flowers. She has a special skill in arranging flowers, and she is called on and volunteers in various situations for natural flower arrangements. She states, "You never quit learning," and has taken several classes on flowers. She also teaches a class on crafts at a local senior residential center. Thelma states that "Life has been good to me, and I have had my ups and downs."

Thelma was born on a farm, and typical of most farm families, her house had no electricity and no water. She says she was a good student, worked hard, and enjoyed life. After college she married another native of this county, and they moved to Atlanta where he could finish his degree. His father died earlier than expected. This prevented his completion of the degree and they moved back home. There he took over his father's agricultural implement company. They had five children, and now there are eleven grandchildren. She talked about the ups and down of marriage from sailing trips in the Bahamas to the difficulty of being a caregiver. She has been widowed since 1996.

Having grown up and worked on the farm, Thelma was used to being outdoors, growing plants, and using the available natural resources. Through "trial and error," she would arrange flowers and dried flowers that she found around the farm. As her interest increased, she would attend a seminar, a lecture, or even take a class. Her family lived on a large lot surrounded by a forest, and she would spend many days working in the yard. If there were any questions or problems concerning the yard, she would seek advice from others. She would also find information on decorating in magazines, newspapers, and even programs on television.

Her passion in learning is to create natural objects of beauty from native surroundings. She wants to include local objects of this area in her displays. Decorating and improving seems to be a theme of this woman's life, from friendships with grandchildren, to advice for her children, to helping friends in need, and improving the community.

Thelma enjoys living in this small town and rural area of Georgia. With a hearty laugh, she describes it as "wonderful!" Neighbors who are friends surround her, and she

can call on them at any time. She often turns to these neighbors for help when she needs additional resources for completing her many projects. Because so many people know each other in small communities, there is often a great deal of entertaining. These situations provide opportunities for this back yard artist. She states how we need one another and that each person should be willing to contribute their part to the community. She also discussed that while living in a small town, “you just about know everybody.” She continues this thought, “I have rich friends and I have poor friends, White and Black.” She feels this adds to the richness of living in this area. She described how on Friday nights she is comfortable going to a variety of places because “there is usually someone there you knew.”

She continues to gain more independence and confidence in her life. She relayed an interesting story about having a flat tire 40 miles away from home and how she felt “an angel just took care of me.” Rather than sitting at home, “I get out.” There are several places she can comfortably go alone, eat a meal, and still feel like she is with others. She also enjoys church dinners and visits with friends. She especially enjoys visiting two of her granddaughters who live on St. Simons Island. Two of her other grandchildren invited her to join them on their high school senior trip to Mexico.

After drinking a coke with a slice of freshly baked pound cake, we walked outside. She showed me around her yard and described in detail the many flowers, plants and objects that she uses in making arrangements. She also talked about future plans and what she would like to do in the yard. “I especially want to light the pine trees.”

Summary

This chapter describes the life situation of these ten older adults. All the participants live in the same county, yet in different locales from farm to town. This county has been designated a rural or non-metropolitan area. These ten people have many similarities, yet different life circumstances. Some were still married and some were widowed. There were a variety of educational experiences from college degrees to high school diplomas. They have a various health concerns as well as family issues. Regardless of this diversity, each person was involved in an assortment of learning activities. These activities ranged from incidental learning to formal education, and from conversations with neighbors to searching the Internet for philosophical truth. Some of the learning experiences have occurred throughout their life, such as gardening, and others were completely new, such as Internet. The conversation with each person was an enjoyable experience. I feel like I learned a great deal and gained 10 new friends in the process. The next chapter discusses the findings of the study with regard to the specific research questions.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS

The purpose of the study was to understand how older adults utilize self-directed learning in the adjustments and changes in late life within a rural setting. The following research questions guided the study:

- 1). What is the nature of SDL of these older adults?
- 2). What is the process of SDL of these older adults?
- 3). What are the late life adjustments of these older adults?
- 4). How does the rural context shape the SDL of these older adults?

Self-directed learning takes place throughout one's life when the individual decides to learn more about some specific topic. This study investigated this simple yet complex topic of self-directed learning with older adults. Education has the power to be an agent of change, both individually and socially (Foley, 2001; Friere, 1970; hooks, 1995; Mezirow, 1991; Moreland, 1999; Rogers, 1969). Similarly, this research isolated how learning can impact the older person's life. Of particular interest was the relationship between development and the dynamics of personal learning.

This study employed a qualitative design. Between May 10, 2002 and November 20, 2002 ten older adults from a rural county in Georgia were purposefully selected and interviewed in a face-to-face setting over a two-day period. Each interview lasted approximately two hours, for a total of four to five hours with each participant. All interviews took place in the homes of the participants. The interviews were tape-recorded

and transcribed; I alone did the transcription for all of the interviews, resulting in 400 pages of conversation. A handwritten note was sent after each interview expressing thanks for participation in this study. The participants have been contacted at least once for clarification of data and there was an official meeting or member check held on January 20, 2003. During the member check, the participants confirmed the findings presented in this chapter. During the interviews the participants were encouraged to show evidence of their personal learning. Table 2 presents some of the participant's self-directed learning activities. Some of these are short term but most are examples of continuous learning projects.

Table 2

Self-Directed Learning Activities

Robert	Robert wants to learn more about the United States through travel; he also studies how the Bible relates to his life.
Norman	Norman's goal in personal learning focuses around the computer; he also wants to learn more about health and aging.
Sue	Sue's focus of attention is raising champion dogs; she is also interested in natural foods and organic gardening.
Betty	One of Betty's goals is to learn how to use the computer for research; she is also interested in genealogy.
Bill	Bill reads information that can help to improve his health; he is also learning ways to help the younger generation succeed.
Hattie	Hattie enjoys taking classes about the Bible; she is also learning how to improve her community.

Dora	One of Dora's goals is learning to improve her yard, and she is also interested in learning more about nutrition and cooking.
Wilbur	Wilbur gives systematic attention to learning more about fire prevention, and he wants to learn how to improve his town.
Charlie	Charlie wants to learn more about new electronics; he is also interested in personal health and nutrition.
Thelma	Thelma desires to learn more about the game of bridge; she also wants to learn more about how to improve the community.

From this chart one can see the extent of learning that was taking place with these participants. Each of these learning activities, as well as others, was discussed during the interviews. As a result of a careful analysis of these interviews, I found that this self-directed learning is centered on the following findings: The nature of the self-directed learning is highly engaging, variably structured, collaborative, and goal-directed. There is a specific process of self-directed learning, there are a variety of adjustments occurring in each person's life, and the rural setting provides a positive atmosphere for self-directed learning. Table 3 is a general summary of the findings.

Nature of Learning

The personal learning of the ten participants converges on four areas. The nature of the self-directed learning of these older adults who live in rural settings is highly engaging, variably structured, collaborative, and goal-directed.

Table 3

Findings

I. Nature of Self-Directed Learning

- A. Highly engaging
- B. Variably Structured
- C. Collaborative
- D. Goal-Directed

II. Process of Self-Directed Learning

- A. Incentive: Internal/external
- B. Interest
- C. Access resources
- D. Systematic attention
- E. Adjustments
- F. Catalyst
- G. Resolution

III. Late life adjustments

- A. Adjustment to time
- B. Adjustment to family
- C. Adjustment to loss (physical and social)

IV. Rural context

- A. Positive
- B. Negative

Highly Engaging

One of the most pervasive topics in these 400 pages of interview data is that this self-directed learning is highly engaging. The participants discussed enjoyment, fun, and excitement concerning their self-directed learning.

Enjoyment and fun. Each person in the sample discussed how much he or she enjoyed their personal learning. For example, Robert and his wife listed many activities that they enjoy. This enjoyment promotes an atmosphere to pursue learning in these various topics. “I do enjoy seeing period equipment, equipment that was used years ago, and she enjoys the houses and I enjoy what they worked with...farming equipment or household equipment.”

Norman enjoys various activities on the computer and going to the library everyday that they are open. He states, “I can only go five days a week! [Laughter]. You see they are closed on Saturday and Sunday... Yeah. I haven’t been there yet [today]! I am going!” The library is a place where Norman can pursue self-directed learning activities. Similarly, Betty describes how much she enjoyed learning about the computer. “I started with this wonderful Classworks manual to teach a person how to use a word processor, and I learned it! And I enjoyed it, worked with it, and liked so many things...it is wonderful to have it.” Charlie clearly enjoys the variety of things he can do on the computer. He says, “Oh, I like it, well, you know, you can do so many things. I, one main thing I do is make cards for people. Yeah, and make labels and I can make iron on pictures for shirts. And all that kind of stuff [Laughter].”

Charlie enjoys gardening, an activity in which he participates everyday. Charlie spoke with fondness about gardening; he is also known for giving the fruit of his labor to

others. He says with enthusiasm, "I enjoy every little bit of everything out there! I enjoy the work! I enjoy uh, seeing it cleaned up, seeing if I can keep it clean." Charlie also enjoys working on the computer. His description of learning to use the computer borders on play and fun.

I just got on it and started playing. I got books back here, you know... 95, because I had my first one was, Microsoft you know, 95, and uh, I just started playing with it. And you can just get on that Internet and you can find any subject you want. And that is mostly what I did then. And play games, they got "Textra" you know that game, you don't? I got a bunch of games on there, all kind of games, and uh, now that I got my CD burner, and they play DVD's too! Uh huh, and then just regular CD's. And then I can have my music back there while I am looking up something, and while I am making pictures. I am doing pictures [Laughter].

Every evening Dora looks forward to a time when she sits in a certain chair that is surrounded by books. I asked Dora to explain more about these various piles of literature that surround her chair. She stated how entertaining they were, she learns something, and she has fun. There were stacks of newspapers, various magazines, inspirational books, and crossword puzzles. Like tasty morsels salivating a hungry mind, I noticed an attractive pile of cooking books.

One of them is called "Taste of Home." And it comes six a year, what I just got was October-November. And, I believe, uh, and it is all recipes, no advertisement in it. All cooking hints and recipes. And uh, I just keep, people have.... Well, sometimes I use one of the recipes, but if I don't it's just entertainment... Because

that is what I am interested in. Cooking and eating, cooking and eating
[Laughter].

In another conversation, Wilbur discussed how much he enjoyed making a speech on Black History.

That is exactly right, and I enjoyed that the best of anything I have ever seen. And they called me back the next year...I mean I would have been glad to have gone back and speak for them again. But uh, I learned a lot about that, whenever, he [the author of the book] said, stay in the south and make friends with your white neighbors and learn how to live. That is exactly the statement; have you ever read it, black history?

One of Thelma's favorite activities is bridge. Bridge is an interesting game that often engages the player to strive to improve. She has been a member of one bridge club for over 40 years; she currently plays three times a week. She also stated she reads the bridge column in the newspaper.

Well, bridge is a challenge. I think and each hand is different and how you play it makes a big difference, and how you respond to when somebody bids and it also makes a difference. So you learn that you know, even though your five-card suit or something might not be but 10 high you learn, if you have got enough points that you bid that. Because that tells your partner that you, you know, that that can open it up for her to, help her. But it is a challenge and I thoroughly enjoy it and each hand is, is different. You don't play bridge? [Some discussion about this]... Well, it is certainly something nice you can do when you get older.

These older adults are describing a type of learning that is enjoyable. These self-directed learning activities provide pleasure and fun.

Excitement. Similar to enjoyment but to a greater degree is the excitement involved in the self-directed learning of these older adults. Robert, for example, speaks of something that occurs daily and that he is passionate about:

That is another thing that while I am dwelling on this, I have a bad habit, not a bad habit a good habit [Laughter]...If someone uses a word, or if I read a word I am not familiar with, I either go into there, the World Book or to the Dictionary and become familiar with that word...And I got kind of a passion for that...I don't like to scan over any word that I don't know the meaning of.

Betty discusses the excitement that she felt when she realized all that a computer could do:

I had spent a great part of my life, alphabetizing in library work [Laughter]. And this was instantaneous, and it was wonderful. And so, uh, having typed on old non-descript typewriters where you had to use whiteout to, to. And even back in the time when I had to use the four and five carbon copies of everything for legal forms. So, I was very much excited about computers, wanted to learn.

This learning is also something they are so excited about that they want to be involved in the details of this knowledge. Concerning the reading of the paper, Robert made sure that I understood that he did more than just read the paper. Similar to other participants, the daily paper has become a vehicle for learning: "Well we take the Valdosta Times, and I don't scan it, I read it, I get criticized for that sometimes about

taking the Valdosta Times [Laughter].” For many people reading the paper is a leisurely pursuit, but this is a vehicle of learning for Robert and for Charlie.

Excitement in these learning arenas is also evident in that it is something to return to. Robert’s wife states, “Well you never learn everything that is in the Bible, and it is a continuous learning. Sparta, [a town in Georgia] I read about that history, and uh, I have already retained that. But in the Bible you don’t retain everything, because it is so much of it.”

Similarly Betty discusses the joy of returning to something that she is excited learning - how to work the computer:

So I started. And I bought some books, but I never did feel like I had enough money to buy every book I wanted to read...But I wanted to be able to get back to the book I wanted, so I would number the book. And pasted the number, like a library call number on the book. I would take notes from it and then put a reference so I could go back to it. So then I used the computer to organize those notes and databases. And I wanted to know about the authors, the psychologists and I wanted to know about them, and wanted to have them listed.

This excitement is clearly seen in Betty’s enthusiasm to learn. “My big interest is to find the truth! I think the main thing that this world is all about is love, and caring for others, which grows out of love, and learning seeking the truth.”

Variably Structured

The nature of this SDL of older adults in rural settings is variably structured. Data indicate this structure as combinations of new and old learning, serendipitous and deliberate learning, and simple and complex learning.

New and old. The participants discussed their personal learning in a variety of episodes that consisted of new information. Robert talked about learning a new word:

Well, in Sunday school lesson, which I taught, talked about “karma.” And I, through my son taking uh karate, he studied a little about karma. And I said I haven’t really ever followed through on karma. So I went and got the dictionary, Well I went first to my old blue back Webster’s dictionary from the 30’s and it is not even in there [Laughter]...And I, through that I found out that English is made up of Celtic, Greek, Latin. We take words from all those uh languages and come up with English language. Well, karma is a new word, and we are adding new words all the time...and changing some of the old ones.

Similarly, Betty discussed learning new aspects of the computer during a class. She had started taking any class that was available on the computer:

As little as I know about computers, I got a different perspective about a lot of things. From the questions they asked and I learned so much that I didn’t know at all. Because I have just tried to learn what I needed on the computer, there is so little time that you can’t go into other things. So I learned more.

Hattie discusses learning new information at work. For every new person that entered this program, she had to learn a new way to work with him or her:

Okay, when you are working with those types of people, different types [she is working with mentally disabled adults], different types, yeah, yeah, and different ailments, and different disabilities. And you have to treat them in a different way at times until they learn you. And then you can have them all in one section. But

uh, we have some that come in; you know with, you got to do everything for them. Well you got to train them how they got to learn to do for themselves.

New information for these participants comes through a variety of mediums such as newspaper, Bible, magazines, television, and speakers. Dora shares these ideas:

That is part of my life; the Bible means a lot to me. I read, what I do every night, we have a mission magazine, and the name of it is Mosaic. And it has the missionaries for that day, that has birthdays in it and I read them. And the church prayer list, and then this, uh, a foreign mission magazine, Home Mission Board. I get it, and it's got a uh, uh, most of it has got the people that work in those areas by the days, and most of those I read.

Charlie discussed a nightly ritual in his home where he watches the television, but especially the History Channel. This new information on a familiar topic, World War II, provides interesting insight.

Yeah, I love it. Don't you? You ever watch it? I watch it all the time; I watch it every night sometime... I like a lot of it because it is reminisces about World War Two. It has a lot of World War Two stuff on it. And those early pictures of Hitler and his crowd. And all of that stuff, and then scenery, where I have seen, I have seen in Germany, in Germany. And... I got a TV guide out of the newspaper, and uh, everyday it has got in it. And that is first when I read the paper, that is one of the first things I go to, and find out what is going to be on so I can tell...[my wife] [Soft laughter]. And also for my information because I might see some things that I really want to see.

In the same conversation, these participants would refer to some lesson learned in the past that seemed as fresh as the morning paper. As discussed earlier, the participants wanted to learn something new. However, there are also old lessons from their past that continue to stay with the person. One of Bill's favorite activities is to try to instill in the younger generation the lessons that he learned in his past. Bill discusses the difficulties of his past and the lessons that remain with him:

Well, I missed part of my doings when I was coming up. I missed education. I didn't have a mother and father. And I tried to get it over to them [he is referring to younger generation] that you should be more conscious about trying to obey their mother and father. And the mother and father should be more conscious about trying to get them to do a better job than they done to them. The only way you going to be able to do that. You got to make up your mind, you gonna do without things he wants to get the things he actually needs. And try to lay a penny or two down for a later day.

Wilbur relates similar stories from the past that are important to him. This old information continues to influence him today. Wilbur would often refer to his past during our conversation. And when I would ask a certain question, he would often tell a story from the past:

My mother always told me, she said, you always treat people like you want to be treated. My Daddy did too [he is talking really fast], my Daddy, was just identical same as I was. He said you treat people like you want to be treated... Well that give me a big picture in life myself. Teaching me how to do people. Treat people like I want to be treated. And I have done my children the same way. Always tell

them you do treat people just like you want to be treated. That was a big help to me... I know that some things like that have helped me you know, when I say help me I am talking about learn how to live.

Charlie with laughter and bright eyes discussed his past and how these old situations continue to teach him today. His skills in working with electronics are lessons learned early in his life. "I love music see. And uh...I have always been that way, it was inbred. Because my Daddy had the first radio [here], he did, and he sold them. He sold Knight radios, made in Cincinnati. And...I just kind of grew up with it, and I just kept going with it, going with it."

These participants continued to be enthralled with new and old information. New information on familiar and old subjects perhaps forms the basis of self-directed learning activities.

Serendipitous and deliberate. The self-directed learning of the participants is variably structured in new and old learning situations and it is also evident in ways that are serendipitous and deliberate. This structure of serendipity and deliberation indicates how the learning takes place. Robert and his wife discussed how much they learned while on a trip in the western part of the United States. They enjoyed the atmosphere of creativity and sometimes were not quite sure what would happen next. But at the same time the tour guide was very deliberate and organized. Robert recalled:

And he asked us to take notes as we went along so that we would be able to remember all these things. But he gave us [takes a deep breath], a brief description of the trip that we were going to take. And asked us to discover...things instead of just seeing them...He said – don't just see America,

learn about it...But prior to that he gave us a daily tour overview on the outline and on the map...And each day he would list the place we would be at...And this daily tour and then he would take on each day. He would outline where we were going.

Self-directed learning for many of these participants takes place in spiritual or religious situations. These events ranging from private devotion to a church service involve serendipitous as well as deliberate learning. Prayer, Bible Study, and personal devotion all lend themselves to the serendipity of thinking and reflecting. Betty talks about her belief in God. This spiritual element is a part of her life and adds to this reflective aspect of learning.

Well, uh, I, uh, keep changing, in the worldview. Because so much keeps coming up. But basically I, I, I, believe everything began with God. Back the first, I have been sounding like I don't uh, go with the Bible, but I was born, bred and raised on the Bible. And it's a part of me, and I love so much of it, but I don't like to...Anyway, the first, uh, verse of the New Testament, 'In the beginning was God, In the Beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the word was God...it goes somewhat like that, that is exactly what I believe [high tone]!

Hattie believes she "got a blessing" during a very difficult time in her life. This serendipitous event became a personal learning experience about finances after her husband died. Because of this she feels that she has learned to trust God in difficult situations and believe the best.

[My friend], I never will forget her, she came and told me, she said, uh, don't get no lawyer...Because they will charge you an arm and a leg...And you won't get

all your money. Just go, wait, go back over there [to the government office], and take the death certificate and everything back. And that is what I did. I waited till I got up, and I went back over there, and I carried all that paper work and stuff over back there. They paid me for a whole year back, for six kids, because all of them were under 18, and myself. And that is how I got this house. And that was the blessing.

Dora stated how much she enjoys working in the yard, and how much she spontaneously thinks and reflects while working in the yard. These segments of time in the yard allow for a variety of serendipitous events to occur. "It's just as peaceful and calm, and I am just as happy as I can be. Thinking about what has happened today, or what is going on at the church... And this is my time!" Bill also enjoys this serendipitous and spontaneous style of learning. Rather than being organized, this man who has been retired for several years, enjoys driving around and talking to people he knows. Bill is a prominent man in the community and he is often called on for advice. He has been learning about his community and the people who live there all of his life.

Wilbur continually referred to the Bible as an important part of his life. This time of quiet allows for one to think and reflect on various ideas and thoughts.

Well, I will sit there and read the Bible even at home...But I read that Bible and by reading that Bible because it says study thyself and show thyself approved, and I do that. But the more you study, that Bible there, you will see things happen in the day that's coming right out of that Bible there. I seen something in there this year, this year, and, referred me back to the Bible. And this was particular thing

was...Y2K. Well a lot of people were worried about that. I wouldn't say I didn't prepare for that.

Wilbur's wife also discussed how a friend brought them a book. This particular book was about the life of Martin Luther King. This unplanned, serendipitous event led to personal learning on the history of another Black man from Georgia.

These people also discuss how their learning is deliberate and how they plan to learn. Hattie, Dora, and Robert talked about carefully organized and deliberate learning that takes place at their church. Certain passages of the Bible were to be studied and even homework was given in order to learn more. In another situation, Sue carefully organizes her learning about animals:

Well, now right here. [She turns to the left of where she is sitting, and opens a rusty file cabinet; she pulls out a file folder with pamphlets.] Here is my file on chickens. I belong to the APA; see the little books we get on. That is the American Poultry Association. And then I also belong to the American Bantam Association. See those are good technical books [I am looking at some interesting, scientific oriented books on these animals.] See. And then I have a, bought some Osterlof. They are supposed to be good layers. Then I have some Buff Orkenton, see I have a lot of information on them...I have technical books on goats. And here is my book on goat [I am thinking this woman is an amateur veterinarian]. I like these books. See I have uh...[She is showing me some type of notebook with various things in it. Her herd name, and various information she has collected about sheep.] Shadow wood, and here is a copy on the registration on, this one is on Rosie that is the one that is leased out.

Wilbur also discussed while on the volunteer fire department he learns a lot about safety. He discussed organized and deliberate segments of learning.

Last night, when we did, what we did last night there, we, we sat there and we talked about our, our fireworks that we had done some training on. And uh, whenever we go to a fire meeting what we do we train on what we are going to do in case that we have an accident.

Wilbur also stated he will bring home notebooks and materials from the various organizations he is involved with. During times at home, he will deliberately study the information.

Simple and complex. In the same way this self-planned learning is structured in dialectical frames of new and old, serendipitous and deliberate, the data also suggest there is a structure of simple and complex learning. Simple learning takes place for many of these participants in situations that do not require a lot of thought. This personal learning is also seen in the daily reading of newspapers and watching television. Nine out of ten participants make it clear that the newspaper provided a source of learning. Dora discusses how when the *Readers Digest* comes, "I read it front to back."

Although this simple style of reading is entertaining, there are times when she will also study complex subjects:

We did a survey of Old Testament, and a survey of the New Testament. And those are workbooks where you read and answer questions. And right now we are not, but I know we will get started in something then...It was extremely hard [Laughter]. Because I had to discipline myself to sit down and read all of that. Because it, like you cover, uh, three or four chapters, like in the Old Testament.

See it has started with Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers; all of that and maybe one section would be over two books. And uh, course it was numbered and, and give it chapters and verses and when you go to read all of that...Some of it, you got to reason out what is the best answer for that question over that material.

Several of the participants disclosed that they have learned significant lessons in difficult situations. These situations are hard to describe because they are complex and personal. Hattie discusses a situation at work where she learned about race. Hattie felt she learned a variety of issues in the workplace by being a minority. She went through a situation where a boss who was White replaced her former boss who was African American. This situation was stimulation to continue to work and to learn under a white boss. Someone was interviewing Hattie about the workplace:

I told her [the reporter] I said; let me tell you, you all never give [the former boss who is Black] any credit for this. But I am, if it hadn't been for [the former boss who is Black], that center wouldn't have been set up. She set it up; she called me and wanted me to be involved. She and I set the center up, and [the new director who is White] came in later by them pushing her out. Because she had a little bit more education...But that ain't the point. You know you don't do people like that.

Some of the participants discussed learning personal lessons in complex and tragic situations. Wilbur described a very painful situation in his life and the influence this had on him. I was asking him why he was so interested in the fire department and all of the learning that takes place in that situation:

I love it. I enjoy it because in the later years, uh, I lost two children in the fire. And losing my two children in the fire, every time they would blow a whistle and siren, and then I would get in my old piece of car and follow them, wherever I go. And that is the way, whenever they got ready to put on a Black, I was the first Black they put on there. And I am always thinking whenever I am going to a fire like that, how to help someone.

I asked Charlie how he had learned about the repairs that he makes. He is known around the county as a knowledgeable person who can repair almost anything. His statement reflects the confidence he has gained by mastering these complex subjects.

Well I read the uh, I always read the uh, thing that comes with it, I always read that. A lot of people don't, when they go to put, somebody trying to put something together. Most people just rush in there and try to do it and get things in the wrong places and all that. That tickles me, and then they call on me to come fix it for them. A lot of people can't, don't like to read, and uh study, uh, schematics and different things, about putting things together. I think that is the way to go, till you get it right.

Collaborative

The third component of the nature of self-directed learning is that it is collaborative. Stretching beyond the name "self-directed," this personal learning was anchored in other people.

Norman, who seemed reserved, continually discussed the collaborative nature of his learning. One of Norman's hobbies was building miniature trains and he would often

attend conferences on model building. He discusses topics he learned in the interactions with others at these conferences:

When my wife was able to travel, we used to attend...regional meets pretty regular. They used to have a fall and spring meet. And uh, you visit whatever your host is, they, uh, some of the guys usually open up their homes or their garages wherever their layout is, open for visitation. And you get a chance to see what somebody else is doing. Uh, their ideas, put to work, and uh, there, of course there is always trade show hooked to it...Made a lot of friends.

Even though Betty likes to work on her own she also enjoys going to classes with other people:

Well, it was very interesting and I enjoyed it; it was frustrating because the computer set up was not too good. Uh, it was, many of the ones in there had just purchased. Or we even didn't have one but were thinking about it. And uh, it was uh, hard for the librarian to get to what she needed to get to a lot of the time. And there were two different sets of computers and one group worked out front and another group back in the corner. And that made it very harder on the teacher that tried to come and go. But you get as little as I know about computers; I got a different perspective about a lot of things. From the questions they asked and I learned so much that I didn't know at all.

Bill also discusses how his learning is embedded in the community. Bill is seen during the day walking around the community talking with people and seeing how things are going. He especially enjoys stopping and talking with parents about their children.

All right, I been [pause] going [pause] different homes, over the courthouse, and talk with the probate judge, or the, talk with the uh, sheriff, police department. You got boys in the community always into some misdemeanor. Talk to them, some parents you can talk to, some you can't. Tell them that your child needs improve their attitude in the community. And they need to stay out of trouble. Don't mess with drugs. They get stone mad with you, and some of them won't. But you can size them up and see which one you can talk to and can't talk...So, I have learned a lot by having some extra time that I can go sit down and talk to these different people and listen at what they had to tell, help me in thinking which is the best thing to try to do.

Similarly, Hattie, shares with us how she learns at seminars and conferences about topics that she is really interested in:

And the last one we went to was over in Brunswick, and uh, that was when I sat up the English workshop...They told us to come back [to our worksite], which was what we had to do, we had to come back and do something. And uh, not just the people to sit there and look at the wall... And I asked different ones there, and the workshop, I was having them in every area. I said, "What are you all doing at your workshop?" Some was making traps to catch deer...And other area they said had workshops had apple boxes, all this kind of stuff you know...I was just asking questions, alright, when I came back, that is how I set up with the workshop here.

Hattie's work was a way for her to express her purpose in life. She was continually thinking how to influence and help the adults in need around her.

Charlie was one of the more private people in the study; he is extremely motivated and often works best alone. If he needs new information he will experiment with something until he can find the answers. Yet this independent man will collaborate with others when he needs some advice. I asked him how he could continue to keep up with the changing electronic markets. "Because I read, I read about them. I study them, I go to Sam's [department store] and see what they got, and go to, uh Rex [department store], down there in Valdosta and see what they got. See if they got something new...yeah, I ask them questions." As mentioned before, this man loves to garden. If there is some need he will quickly go to an expert for advice:

Charlie – Well, yeah, compost pile, I got a place built for it, it makes compost. That is rich stuff see. Donny – Now how did you learn about compost? Charlie – [Laughter] Read about it! Donny – Where did you read about it? Charlie – I read about it in magazines and go to the county agent's office and they got pamphlets on it.

Thelma discusses two civic clubs of which she is involved. This is more than an activity; this is a way for her to channel her time and energy to help to improve the community. This self-directed learning activity is important to her and she enjoys the collaborative nature of this activity:

Well I get up and give my report like I have always done, you know. And [my friend] will say, "Well, Thelma you are the only one that gets up and gives a report." Well they will just pass out papers for you to sign. Well, that is just not an organization to me. If you, I mean if you are going there and I am head of the conservation, then I should have had my stuff mapped out...I guess I will still just go till I can't go anymore. And I

pick up [my friends] both, and it enables them to go, otherwise neither one of them could go, because [my friend] doesn't drive at night and [my friend] doesn't either. And [my friend] is on a walker. You know, so. But she enjoys going and I enjoy you know, she is very good company and I enjoy, we work for flowers and through the woman's club all these years.

The self-directed aspect of learning seems to imply that the participants are personally motivated to learn, and often the learning is grounded in other people.

Goal-Directed

One of the defining aspects of SDL is that the participant has some particular goal to accomplish. Rather than incidental or happenstance situations, this learning begins to take shape toward a goal and objective. The SDL of these participants was evident by a commitment to accomplish a certain objective of learning. They gave systematic attention toward an activity until they felt they have accomplished their particular goal. Also, they may decide to continue to learn this topic for a longer period.

Charlie is not just interested in learning about any war, it must be World War II and on the European front. Wild and exotic plants are not so interesting to Thelma; rather she focuses her learning activities around native plants of south Georgia. Although Sue enjoys many types of animals, her goal is to raise and care for a specific breed of dog, goat, and chicken. She subscribes to various periodicals, reads books, attends seminars, and talks with others about this particular type of dog, goat, and chicken.

Betty is interested in a wide variety of topics, but her general goal is learning about truth. Topics on religion, psychology, and spirituality form the foundation of her

interests. Wilbur primarily wants to learn about issues of safety in fire, how to improve his community, and ways to be a better gardener.

Another interesting dynamic related to the goal-directed nature of self-directed learning is that there is a commitment to this process. This aspect of the learning takes the participant beyond fascinating hobbies and alluring pastimes to specific learning. This aspect of learning involves a great deal of energy, resources, and time focused on a particular goal. For example, Robert and his wife discussed the commitment to accomplish a goal of learning about his great grandfather:

No not everyday, but we would spend a lot of time on it. When we would go to Douglas it would be three or four hours of the time. If I had to estimate, I would say it was a good forty hours or more...Uh-huh...it takes so long to, to run those tapes and read them. And the print was not very clear...cause a lot of them were old. Whoever put all of that together I admire them, cause that was a lot of work to put all that information together.

In another situation, Robert and his wife discussed preparation for studying the Bible and the Sunday School Lesson. Robert's wife said:

I read over the lesson, and then I go back and read it again. And...we have a Sunday School book that we use, quarterly. And I read over that. And then words that I am not familiar with I look those up. And I always write down a lot of information, uh, so as I can have it on hand. I have always done that [Laughter].

I was struck by this woman's commitment to her goal; she went beyond scanning or glancing over information. She was highly engaged in this learning, demonstrated by a commitment to master a certain topic. Every week of her life she spends approximately

three to four hours reading and learning about a Bible lesson. Many of the participants discussed the length of time they are involved in these activities. Norman stated that he would spend “around four hours a day on the computer.” Betty discussed how she would “get up and spend about two hours before breakfast” working on her search for information.

Interestingly, chance situations may influence this goal-directed learning. For example, Norman had decided to learn how to work on the computer after a visit to his brother’s house. After returning home, a local organization for the first time was offering computer classes. He, by chance, happened to see the announcement in the paper and enrolled in the class.

In summary, the nature of the learning for these participants was highly engaging, was expressed in variable structures, collaborative, and goal-directed. The highly engaging aspect of learning was evident by activities that could be described as enjoyment, fun, and excitement. The variable structure was seen in contrasts of new and old, serendipitous and determined, and simple and complex. The collaborative nature was evident by the incorporation of other people in their community in the learning. The goal-directed aspect of this personal learning was seen in a commitment to accomplish a certain task.

The Process of Learning

Each participant discussed in detail various activities of self-directed learning. It eventually became evident that there was a loosely organized series of events that helped to form this process. The process of personal learning is depicted in Figure 1.

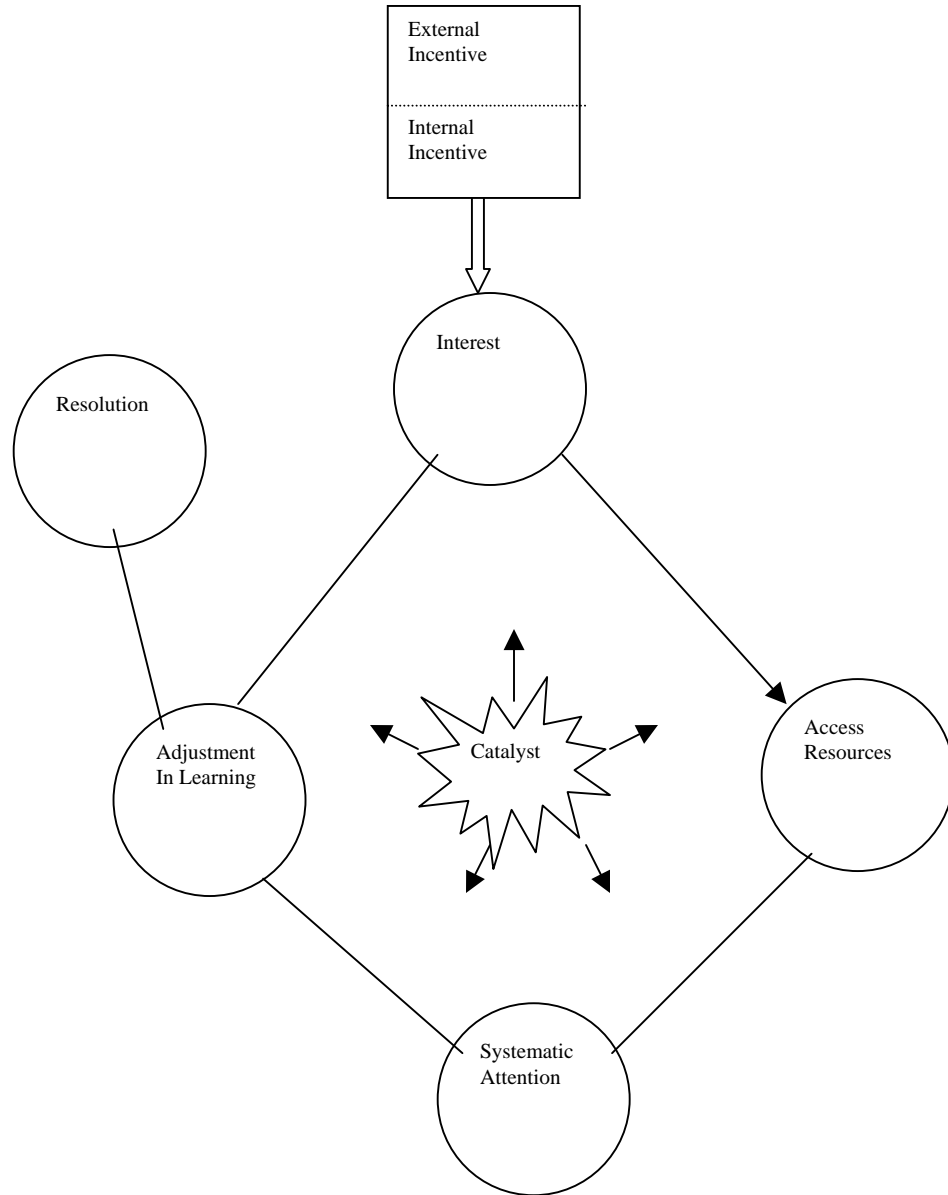


Figure 1. The Process of Self-Directed Learning

The process of learning begins with an incentive to learn. This may originate internally, as in Sue's internal drive to learn about organic gardening. Or this may originate externally. For example, someone asked Thelma if she would make an "elf" for a Christmas decoration. The dotted line between internal and external is meant to suggest that external incentive projects of learning can become internal. If the person has an interest in the topic or activity, then he or she will pursue it. Charlie was asked to work with the local elections; this interested him and he decided to learn what was necessary.

This procedure involves accessing resources. The learner scans their environment for resources whereby they can gain more information in this area. In order for this learning process to continue there will be systematic attention and time given to the project or activity. For example, Sue reads through an assortment of periodicals for information on raising goats, and then she will catalogue this material. The individual will make some adjustments in order to fine-tune the learning to his or her interests. Betty had to switch to another computer in order to complete the goals of her learning.

At some point after making adjustments the project comes to an end (resolution) or the person continues to be interested and the project is ongoing. The motivation and intensity to learn is often enhanced during this process through a catalyst. The catalyst results in an increased amount of learning, time, or energy focused on this project. The catalyst is usually another person in the learner's life, yet it can also be a significant event. Although not apparent in this figure, there are multiple projects occurring at the same time. Adding to the complexity of this personal learning, usually each project is at a different step in the process.

Incentive for Self-Directed Learning

The process of learning originates with an incentive to learn. This is a desire to learn and can be internal or external. An internal incentive is usually something the person wants to do on his or her own; an external incentive is something that others ask the person to do.

Internal. The internal incentive for self-directed learning is some topic the individual is personally driven to know. There is something internal within the person that pushes him or her to learn, and the learner is willing to invest significant amounts of time of their time toward the activity. Robert's wife explained why she is so motivated to learn about homes:

I don't know. It is just that I like [laughter] homes...they fascinate me [emphasis] the architecture inside of them. You know there are some beautiful homes built out of some beautiful wood...I love wood; you notice my home has a lot of wood in it. I like the patterns of the wood and all, so like how they used to furnish their homes out of their different types of wood they built their furniture out of.

Betty relates how much she wants to learn about religion and psychology. No one is telling her to do this, she does not have to take a class to learn, and she is inwardly driven and self-directed to pursue these topics:

And I was especially interested in religions, comparative religions [I am thinking this is her primary interest]. And, and uh, forms of learning, like the, the divisions, like psychology and sociology, and literature, imaginative and factual and, but especially psychology. I like to learn about uh, how it has developed. You see I

had to do this completely on my own. I did not have, I got very much interested in it when I was going back to VSC to get those courses [classes for required certification]. Because I found a place in the library upstairs there, that had all of the psychologists. And all of the different views and they were so different and there were so many different books that I just longed to read and I would bring four, five, and six at home at a time with me. Trying to scan those things and get something from them while...I was also trying to do everything that had to be done to pass the course [Laughter].

External. In addition to an internal motivation the participants also discussed an external incentive to learn. Norman shared with me how he began to use the computer. First, he saw his brother using the computer on a cold, winter day. Since his brother could not go outside, this appealed to Norman because the computer was available for use in the warm indoors. After returning home there were classes offered in his hometown on using the computer:

Well, I just thought it was the thing. My brother was into it, the last time I visited him about three years ago. Uh, uh, he was kind of showing me the computer and what is there and what it would do. He has been at it about 15 years I believe, something like that. I just sort of got interested in it, and I came back, and started going over to the library and picking up whatever I could from the folks over at the library.

Hattie also discussed that work or career often requires one to continue to learn and to attend seminars and classes:

Okay, Okay, all right now, we had to, in working with the state; we had to have so many hours. And, okay, we had to put in 40 hours at VSU, and we had to put in hours at where you at [University of Georgia]. Because see we had to go all over the state. And take up different things, and that way they was training us, how to come back and set up...[Phone rings for the third time in this interview]...We went to so many because we had to go like Atlanta, Macon, Athens, Valdosta, and we also we out to Brunswick area. And each one of those areas we went, that was where some of those people from those universities and colleges would come in and give a lecture of what to take back, and they would train us, on different things... So you have to jot down everything you have to do for them. And we get so many hours for each unit.

In summary, personal learning begins with some type of incentive to learn. Those that originate externally are often short-term projects and may serve the needs of others. The internally motivated projects often turn into lifelong learning projects and may even result in the person developing expertise. These people do not have to be pushed by others to learn about these topics; they are internally driven to learn. It should be noted that the boundaries between internal and external incentives sometimes overlap. If the person became personally interested in an external originating activity, it would eventually become an internal originating self-directed learning project. For example, Wilbur was given a book on Martin Luther King (external origin); Black history eventually became an internal interest.

Interest

One of the most common used words by participants was “interest.” “This is interesting to me” was continually repeated in reference to self-directed learning and reasons behind learning. In order for the process of personal learning to continue, there had to be some internal interest, otherwise, the activity may be put aside.

Sue states that she has a great deal of interests and some of these she pursues in detail. Many of these interests seem like common threads that have run throughout her life, especially her interest in organic gardening and animals:

I am *interested* in all types of animals and nature. When I was just a child my aunt got me *Nature* magazine.... Anytime I run across anything, I have a wide variety of *interests* – archeology, the sea, sea life, cause we lived so long on the sea...In 99, at Christmas, my right shoulder was so frozen up with arthritis that when I sat down to write my Christmas cards it hurt too much and I didn’t even get my cards out that year, but it happened only once. [Pause] Goat milk - my daughter brings me up enough so that I can stay in goat milk. Milk and cheese. So I know that, I am quite *interested* in that [emphasis added].

Some of these interests became complicated projects of their own. This would often involve magazines, bulletins, seminars, readings, and projects. Sue pointed out a drawer full of organized pamphlets and magazines, “Well, I do take, down under here, just pull that out...[a filing cabinet near me], that is Poultry Press, I take that magazine.”

Across the county, Dora discussed her evening activities. Something on the television has to hold her interest or she resorts to the word puzzles. For her there seems to be various levels of interest, as some activities reveal mere curiosity, and some are

daily events. Dora is involved in a variety of activities; I asked her, which one is more interesting:

Well, I think what I read from all my literature, in the Bible and all, the denominational literature that I read and have, it is more lasting. And it brings, uh, I guess comfort and joy of knowing that you are related, that you are involved in something that the Lord is pleased with.

One's interest is as unique as the individual, and often is aligned with personal issues and one's development.

Access Resources

The older adult will access resources in self-directed learning. This use of resources seems to be as unique and independent as the individual. However, there are many similarities among these ten individuals. For example, as described earlier, the learner is consistently pursuing information about topics they are interested in. The learner accesses these resources through a variety of means including conversations with friends and acquaintances.

Many of the participants used several resources during their process of SDL. The frequency of these resources is also important to consider. The following resources were used daily or weekly and are discussed in order of use. The most prevalent mentioned was the newspaper. This consisted of local, regional, state, and national papers. Some people even received papers over the Internet. The papers especially seemed to provide a guide for other activities of interest in the area. Hattie said, "I don't get out of bed until I read the paper." Charlie reads two newspapers "cover to cover." Norman accesses a variety of papers over the Internet.

The next prevalent resource was the television. Most use the television to provide information similar to the newspaper including watching the news several times a day. Programs of special interest such as the History Channel, Home and Garden, Discovery Channel, and Public Television were especially mentioned as resources for SDL.

The participants spoke of attending seminars and classes. There are several organizations in this area that provide useful information on a variety of topics. Many of the participants discuss using the library on a regular basis; they have discovered the variety of resources of a library. Often they are friends with the workers in the library who also help in this process. Robert and his wife traveled to several libraries across Georgia in their learning activities.

All of the participants are involved in church activities, and five of them mentioned how the church is also a resource for personal learning. Many churches go beyond worship service and provide learning seminars and topics on a variety of issues from religion to health. Some of the participants will attend church activities four times a week.

Other resources of significance to this group were pamphlets received in the mail, talking with others, and the Internet. Robert and his wife discussed how they would use the library, dictionary, newspapers, television, Internet, Bible and various inspirational books, as well as attending seminars of interest:

I have about gotten down to where just current happenings is what I try to keep up with...through the newspaper through TV and through what travels we make...And then one thing she forgot to tell you that we get a lot of information

on is Georgia Public Television. We watch Channel Eight a lot and she don't miss a program on the European Countries, she follows all of those tours....

They also enjoy traveling and stated that travel is a source of learning. Two trips they discussed was a recent one out west and a trip to Boston. When we began to discuss this trip, they excitedly explained how they would access available resources to add to the trip. This additional information enhanced the learning opportunities during this trip:

Like I say, I enjoy learning more about the United States, in fact, we had visited all the states except about ten, which are real far western states...I like to read up on the states before I visit them and get information. We used the encyclopedias...and go to the library and bring it up on the computer.

Sue also discussed the number of catalogues and periodicals that come in the mail today. Many times they are trying to sell something, but they often have useful information. I asked her how she gained all the information she has about raising animals. She reported talking to the veterinarian and use of the magazines she receives:

Well, talk to the vet! And then, uh, I do take; they have some magazines that come in. Through that, uh, I get a lot of these free magazines, companies put out advertising a product, so I can, I can read them and still not have to buy a product.... Just general, dogs in general, there is a [looking in this huge pile of periodicals]...sometime catalogues, I learn a lot from catalogues.

The primary way Bill gains information is through talking with others. However, his kitchen table was piled with information and pamphlets from doctors. The following is the discussion we had about the value of these pamphlets that many older adults receive from doctors:

Donny – And did you read this? [I am holding a small pamphlet with simple and specific information about the importance of nutrition]. What you think about all of this [referring to his brochures about health]? Bill – It is good! I don't do it all the way up like I should. You eat more vegetables and uh, you don't eat much fried food more boiled food. You bake your fish. Donny – And are you doing all that or not? Bill – I do most of it, I don't do all of it [laughter]. I eat a lot of okra and tomatoes and carrots. I try not to eat much pork meat; I eat beef once in a while.

Wilbur takes advantage of a variety of resources; these include reading the Bible, going to church, learning at work, going to the library, and watching television. But the primary way he learns seems to be dialogue and extended conversation with his wife. They have a close relationship and work together in many different areas. This continual discussion and conversation is also a powerful mode for learning promoting further discussion.

Charlie accesses a variety of resources. He is especially attentive to the newspaper and television:

Yeah, the first thing I read in the morning is the Valdosta Times. And I go through it and read it. And then during the day I work the crossword puzzle. And then later on in the day I get the constitution, Journal and Constitution, and go straight to the editorials. And, then I go to the, go to the uh, sports, too. I like to read, I like, see... But, I try to read all sides. And uh, and that is why I enjoy it so much.

Systematic Attention

Participants discussed the systematic attention given to these activities. This particular part of the process is when the goals of self-directed learning become a priority. Robert and his wife gave systematic time to learning more about their faith. Several times a week they go beyond random readings to the study of inspirational literature. Robert and his wife told how they systematically read and study the Bible:

Robert – I always try to relate it [the Bible] to current events, uh, like last night, it [the Bible] talks about, uh, anti-Christ. Well, how do you recognize anti-Christ today? Some of them are real adept at covering up their true beliefs, and uh, so I try to relate the Bible to current times, rather than just using it just as a history. I know Bible is a history. I try to relate it to current times, and current events.

(Wife) – I have been to the library, and pulled a lot of information up on the computer, that goes along with the Sunday school lesson. And, run printouts on it, so as I can have that accessible for the class.

At their home there is daily attention given to newspaper and purposeful television watching. They are also systematically interested and involved in learning about world events. During the interviews they shared how much time they had spent on some of their projects. They also shared about spending approximately 40 hours on the project to learn more about a distant relative.

Betty also expressed this concept of systematic attention to her personal learning. She would spend one to two hours every day before breakfast on her personal learning:

Well, don't ask me about the last month or so. For many years, I would spend an average of two hours before [my husband] got up and we had breakfast. Nothing

else came ahead of that. I would read the books, read the articles, work with my list, and so forth. And it was my spiritual practice, I was seeking.

As discussed earlier, learning to use the computer was simply a tool for Betty to access information about important topics. Her spiritual quest of knowledge was given daily systematic attention. “Nothing else came ahead of that.”

Adjustments in Learning

Participants in the study often discussed difficulty, obstacles, and adjustments that took place during their process of SDL. This is often when the participant would forge ahead to accomplish the particular goals in self-directed learning. Dora continually used the word “trial and error” to describe her work in the yard. These adjustments in one’s daily life are often the result of an error or mistake. “It’s just been more trial and error. Trial and error. And you just get in there and, and do it.” Later she discussed this in more detail on some of the specifics of work in the yard:

Just by trial and error. Just by trial and error. Lots of it don’t work, some of it don’t work.... In uh, trying to spray weeds, or something like that, buying herbicides or fungicides and trying them and they don’t work. Most of them, the best thing is Roundup. But it is expensive, and get it on and it don’t rain it will work.

I thought she had probably learned a lot about her yard. Since people in south Georgia have difficulty with fire ants, I asked what she does about fire ants. Without hesitation she quickly told me how to get rid of fire ants.

Now, fire ants, is another story [Laughter]. I have fought that for all these years. And you buy these granules, and then you got to water it in. And I got to using,

Malathion, it is a liquid. And I got to using that, and I just put that in the water and go pour it on, and it is your death. It might not be right for the environment, but that is what I use instead of the granules.

Thelma discussed how she continually made adjustments when she is creating a decoration. This trial and error is an attempt to finish what you are doing despite the obstacles.

Yeah, I did the wedding, for the rehearsal dinner for uh, [someone in town] she wanted something...wanted something different, and so, I fixed lanterns out of uh, and covered them with uh, burlap. And then I used the uh, a big pine cone and drilled a hole in it, and put a candle in there. Which is not a candle, but it is a vial that you can get, that has a wick in it. And you can get that and so therefore you can use, uh, the oil and then I used half pint fruit jars. I mean jelly glasses. See it's what I used. But a lot of it was just trial and error.

Thelma discussed how she encountered difficulty when attempting to make various decorations or flower arrangements. She discusses how in the middle of making some project you don't give up when you encounter a difficulty or obstacle, rather you have to make adjustments in this process of self-directed learning.

In summary, these participants continue to pursue SDL throughout their lives. Within this pursuit they encounter obstacles. These obstacles demand adjustments in this process of learning. This in turn creates a practical knowledge and a confidence of what to do. Dora said, "Yeah...well, mostly most just, just what I have known. You try what you know through the years." These men and women did not give up. They continued past the difficulty and the learning process continued.

Catalyst

During this process of learning, the participants discuss the impact of some event that often speeds this process or even motivates them to learn on a deeper level. This may be seen in a variety of ways, but usually the catalyst for these participants was another person. Regardless, this is rarely something the learner can plan or predict. This seems to be entirely spontaneous. However, this unpredictable event often becomes integral in their self-directed learning process. This catalyst to personal learning may help the person move through the adjustments and obstacles that were just discussed. This spontaneous situation also helps to create a greater motivation to learn.

Norman discussed the impact of one particular person and how he became a catalyst to his SDL. Norman feels he can call on this man when he needs help with the computer. However, Norman also feels he is a friend. This man has become something like a computer coach to Norman. During the interview I asked Norman if he could single out what has really helped him to learn how to use the computer:

This fellow has been very kind to me, I don't know if you know, the ... family there in church, [he] is uh, in charge of computer system at [a nearby air force base]. That is his job. He has been in computers about 18 years I believe it is. And uh, become good friends with [he] and his family there. A lovely family, one of the nicest families I think I have ever met. And [he] has been very helpful, at his classes, and to answer questions, and to come by.

Betty also discusses the value of another person in answering a difficult question. Especially someone that can quickly answer a specific problem. "And there is so much to learn, you just can't operate nearly as efficiently if you have somebody that knows what

he is talking about, that can quickly get to the heart of the problem and explain it to you.”

But more than this, for Betty the main catalyst has been the computer in general. To be able to search libraries from her home has enabled her to search for answers and collate material from the ease and comfort of her home.

Wilbur is involved in a variety of activities, but his involvement in the volunteer fire department dominated our conversation. During our interviews he and his wife discussed how they lost two children in a fire. Although he was interested in learning how to help the community, this fire became a catalyst in his learning. He wanted to do anything he could to help his community in case of a fire. He would follow fire trucks to various fires to see if he could help. Eventually one of the firemen asked him to become one of the members of the volunteer department.

Sue was the only person that discussed the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001. This was a catalyst for her to continue to be prepared to live independently. “And, chickens are a very practical hobby for me, particular with this war on terrorism that we had. And when they hit the World Trade Center, I was expecting another strike. I really was.”

Hattie tells a story about the process of getting a sidewalk built on her side of town. She lives in what is called the Black part of town and many call this area “the quarters.” She had been somewhat discouraged because she had not seen improvement in her area of town from the city taxes. Spontaneously, another lady in a meeting encouraged her to continue her fight for a sidewalk. Hattie says, “This became the means for me to come back and stress [motivate] myself.”

No. No, I had been asking for a long time and you know I go to council meeting and I ask. I ask the people in charge and this is what they say, “Well we can’t do it, we can’t do it.” Okay, I just kept dwelling on that. So this lady came in and she had a meeting with us, I was asked to go to this meeting...a sidewalk committee...And she wanted us to meet them in Atlanta; she wanted us to come to Atlanta. And she come to me while we was in the meeting in Atlanta. She says, “...Hattie you still stick to what you want, cause you gonna get it, and you can get it...” I said, “Okay, thank you.” *And that gave me the go, you see, when she said that. That means for me to come back and stress [motivate] myself... And that is what I did.* [Emphasis added]. I came back and I told them, the mayor, that was what we wanted. With the sidewalk on [my side of town], I said a lot of times, you know you just want to get out and walk. You don’t want to ride all the time. And so, why can’t we have a sidewalk, we have to walk out there in the ditch and the grass.

Although Hattie was not necessarily pleased with the results, the sidewalk was eventually built.

Wilbur discussed how one’s family could be a catalyst in this process of learning. He had been asked to give a presentation on African-Americans. His family went with him to the library when he gave the talk. This catalyst helped to motivate him to study and plan this to a greater degree:

That was a big help to me. But whenever I read that book and then I had my whole family, I sent my whole family, my wife and two or three youngins wasn’t it honey? They went and was right there with me. And uh, library, was about full

almost. And uh, it was just easy for me to speak on that, and I wasn't reading out of the book neither. I had done studied it. And I, it was just easy for me to speak on that. On that, because I know that some things like that have helped me you know, when I say help me, I am talking about learn how to live.

Similarly, all the participants are involved in many learning activities because of the motivation that has come from a family member. This seemed to be especially true of learning to work a computer.

Wilbur's wife remembers how a friend gave them a book about Martin Luther King and how much this meant to them. These spontaneous gifts can be catalysts for SDL. "He brought this book, uh, Daddy King, not Martin Luther King, you know his struggles with life, and other stuff, and he, you know [he] brought that book to him. And uh, he wanted Wilbur to have it. He brought it one afternoon."

Resolution

This loosely woven and somewhat erratic process of self-directed learning may eventually come to a close. Several participants spoke of information that has been placed in boxes and carefully stored. Betty stated she has collected material from various learning projects, but they have been boxed up and put away. The participants discussed an interesting array of these short term learning episodes from Dora's wreath, to Norman's class, to Sue's book, to Bill's two month hospital experience, to Wilbur's work with the rural development center, to Charlie's attempt to put lights in a warehouse, to Thelma's luncheon on cultural activity in south Georgia. Even though these specific learning activities were over, there were various aspects of the learning process that carried over to other projects.

Robert and his wife, for example, had been asked to provide information for a new building in their church. This took a great deal of time and effort. In this process they learned a lot, but this activity is over:

So we kept visiting and went to a church over in, out from Douglas. And the contractor that finally, eventually built our fellowship hall, went to that church...

From that we learned how we wanted our fellowship hall to go. So, we patterned it after that church and used the contractor...We visited a lot of churches on those stained glass windows...[a discussion about the various churches]. *We were relieved when that project was over* [Laughter] [emphasis added]. That was a lot of work, searching all around.

Robert shared how some of the things they learned carried over to other intentional learning activities. For example, they learned how easy it was to use the Internet, obtain information from other people, and how to use the resources in the library.

The participant may decide to continue to learn about this particular topic. Each participant was involved in several short-term projects, but also lifelong pursuits of learning. These may have begun in a similar situation as described above, but the learning somehow never stopped. In this situation there is a resolve to continue to learn on this particular topic.

During the interviews there were several situations where the overlap of a short-term project and lifelong self directed learning became obvious. Sue discussed the topics that she had learned in a computer class. Although she was learning the details of how to work on a computer, her main concern was to be able to have some place to put the stories that she is writing and hopes to write. This lifelong SDL was discussed during the

interviews. Although this information is somewhere “in the back of the house,” she continually returns to these stories and writes additional information:

Well, I am writing some stories. I have some stories written down. I do them in long hand. And then I go put them in the computer. And uh, back, in the things I have known. I got one I call “Wheels.”

This lifelong dream of being an author is a continual source of motivation for this older adult. This is also a stimulus to continue to learn and to keep active because there are stories to write and books to finish. Learning how to use a computer was a short-term project related to the lifelong project of writing.

Similarly, Thelma was showing me some of her self-directed efforts of decoration. It became obvious one of her lifelong learning activities focused around decoration and ornamentation. She said, “Let me show you this.” With laughter, she brought out a three foot “elf.” She had spent hours during the past few weeks learning how to improve the looks of this elf for a Christmas parade in the community. This short-term project also reflected a lifelong interest in learning how to decorate.

Each participant is also involved in ongoing, self-directed lifelong learning projects. Robert continues to learn more about the Bible as well as world events. The computer is the focus of Norman’s interest, and it has become the gateway for other information. Betty takes time to learn more about religion and psychology. She wants to make these topics interesting for her offspring. Natural foods, health, and raising animals has been a mainstay for Sue; her home was full of literature and resources of all of these topics. Bill wants to help others in his community to learn how to survive and be successful as a minority. Becoming a woman of influence in her community is Hattie’s

intent; she takes the time to learn how to help others. Dora's focus is to learn more about working in the yard and spiritual growth. How to live an enjoyable, long, and healthy life seems to be the essence of Charlie's interest. And Thelma's desire is to learn more about community involvement and natural, native decorations. All of these lifelong pursuits are sought with seeming endless energy and lead to specific information and knowledge. Each participant also discussed health, children, grandchildren, television, and newspapers (local and regional) as personal lifelong learning pursuits.

These individuals have developed an expertise in many of these areas. This expertise not only involves these personal learning activities, but also includes knowledge they have gained from their life experiences as well as work.

Robert has expertise in crossword puzzles, words, world events, the Bible, gardening, and history. Gardening, education, and historical houses are part of the knowledge of Robert's wife. Norman has specific know-how in toy trains, the computer, and birding. Music, doll furniture, collecting information, legal issues, and topics of spirituality and psychology comprise the capabilities of Betty. Sue has skill in raising Dacshunds, goats, and chickens. And she has read a great deal about natural food. Starting a business is a proficiency of Bill. Motivating others to get involved in the community is a skill of Hattie. She is also knowledgeable about working with adults with disabilities. Dora demonstrates proficiency in the yard; she also has skill in working with children and older adults. For know-how in repair of antique gunstock, Wilbur is the expert. He also knows about his community and how to take action for improvement. Charlie is knowledgeable about World War II and especially the Western Front. Skillful in electronic repair, he also has expertise in gardening and music. All three Black

participants - Bill, Hattie, and Wilbur – discussed how they have learned to survive as a minority.

In summary, there is a process whereby each person pursues SDL. All ten participants discussed moving from an internal or external incentive to learn. This incentive ignites their interest, which leads them to accessing resources. They then devote systematic attention to the learning project, making adjustments as needed. The project ends (resolution), or the individual may decide to continue learning this particular topic. There is also a catalyst, usually another person, interspersed in this process. This encouraged the participants to pursue this process of learning. Seemingly simple, this process is actually a complex network of unique projects in varying stages of progress. Each participant was involved in several internal and external originating learning activities.

The difference between the internal and external incentive to learn should be noted. Internal interests are often personal issues within one's life. The external interests may come from other sources and the learning may end when the activity is over. However, the learner may switch from external incentive to internal when there is a personal interest. For example, Norman was encouraged to use the computer by his brother; eventually he realized this is something he wanted to pursue on his own.

Late Life Adjustments of the Participants

The participants discussed three late life adjustments. These include adjustments to time, to one's family, and to loss, both physical health and social connection. These late life adjustments often become the internal or external impetus to begin SDL.

Adjustment to Time

One dominant aspect of life for these older adults is that there is more time. This has come about because of retirement, or because one's children have left home. There is the sense that these participants now have time to do what they want. Some have chosen to be at home and some have chosen to work. Regardless, one of the adjustments is this new expanse of time to pursue what they want. Much of their time is used to pursue SDL.

Robert has been retired for fourteen years. He has enjoyed this extra time in his life:

I had a job at [a nearby air force base] that was fairly pressurized the last 10 years of my life. And when I retired 14 years ago, I was ready to retire. And uh, I felt like all my life I had dealt with figures and finance and accounting and so forth like that. And it was just time that I relaxed and enjoyed, uh, retirement. And I do. I feel like that I get to do a lot of things that I never would have, had I continued working. And we had some retirement briefings, prior to retirement. And this doctor really impressed on me, that uh, not only, after you retire should you keep busy physically, but you should keep busy mentally. Because he said your mind is the same age as the rest of you. And if it is going down hill your mind will go down to a certain degree. And we all understand that. But you don't have to let it, go excessively, downhill, *so to me retirement is a really a chance to learn more and to enjoy what you learn* [emphasis added]. While you are working you don't have but certain amount of time to enjoy anything. But I enjoy what we do, and traveling, in fact, she, uh, tries to say sometime that I should have been a gypsy

[Hearty laughter]. But, I enjoy retirement, and I enjoy, I don't want to get old and incapable of things but I enjoy my life.

Robert does not want to have idle time. He has adjusted to this extra time by participating in activities that are meaningful for him, especially efforts of personal learning. He likes knowing that there are things to be done. Laughing, Robert's wife said that he feels you should never get caught up. "If you get caught up then that means you are at the end."

Norman was an early retiree. He retired at age 62; he has been retired for almost 22 years. This somewhat lengthy retirement takes on a career of its own. Although Norman has always been a busy man, his adjustment in retirement was to replace his normal job with freely chosen activities that center on intentional learning. One of his main learning activities concerns the computer; he spends around four hours a day on the computer. He discusses the importance of staying active: "Well, I keep doing something, whether it is accomplishing, whether I am accomplishing anything or not."

Betty's voice seems a little more urgent. She has been retired and her children have left home for some time. Rather than considering this as extra time, she seems to realize that there is a limit to this time. An adjustment for her is to use this time in ways that will help others learn, especially her grandchildren:

And I haven't learned it [referring to her search for truth] yet; I am still working on it [Laughter]. There is so much, I have things that I want to write and do and uh time is running out [spoken with a great deal of enthusiasm, hope, and positive attitude]. And I can't get the time to do all I want to do.

Similarly, an adjustment for Dora has become the realization that there is not much time left. She states seeing her great-grandchildren reminds her how short life is and that she will not get to see most of the events in their life:

Now I got two great grandchildren. One's a little girl and one's a little boy. And the little girl is three, and I am 80 years old. And I said, one day I said, "Well, you know it bothers me, and it makes me sad, I won't get to see her be a teenager."

And things like that, if you let it play on your mind, it would be depressing and it would upset you, but you have to live for the moment. And enjoy exactly what you got right now.

Dora has adjusted to the extra time in later life by continuing to work and spending time in her yard. Dora describes the enjoyment of leisure amidst of life of freely chosen activities. I had asked Dora, "What do you enjoy about it, what do you enjoy about your life now, would you say?" She responded, "Coming home in the afternoon, changing my clothes, and going into the yard. See you are interrupting my routine [Laughter]! You are messing up my routine! And working until dark." Wilbur and Dora are the only two participants that continue to work for income. Although neither of them has to work, they have adjusted to retirement by continuing to work. They like to work, they want to work, and they continue to do a good job. This is retirement for them.

Sue is the oldest participant in the study. Even with a recent fall and a four-month cast she stays very active. I asked her about her life and what she has learned. She stated slowly and thoughtfully, "Well, satisfaction, interest, I am never bored. Never time to be bored." Sue has adjusted to the extra time in her life by pursuing various learning projects such as taking classes, caring for animals, and even returning to work.

Hattie tells how she continues to be involved in her previous job. Rather than sitting at home, Hattie has adjusted to retirement by staying active with her former work. This work meant a lot to her and she has learned how to work with adults with disabilities. Now she volunteers on a regular basis at the adult mental health clinic. Charlie, similar to Norman, has been retired for over 20 years from a regular paying job. Charlie has adjusted to this lengthy retirement by spending his time with a variety of activities. Charlie is a busy man filling this long awaited time with interesting pursuits of self-directed learning. He discusses one activity he has gotten a lot out of:

Well, [my friend], he was the Chief Judge, uh, he appointed me Chief Registrar. But before that though, I had been working the election, I have been working the election since I retired. And uh, I have been a bailiff since I have retired. I go to court; we had court this past week.... So I just naturally came into it, and now they are counting on me, more than anybody. They used to have only two workers, and I got 12. I do more than all the rest of them put together, I guess.

With detail Thelma discusses the many activities in which she is a part. Similar to many women who raised children during the 1950's, she worked mainly at home and rarely held a paying job. Thelma's adjustment occurred when her children were grown and left the home. This was similar to retirement. She discusses the variety of activities she has been a part of such as bridge clubs, the Woman's Club, Church, and various committees. She describes this life, a life so busy that she needs a day off from all of her volunteer activities:

And then we stay at the hospital and we eat lunch. And by then I think I am going to sit down on the couch. And [Laughter], and then on Tuesday night, I don't do, I

am not a very good housekeeper, that does not interest me, in the least. But maybe I will do something in the yard, and then usually on Tuesday night, usually this Better Home Town thing meets, so that takes my Tuesday. And then on Wednesday every other week, I play bridge on Wednesday.... Oh, and then Thursday, well every other Thursday we had a bridge club. There is not but four of us anyhow, and I play bridge on Thursday. Then Friday is usually a free day.

Each of these activities provides meaningful learning situations for Thelma. She is constantly thinking about new projects and ways to improve the community.

Adjustment in Family Relations

Each participant discussed their family and their various family members. The participants especially spoke about their children and grandchildren. There is also the lingering influence of one's parents. Every participant spoke about various aspects of their parents' lives. Many of them discussed how this has helped them in the adjustments and changes in late life. Robert's wife was answering a question concerning health. She is very motivated to learn more about physical activities such as walking and aerobics.

When I asked her about this she began to speak about her Mother:

I want to be as young as I can, and as active and alert as I can, as long as I live.

Because my mother, I base it on my mother, she sat in a chair for years and when she got up into her 80's she got where she was just walking with a little shuffle [holds hands in front with little motions back and forth like a shuffle]. I said I don't ever want that to happen to me [high voice]. So the longer you stay active and keep your mind active, the better off you are [Silence].

Dora talked about the “chair” in her den and the role this plays in self-directed learning activities. But she also, discussed how much the way this chair was similar to a chair her mother had. Piles and mounds of books and various activities of learning surround this chair. Wilbur also spoke of the influence of his parents. “My mother always told me, she said, you always treat people like want to be treated, my Daddy did too [talking really fast], my Daddy, was just identical same as I was, he said you treat people like you want to be treated.”

All of the participant’s parents have been deceased for many years. Yet, it was interesting that these older adults were speaking of their parents as if they were very much alive. Many of the references to their parent’s life were for a much earlier time. One must consider the continuing impact of a parent when the child becomes an older adult. This impact is also part of the adjustment to late life.

One of the most intriguing aspects of human development is the changing role of a parent and his or her child. This is also an interesting dynamic as the parent becomes older and when the child is an adult. Several participants spoke about a child who is now an adult, who continues to do something the parent disapproves of. These older adults have had to reconsider and learn in this relationship with their adult children. Robert shares a personal story:

I can give you a prime example, right in our family, our son has been taught conservative practices. And she, his wife, has lived in the other world...Her life, and I don’t know whether you can reach her or not. Because she feels her way of life - if you make it you spend it...[A discussion about this. Robert’s wife is nodding and agreeing]. They moved into a new home three years ago and I will

give you one example, a year later, they decided they did not like the paint in the room so they repainted it. To me, a paint job is good for a few years [emotional tone], and uh, I am not criticizing her, I am just saying that is her way of life.

Similarly, an adjustment for Sue has been teaching responsibility to her adult children and grandchildren. One of her grandchildren had some difficulty getting a job as well as assuming responsibility for his children.

All of the participants spoke fondly of their children and family. Many of the participants spoke fondly of the impact of having a friendship with an adult child. Hattie discusses how close she feels with her family. This positive adjustment in late life with one's family adds to the richness of one's life:

Ooh, if it was left up to them, they would all be here [Laughter], grandchildren, they love to come. And uh, I enjoy them when they do come. Well my kids tell me I give the "grands" more attention than I did them. Or do them now; I said, well you must remember, you know they are younger. Ya'll are older now, so ya'll on your own. So I have to kind of give in to them when they come. They all give me that name that I do more for them, than I did for them...Oh, they're my heart, and I am their heart, we just love each other [Laughter]. Ah, we's just all mingles right in there together. And, if anything goes wrong with me, they are here. And if anything goes wrong with one of them, I am there. That is just the way it goes. We all real close. Real close.

This closeness among family provides for enjoyable learning opportunities about the members of one's family and their activities. Sports, hobbies, various activities, and

careers of family members provide new experiences in self-directed learning for these older adults. One person stated, "I am learning a lot about soccer."

Hattie discloses an important topic in her conversation. Even in small town, rural America, families are spread all over the world. One of the adjustments for Hattie has been when her family moved to different areas. One of the adjustments to family as an older adult is the separation from one's adult children and grandchildren. Our country is extremely mobile, one can move to various parts of the country for work with ease. This often leaves behind parents of adult children who never get used to this separation from their children:

No, honey, they are not all here. See I got a son that live in New York and I don't see his children. They all up there. And then I got a daughter that live in Miami, and her children's down there. And my daughter live here, I got a daughter that live in Atlanta, she got two. And uh, one finish college last year at Ft. Valley, and the other one will finish in December. And uh, at Ft. Valley, this year. And so she didn't have but two kids.

Hattie has learned about New York, Florida, and other places where her children and grandchildren live.

Having grandchildren is an adjustment in late life. These offspring can have a positive strong influence in the life of the older adult. Because one of Betty's grandchildren was leaving for college, this motivated her to prepare a synopsis of her search for knowledge and to include a list of questions she feels are important:

Well, [my grandson] was about to graduate and he is about to go away to Stanford and California culture and all of that. And I wanted so much to be able to

communicate a little bit of what I had found out. But it is so hard. But in 2000, I ...put together a list of questions that I think parents and children should talk about. These are issues faced in everyday life that every person needs to have his own opinion about. Of course they will all be opposite in many cases even within the same family. And for that reason many families don't ever bring these subjects up. But I think it's important that they should and ...[This is dated January 5, 2000.] First question: Should parents purposely speak to their children about where they stand on issues of daily living, such as sexual conduct, minority rights, substance abuse, various moral issues? Second, should parents give children a spoken or written explanation of their beliefs? Third, about the nature of God, what is the nature of God? Describe it. Fourth, do events occur with a purpose following a plan or does all happen by chance? And fifth, what is the nature of reality? Is substance solid or just mass energy fields? What is life, when does life begin in a human? What part of a human survives death? Is there life in apparently inanimate matter?

During the interview with Bill, I asked him what was important to him at this time. He was clear that his three grandchildren are very important and he is willing to make sacrifices for them. He has made a variety of adjustment in late life because of the influence of these grandchildren:

That is just money I donated, and I proud of, I was able to do it. But at the same time, she got a future in front of her, because she is in shape now to get a job to take care of herself.

Wilbur and his wife discussed the close relationship they had with their grandchildren. They all had nicknames that they use today. Wilbur describes how much joy and pride his grandchildren give him today.

Well, a lot of times, I went in stores and somebody going to tell me, you know Wilbur...Somebody over there will say, "You know his grandchildren they are going to Harvard, one at Southern Tech, and one at VSU."...And then they go to joking me then you know, but I feel real good about that.

From this strong connection to their grandchildren, Wilbur and his wife have learned about careers in law, engineering, and education.

Betty states her main reason for self-directed learning revolves around her deceased parents, children, and grandchildren. She discusses the adjustments she has made in her family as an older adult. She demonstrates how one's family can be a motivation for personal learning. Betty showed me a notebook that was full of information she had collected:

Well it's my own personal library. And to be honest nobody has ever looked at that Donny. This is something that I don't talk about, because it is just a groping. And a trying to find out what is real and what is true. And I especially wanted to know that. Because I was so confused after the rural upbringing that I had [All of this is said with emotion and slow, deliberate speech.] All of the strong faith of my mother and my father and...I don't know if you want to go into depth into this right now, or not. But that pertains as to why I am trying to get this together and why this was important to me. Well, I wanted to know, *what was of value to teach my children* [high tone]! I'd realized you know as they had left babyhood and

started reading voraciously everything and anything that there were certain values that I should make explicit. Not just expect them to pick it up. *But to teach them*, and I did not know what my own values were. I was going back and forth between what is so and what isn't [laughter]. And I did not have time to find out in those early years. And not until, actually, two of them had graduated and other one was way up there, did I really have a time to try to sort out what I believed and how I felt. And uh, of course, it was too late and they were already grown. *But then they would have children and so I went at it, and it was very, very absorbing* [emphasis added]. That was the one thing I wanted to do above all others, learn all of this and put it together. And the thing about it is, my, ideas keep changing.

Adjustment to Loss

Physical health. The most pervasive topic of discussion with each participant and in each interview was the topic of health. Often these adjustments become the impetus or motivation for SDL. Robert's wife discussed the importance of using your mind. "From the standpoint of keeping your mind active, I believe that if you quit using it altogether. It's going to be just like anything else, you won't have as good use of it as you should have." I asked what other things she is doing to remain healthy:

Oh, exercise...I am doing aerobics twice a week, and then walk in-between times...I walk out near the hospital; we usually go in to [town]. The reason I used to do that, we used to walk on the dirt road, but the mosquitoes. And we walked more then, than we do now, we walked like two miles. Now I just do a mile...I started having a problem, a sciatic nerve problem... Yes, doctor told me to cut

back on it. Exercise brings more oxygen to your brain [with emphasis], keeps it functioning.

Robert and his wife state they have learned a lot about their health and their body as a result of these activities. However they continually adjust to the loss of what they used to have:

Physically, of course there is things that you miss that you could do when you were younger. Uh, in sports, a lot of things that you are just going to miss. Uh, mentally, I, there's not a big change, in some things, you can be my age, and still feel like about things like you did.

Norman discusses his health. His rather pessimistic tone sets the standard for the way most older adults view their health and aging:

And uh, I, uh, last couple of years I did a little mentoring work at school, but, uh, I have difficulty with a lot of children. So I gave that up. Hearing, their voices just don't carry. I can't uh, completely correspond with them. Cause the hearing aids just don't get it there.

He goes on to discuss how hearing problems can limit one's social world and the loss of agility:

I used to enter a model [train] contest rather regularly when I was younger. As I have gotten older I, it doesn't show very much. But it shows enough that my tremors, that I can't, it takes me a lot longer. And sometimes it is frustrating because I cannot fit it right where I want it to be without shifting it around. But in earlier years I entered a lot of contests. Model contests, and I won a lot of ribbons.

He made one statement that each participant said in various ways: “Well, the problem with me is that [laughter] my memory loss [laughter], lot of it gets away from me. Can’t recall it [voice tone changes].” These adjustments to the change in the physical body often motivate the person to plan ways to learn more about improving their health.

Betty discusses her health. First, she talks about the impact of not remembering as well as you used to. Eventually she shared about a specific degenerative disorder:

Well, it is a limitation. Because you are limited physically in what you can actually do and there is much fatigue that goes along with it...And that is uh, has been hard. Actually, uh, because it, limits me so physically that I don’t get things done. And uh, it being tired and having to make yourself do something. It takes ten times as long to do it, as when you say, “Oh let me get into this” when you have the zest and the energy. So that makes a great big difference. The physical things, and you can’t find, there are very few people like [someone I know] that know, knew how to manage her health. And plan and do and will power to stick with it. Ride eight miles on a bicycle a day, there are very few.

During the interview with Sue I asked her what was motivating her to learn. She said, “Good health! Good health and activity. Or, more strengthened in getting myself back on track. For four months, I have lost a lot of strength. Because there were so many things I couldn’t do. But it’s coming back.” Sue also described what it was to live with an illness:

Well, I had difficulties trying to live [laughter]! I am a cancer survivor. Just after my husband died, I found out I had lymphoma. And uh, that was pretty rough, the chemotherapy. Man, it knocks the socks off of you. But I survived it, I was very

fortunate, and had to get it every year, the cancer check. And back in '80 I had a case of pneumonia and was in intensive care for a few days. But I was fortunate enough to survive. So I said I am living on borrowed time, I appreciate it. But uh, as far as learning is concerned, there is always something to learn.

Sue is motivated to learn because of an adjustment she had to make because of a loss in physical use. She appreciates the time she has left, and she is motivated to personally learn as much as she can.

Bill discusses life as an older adult. He states that as you get older “you have less performance...and it is inconvenient [sic].” This loss of physical performance, this “inconvenience” forces the older adult to adjust. These adjustments result in SDL in new ways:

Thinking, thinking. You can't think as well. You cannot uh, do the things you used to do with your family. Because the things you used to do for your family. You can't think well enough, times roll ahead, that you can see as you could. You see the mistakes but you can't correct them.

One of the biggest frustrations with older adults is forgetting. Bill discusses this:

I got two walking sticks. That is a cane. Sometime you can put it at the door. Cause you are putting it where you know it's at. I just missed this door and put it another place, and you will forget where it is at. Or you can go to the refrigerator and get something. And somebody call you on the telephone or somebody speak to you. Before you can take care of this here, and get back before what you started to do, you done forgot what you are supposed to do. That is where you can tell you are slipping...*That means that activity whatever you are doing, you can't do*

as much of that as you used to do...But at the same time, I realize that the older a person get the weaker he get [emphasis added].

I asked Bill to describe what it is like to be an older person. He stated positive and negative ideas:

Well, it's good! I think, to be old man. *But it's a lot of inconvenient to be an old man [emphasis added].* Now what I am fixing to tell you, I have problems getting by, not getting by, getting about. As far as living, than I used to, but my health is going bad on me.... *And I have learned that you have got to adjust to your own condition. I learned that [emphasis added].*

Bill's "inconvenient" life is also the motivation for adjustment. These adjustments also involve personal learning. Bill dinner table was covered with pamphlets and periodicals he had been studying from hypertension to healthy eating habits.

Hattie states that she feels good but that she can notice some change. She discusses how the change in one's health brings about adjustments. These adjustments are dealt with by personal learning and reading about what to do:

Well, you just keep up with, you know, how life change. And what you are supposed to do is to keep yourself going. And I kind of stay within that [emphasis added]. And I also read that now, to take a vitamin E tablet and that will keep you from having heart attack. And that is another thing I take every day, every day...Well, a lot of that came from my health book. Uh huh, and you know how you can pick up health books, and then I get some of that through mail. Just like now, where I get my medicine, vitamins from. I get a little book like that every month or something. And it tell you what different vitamins are for.

Dora stated the most common statement that I heard about one's physical health. She states the main change for older adults is that everything just slows down:

Well, you begin to slow down [emphasis added]. And you realize you are not physically able to do what you been, even a few years ago. And I will give you an example. After [my husband] first died; now he has been gone 14 years. And I was not working at the nursing home. I could get out there and work all day long. I mean all day! I might come in the house and eat lunch at three o'clock...

Sometime I would come in and take me a bath and eat and go back out! I mean that was refreshing, see. And uh, but I can't do it now. *The body slows down, it just can't hold out* [emphasis added].

This adjustment to slowing down becomes a personal lesson for the older adult. They learn new ways to do things and they begin to participate in new activities.

I also asked Wilbur about his current activities, and what he is doing to keep healthy. After being diagnosed with high blood pressure they adjusted through SDL on nutrition:

Well, I figure when I get out there and work every day I exercise [laughter]. My job requires it all the time. I feel like I get enough exercise out there... Well, right now, I am on a low fat diet because of blood pressure. [Some discussion about this, the doctor told him.]... You are given literature by the doctor, and then a lot of your medication come with a lot of literature, *so we study all of this stuff... But then after he came down with this problem, I started studying more* [emphasis added]. You know with the labels on the bottles of oil, and using a lot of olive oil instead of just regular cooking oil... But I prefer the olive oil.

Charlie has adjusted to becoming older through SDL on how to improve his health. “Oh I get up, we walk sometime in the afternoon. We do our, walking, and now that it is turned real cool, we will do a lot more walking... Well, in the hot summertime, but when it gets cool we walk three miles.” He continues this dialogue with a focus on healthy eating habits. Clarence has read and studied a lot about one’s health especially concerning nutrition and exercise. This adjustment to late life involves the application of things he has intentionally learned about nutrition and exercise:

The first thing is uh, you are what you eat. Your diet over the long haul. You should have a good diet, and leave off so many sweets and fats, I have a weakness for chocolate, so I have to use my will power to... Uh, fruits. I eat an apple, I have eaten a banana every day I know for 30 years. And even when I was a boy I eat bananas. [Laughter] I don’t know if that has anything to do with it or not. But it does have food value in it, potassium and different things, and uh, you got to have potassium. So, uh, ...I grow my own vegetables, and uh, for the most part they are free from pesticides, I try to use as little as I can, and uh, and I am never sick. See I never have colds or anything like that. I have only had one cold since I was in Germany during World War Two.

Many in this generation of depression era cohort were cigarette smokers. Charlie like many of his friends was a smoker; his decision to quit earlier has probably extended his life. He learned about the negative effects of smoking by randomly reading an article in *Reader’s Digest* during the 1950’s. This serendipitous event and its ensuing activity of changing a negative habit turn into a significant SDL project.

Social connection. One of the significant losses for older adults is that of their friends and especially their partner. Thelma describes this:

Now I will go out and eat by myself. I will go to [a local restaurant], and I will sit back there in the bar area, cause, people come in and out, that I know back there.

You can see better back there and all the people that come by speak to you so.

Betty discusses some of the things that have been lost. These are important aspects of her life that can never be replaced. They have had to give up camping, square dancing, and move closer to town.

Well being an older adult, it is much worse in, uh, terms of health and not being able to, uh, be agile. And do the things you have been accustomed to doing. We of course had to give up our, we enjoyed square dancing, [my husband] and I both loved that for many years... We camped with a group that square danced, so we would camp at places with big dances. And people from all over Georgia and other states and we would go down to, uh, where is it, Lakeland, Florida. *And that was so much fun, so enjoyable; we had to give that up... When you are older you are, become even more isolated than you have been before...* [emphasis added]

We would go on trips, and on a lot trips that didn't have anything to do with camping or square dancing and we don't now. [My husband] has, he, he, can't drive out of town any more. His responses are so slow that he mustn't drive in traffic. And he always did all of the driving and I have taken that over. And it hurts him when he goes on a trip when he knows he can do it better than I can [laughter]. So, uh, we don't go. And also, my health got so bad that it was hard to

drive even 60 miles and I'd be so exhausted. *So our trips have been cut out, and there is nothing that replaces that* [emphasis added].

These difficult losses involve adjustment. This is a personal reconciliation to a more satisfactory state or a resolve to become comfortable in this new situation. This practical SDL is necessary for these older adults to age successfully. Also in Betty's case she has adjusted by spending more time on pursuing personal learning projects.

All of the participants have been married and half have been widowed. This is a significant loss that is hard to describe. These participants discuss the difficulty of this time and its adjustment.

Norman was sitting in the chair facing the tape recorder. He was in front of a window; I could see tall Georgia pine trees outlining the blue sky. Looking straight ahead and hardly moving he talked with dignity and meaning about the absence of his wife:

Well, I don't think, if you don't have a computer, or you are not going to get a computer, I don't see the point in taking classes. I do know one couple here and they can afford a computer, uh, who have taken classes who use the library all the time. But of course it is a man and wife. *For me there is nobody here* [emphasis added]. Uh, and I am not going to sit around and procrastinate what may happen or how I feel and uh, get sorry for myself, I don't intend to do that.

He continues with this thought of being widowed and being alone:

Well, I guess for me it [learning about the computer] is uh, it is one of those things, like I said a while ago, that keeps me from sitting around here and wondering what is going to happen next, what may befall me there. *There is nobody here to talk to* [emphasis added]. And uh, of course I have the best of the,

uh, reproduction system on my computer, and I listen to uh, uh, uh, a lot of discs while I am working with the computer.

Norman is clear that the death of his wife brought about a change or adjustment in his life. This adjustment to the emptiness of having no one around became the incentive to assume responsibility to learn about computers.

Sue was very happy in her second marriage; they had lived together 20 years and had one child. She moved to south Georgia with her husband and now she is here to stay. Since he died she described her life as a “lonely freedom.” Similar to other participants, this seems to be a loss that stays with the person. Her husband has been dead for 10 years. She describes what it is like with this loss:

It is awfully lonesome. Evening comes on and you are sitting here and you hear a sound and for a second you are thinking, he moved the chair...Hard to realize that he is gone. You know. He may be watching over me. I sort of feel that. But, in the flesh no...*And it's awfully lonesome, it's an adjustment* [emphasis added]. I say, well, look at all the things I do have; everywhere I look at things he started.

What was this adjustment? For Sue it became learning to live alone. Rather than giving in to the grief and loneliness of being widowed she has learned how to continue with her life and to spend more time on self-directed learning activities.

Bill has been widowed since his wife died in 1986. Eventually he moved into a smaller home; he gave his previous home to his son. Although he is a happy and positive man, he described what it is like to be without her. Bill also states that he has to do so many things that she used to do. “I had to learn to do all that myself cause I ain't got

nobody to do that for me.” Referring to medicine and directions, part of his adjustment was learning to take care of himself instead of depending on his wife:

It’s been quite difficult, quite difficult. I adjust to it, and I am still working on it...What do I miss? Housekeeping, advice, how to manage my little money. I had help to do that. So after her leaving, me and the children was able to communicate, we got along. We did everything on an agreeable basis, we didn’t have no differences. So, it worked out good. And I don’t’ think I will ever marry anybody else.

Dora has been widowed for fourteen years. She is a busy woman, active in the community, and has a very positive attitude. Our conversation turned to her husband:

Well, I guess, I really don’t know how to explain it. It’s, it’s, because it’s [takes a deep breath] I think I have used a way of life expression too much. But it is, and it is just my life and just me alone. And uh, you make yourself satisfied with it. You don’t let the emptiness bother you. And you talk about me going out in the yard. And people saying, “You know I go in the house, at five o’clock and we have supper and all this.” And I say, “*There is nothing in the house to go in the house for!*” *There is nobody there to talk to!* [Emphasis added]. Might as well be outside listening to the birds! So...Oh, it was a long hard, uh, process of grief and being alone. And uh, letting your heart heal where things didn’t make you sad.

Dora’s adjustment was to continue to be involved in activities she enjoys. From gardening to reading, part of her adjustment was to continue learning activities.

Charlie discussed the difficulty of becoming a caregiver with his wife in the early stages of Alzheimer’s. “Yeah! The house, I can’t keep it up and do everything else.”

Well, main thing I do, I pray that the Lord will give me the strength you know. To stay in it for the long haul you know. To look after her, to give me the health. And right attitude and patience, that is the number one thing, is patience. Give me the patience to look after her, and so far, I have made it good. Do it good....Yeah, but I would be so lonesome without her. You know [Soft laughter].

Part of Charlie's adjustment has been to learn what he can about Alzheimer's disease. He takes several publications on health and one especially on Alzheimer's. He reads the material and makes decisions for his wife.

This "lonely freedom" as a result of losing friends and especially one's mate is a difficult adjustment. Although there is loneliness, there is also the freedom to pursue various activities of learning.

In summary, each of the participants expressed a positive attitude; they emphasized they enjoy this time of their life. For example, I was asking Norman about being an older adult. He said, "Well, that depends on your health, and of course, uh, aging process, that works more on some people as they get older than others. Uh, uh, you have to kind of keep a positive attitude. And, uh, not let some things kind of get you down, so to speak." Norman describes the adjustment to the difficulties of late life. For many of the participants the adjustment is the challenge of keeping a positive attitude. Yet the participants also spoke of depression and the difficulties of aging. Some shared some very difficult topics such as becoming widowed or losing one's children.

An important consideration for this sample of ten participants is their religious involvement. The south is traditionally known for a conservative and Christian

perspective. This sample talked a lot about their personal faith; each person during the interviews discussed religion. Perhaps one's religion provides a substantial basis for this positive adjustment.

Robert continually referred to his religious beliefs. During the conversation, it became obvious he and his wife devote a lot of time to reading and thinking about the Bible. Their faith gives them a reason to live and a goal to continue to learn:

It gives reason to your being a Christian, as far as I am concerned, the Bible does. And it has the way you should live, and how you should live, and the reason for life. As far as I am concerned I don't think that people are just put here for the temporary time that we live and that is all we ever have. Uh, I guess you might say, I believe in the hereafter. And so, uh, *I am studying for a permanent reason, rather than a temporal one* [emphasis added]. That is the way I feel about it.

It is obvious, this man's attitude about his life is also influenced by what he reads and understands from the Bible. His adjustments to the difficulty of late life are rooted in his faith.

Hattie's religious experience also adds substance to her adjustment. She believes the Lord is watching over her and helping her in every phase of her life:

All my life I have been in the church. And I am a clerk in my church. And uh, I have been in the church ever since my parents brought me up in church. And I brought my kids up in church. I got children singing in the choir, and I got one son that is a deacon. And uh, so they was raised up in the church. I was raised up in the church. And I uh, believe in the Lord. And uh, you can not do nothing without Him. Uh uh. And if you sit down and you want something to happen, you

talk to God about it first. And He will show you, He will show you things. And uh, but you got to be able to understand what is going on.

During the second interview with Wilbur, he held his Bible in his hands. I had just videotaped him explaining what the Bible meant to him. He states that God helps him with depression and that the Bible can forecast the future. I knew that they were a religious family so I asked him about his religious views:

Well, I will sit there and read the Bible even at home...But I read that Bible and by reading that Bible because it says study thyself and show thyself approved, and I do that. But the more you study, that Bible there, you will see things happen in the day that's coming right out of that Bible there.

Each of these participants has experienced a variety of change and adjustment. These adjustment centered around more time, one's family, loss in health, and loss in social connection. These older adults utilize personal learning in their adjustment.

The Rural Context of Older Adults

The participants discussed a variety of ways that living in this rural area has characterized their life, and by extension, how it has influenced their learning. Although most of the comments were positive there were also some negative issues. The positive comments focused around the quiet and simple atmosphere, nature, and the people. The negative comments centered on lack of resources.

Positive

These participants expressed an extremely positive outlook about living in this area. They referred to this town as a "small town." They never used the word "rural" rather they said "country" if they lived outside of the town. All of the participants except

for Sue have lived in this county for most of their lives. Three participants live in the country and seven live in or near the small town. Five of the participants were raised on a farm, usually without electricity and running water. The overall common attitude was that each person likes living here; three used the word “love” to describe life in this rural area. Thelma seems to summarize in one statement what many of the participants feel:

Cause you know it was fortunate to live in a small community, because you have access to everything. If I lived in a city, probably I would have never done all of this. Well, one, this you wouldn't have had the space. And two, you wouldn't have the close community here, like we have here.

This feeling of being fortunate, the access to all people, the space, and the close community are ideas that were repeated throughout the interviews. These are also concepts that can create a positive atmosphere for self-directed learning.

Charlie was also excited about living in this small town. He has lived here all of his life. When we were speaking about life in this town, he was completely positive describing the nature, the inhabitants, and raising children. His statement summarizes many of the thoughts of these participants:

I think it is the greatest place to raise children and the greatest place to live... You still have, they have, you can still go to concerts and things like that if you want to. They have the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra coming to Tifton you see. And I try to always go to that. And the Valdosta Arts, we used to have it here. You can do that if you want, you know. You can do that, but the air and water. Our water comes out of the, that is one of our biggest assets in south Georgia, is that Floridian Aquifer, down there and that water comes out... Yeah, and it is pure

water. Of course, it goes, down there in the water works, they put fluoride in it, I know that, and I believe they put a little bit of chlorine in it too. But, it's clean, good, good water to me. And the air we breathe it's fresh. Don't have any lines. Like this morning I went up and got a haircut and I was back home in 30 minutes from the time I left here...Went to the barbershop and just went in and sat down and the girl started cutting my hair. I come out and I wasn't gone but 30 minutes I don't think. And you can't do that in an urban area. And I don't like to be closed in.

As mentioned above, Charlie enjoys the simplicity of getting a haircut and getting back home in 30 minutes. Many of the participants discussed the quiet and simple atmosphere of living in a rural area.

Quiet and simple atmosphere. Many participants responded they are glad to live here because it is a quiet place and it is simple. Small towns are known to be quiet, perhaps driving teenagers crazy; it is also the melody of life for others. The quiet allows someone to become familiar with other sounds. Some discussed how you could identify the sound of a friend's car driving by. However, for many this quiet is also the right atmosphere for learning.

Robert and his wife have lived on their plot of land all of his life. It is 12 miles from the county seat and trees and fields surround them. I asked them to describe what it is like to live here:

Oh, you just at, uh, relaxed, relaxed atmosphere. No pressures, and you hear the sounds of the birds singing and you have the peaceful scenery....When we go to Atlanta, when we get back out to about Jonesboro, she says, "Whew, I am glad I

don't live up here!" [Laughter]. We like the quiet and the peace; away from the hustle and bustle and being under tension ever time you get out and ride a little ways. It's to me, though, it's home, it's all I have ever known for any period of time. We like to travel, but we like to come back to our little peaceful abode.

Many of the participants would contrast and compare living in this small town to living in a large town. Hattie discussed how much she enjoyed living in this small town.

Well, I walk. I walk somewhere everyday; just get out and walk. Like go down to visit my children's. Just like instead of driving to visit them.... I love it here. It's a small town. And you know everybody, everybody know you, and what I mean, I just like it. I just don't like a big town.... In a big town...you got to wonder which way you gonna go to get to that place and all that kind of stuff. *I know this place* [emphasis added].

The simplicity of a rural area is evident in seeing familiar objects – people, roads, and landmarks. Usually everything someone sees is recognizable; if not you can stop and ask somebody. Thelma explains again why she enjoys living in this small town:

Well, I like living in [this town] because I can go to the store. The store is only five minutes away, or 10 minutes away, if I need something from the store. And if you lived in a city, then you know it might be miles before you can find a "Jiffy Store." And here we got one on every corner or a grocery store. But that, you know, and if you lived out in a neighborhood then you don't have all those stores. I know I go to [my daughter] and you just can't go to the you know, 10 minutes to find you a loaf of bread or something. You have to travel quite a way to go. So I like that, and I like the people, and of course some of the people I like and some of them I don't. But that's [laughter], I don't have to like everybody.

The simplicity and quiet of this town and area was a repeated theme in these conversations. Like a teacher setting the atmosphere for learning, this peace and quiet characterizes the context for their learning.

Nature. Living in a small town and rural area places the individual closer to nature. Farmland and extensive pine forests surround this rural county. Participants discussed the impact of living in this agrarian area. During the discussion with Betty, you could see bird feeders, bushes, and shrubs. During the conversation various birds and squirrels interrupted us:

Yeah, we have doves and sparrows and oh several kinds of red birds...But we have a great problem in that our squirrels insist on getting to that bird feeder. And somehow they are smarter than we are. Jump right up there all the way over to that! [Discussion about the activity of squirrels]. But we enjoy watching them...They will eat and eat from the ground. They will get up there and throw it out and then eat until their hearts content. Then they will go over and get a sip of water.

Sue never wants to live in a city or crowded area again. Her mobile home is completely surrounded by trees and bushes. She describes what it is like to live in the country:

Well, you can hear the birds singing in the morning. I don't hear my neighbor's radios...I just like being in the country all this nature around me. Woods back here getting so thick, I am going to put my goats back there. And they will clean it out gradually.

She continues the description of her area and describes the impact of being close to nature. She is emphatic that she learns by observing nature:

Well...all nature teaches you! The birds with their little babies and how they faithfully carry through until they are...By the time they are through raising a little nest...And I think there are some hummingbirds...Cause I have some of these ...hibiscus...I see the hummingbirds, they are coming up...Garlic blooms are good for bringing in the hummingbirds...But one of my neighbors used to have cats...And they would catch my birds.

She feels close to nature and even depends on nature. She often gets food from the back yard:

I generally have two eggs every morning for breakfast, because I have nice fresh eggs. I got my own here. And milk, I like milk. I will drink tea, but I got allergic to coffee. Coffee started bothering me, so I drink tea...I can't kill a chicken with it looking at me, I can dress him. But I get somebody else to...Usually we share a chicken. I got good neighbors. Yeah, I get somebody else to.... So I get somebody else to chop! And once they quit fluttering why they are good.... You can see my place is rich soil here. Man it grows, you can see it grow. And I have never bought fertilizer, but, I feed my animals and when I clean the kennels I put that round the ornamentals. And when I clean the goat pen I can put that round the plants in the garden. But chicken manure has to be, has to be, uh, composted because it is hot it will burn. It's like horse and chicken manure it will burn. So you compost it until you get all that heat out of it. And then it is wonderful food

for plants, and man it makes things grow. In fact [laughter] your biggest job is to try to cut them back. This place is overgrown it is a jungle.

Dora describes what it is like for her to live in this rural area. “Wide open spaces, clean air. And uh, get outside, and especially early in the morning. The birds are singing and the air is cool and pure. And it’s, it’s just, it’s just a feeling you can’t have anywhere else [laughter].”

Similarly, Thelma describes what it has been like to live in this area. She dwells on how she grew up. “Well, I just have always had I guess, I grew up on a farm. And that was just growing things, was just, part of me.” Several of the participants were raised on farms in the 1930’s without electricity and running water. She continues these thoughts later in the conversation.

So I have, I think living in a small town, in a rural place. And of course since we, uh, we lived on a farm, we worked on a farm...So, but we picked cucumbers, and I would ride around and look at the cotton. And I thought, gosh, they, I thought how in the world would they have this much cotton...But I just, but, that, and we used to, we called it swapping work, you know if we filled a barn today then tomorrow if your neighbor needed filling a barn then they would come help you. And then you would go help them. Of course our barn filling day was on Tuesday see, and you would have different days of the week that you filled the barns cause you used the same help...And then we had a peach orchard...And [the house] had a well on the back porch and a grapevine out there, cause I can remember playing on that grapevine...I think it is wonderful to have experienced that...it just makes a difference.

Dora, Robert, and Sue live on a farm. Dora, Charlie, and Sue are active gardeners. Norman, Betty, Charlie, Bill, Wilbur, and Hattie live in a neighborhood in the city limits. Yet, even their homes had large lots, views of trees, and fields. Robert, Sue, Betty, Bill, Charlie, Thelma, Dora, and Wilbur have all been gardeners in the past. Only two of the ten participants did not discuss either growing up on a farm or living on a farm during their life, Norman and Hattie.

Many of their activities of learning involved nature, especially gardening and working in the yard. Being around nature, being so close to the outdoors, seeing trees and sky helps to set a positive atmosphere for learning.

People - a sense of community. The participants discussed how their neighbors, acquaintances, and friends in this rural area were a source for self-directed learning. These people also form an integral part of this rural life. More than just a resource for knowledge, people are part of this dynamic community. Although not as crowded as urban areas, people in rural areas may be closer in other ways. This closeness, this sense of familiarity with others, helps to create as Charlie says, “A great place to live.” The participants brought up several topics. They feel closeness and a sense of community and they know they can learn from one another.

One of the main issues concerning community is the notion that help is always available from others. I asked Robert and his wife to describe what it was like to live in this area and what would they miss if they moved into town: “We would miss all the people in the neighborhood. You are like one big family; here in this community... We all go to the same church right here in this community.” Robert continues this thought: “You

have a closer relationship, even though you live further apart. People in the country tend to more or less, bind together.”

Robert repeats these ideas with ways that local churches add to the life of the community:

In our church, I guess a lot of churches do, before each service we give an invitation for prayer. And in that, they will bring up a certain family that is having problems and that we need to help in some way. So, nowadays, it's changed a lot. It used to, if a man got sick, and he couldn't start his crop, all his neighbors would go in and plow his fields and plant his crops for him. That has changed over the years, somewhat. But there is still a desire to help your neighbor, and to help out the people in the community. I think more so, than there is in the urban areas, because they just don't know as much about each other. As we do, and, it's just a closer relationship, really [Silence].

Norman feels comfortable in his neighborhood and knows that he can get help if he needs something:

Mostly the people are friendly, and uh, I live in a very nice neighborhood. And I have some neighbors that are really neighbors. And uh ... Well, they kind of keep up with how I am a doing. And if there is something wrong they would be willing to feel like to help me out. And in fact they have, one time or another... And things like driving me when I had to have some medication uh, like, well, hernia repair. Bring me food, fresh produce, and things like that.

Norman also spoke about the impact of a friend on learning the computer. Any time he needed some help, his friend would come over to his house to help solve a problem on Norman's computer.

Sue appreciates living in this area of Georgia. Having grown up in a crowded town in Florida, she notices the difference:

Oh, like I told you, if you are going to be old, Georgia is the place to be. Because everybody is so nice...Florida is...uh, too much like a big city. This is like the open country. You go in the grocery store, and uh, well one time I was in the, for an example, I stopped in one of the dollar stores, and I had some rather bulky packages in there. And a young lady, she had a wagon, she came out about the time I did. She saw me starting to put them in the car, she stopped her wagon, and she said, "Let me help you" [high voice]...And I got such nice neighbors here. They help me out. I found a great deal of friendship, course you got to be a friend in return. Now that is why I like the chickens, cause I got plenty of eggs. And I can do something in return for vegetables, and the fellow on this side is a carpenter. He built the ramp for me, course I paid him. He charged me very reasonable and helped me get made up.

Many of the participants discussed that they felt close to people in this community. A variety of small organizations and clubs within these communities also promote these feelings of closeness. Dora describes one of the activities she is involved in: "Well, we meet once a month. And, well, we don't meet July and August. Two months I think we don't meet. But it's a fellowship. And you gain strength from people."

Dora describes this get together of older adults that is sponsored by her church: “It’s, it brings a lots of joy! And uh, uh, pass and repass, speaking to people and seeing.”

Dora continues to describe her close feelings to the people in this community. These people include family, church, and activities with others. She describes the depth of relationships one can have within some of these organizations, such as the “ladies in the church” or one’s family:

Well, it’s having your family around you, and, and like I am saying we eat lunch every Sunday together. And see them, in between, or talk on the phone. But, sometimes I see them; I go by and get [my grandson] on Wednesday nights. And we go to church, and uh, that is just fun to me...They are people that have uh, the same beliefs, and way of life that you have. And you feel comfortable being around them. And uh, if you were in trouble, I think they would come to your aid. I would go to theirs...We have the Senior Adult group at the church. And then, that we are real close group. And uh, but, uh, if any of them have family problems, or death in the family, why, uh, we all, everybody goes to their aid. Uh, the other day, one of my friends, her mother-in-law died. Her husband is already deceased and her mother-in-law died. And she was in Camilla, and uh, so I knew they would be coming home that night. So I fixed supper and took around there. And, and she said, Dora, “That was better than anything you could have done.” So, just, having that meal there for them, after they had been gone all day. And come back. So there is lots of them like that, that I help do. If somebody has been sick.

Social clubs provide another platform for even deeper relations. Thelma is currently in three bridge clubs and one of these has lasted for 40 years:

Oh, it's just, our bridge club is very close. And you know, when they have a death or something, we always fix the meal, that night. And then...when some of them's children got married, of course now it is grandchildren, but anyway we would all have a party and go together. And just, you know, it has been a real influence to me to know...And then you can go there, and it [bridge] is some type of recreation that you can do.

Another interesting dynamic of the rural community is that "everyone knows you." Each participant discussed how nice it was that people recognized you and that people knew you. This familiarity promotes a comfortable atmosphere. Hattie states, "I love it here. It's a small town and you know everybody, everybody know you. And what I mean, I just like it...I know this place."

Wilbur discusses how a trip to the local gas station turned into a prayer meeting at the cash register:

Yeah, I attend church every Sunday, and then what I do, I will help a lot of people. That seem like to me that they cannot help their self. And I do have some that have a lot of trust in me. Uh, and [directed toward wife] can I tell this? I walked in a place about two or three months ago, and I bought gas. And when I bought this gas, this lady, she said, she was way down. And she said, "Wilbur, I am going to ask you something, will you pray for me?" I stopped right then, and it was, five or six of us in there. And we held hands and we prayed for her. And

later on in that afternoon, when I went home, she called, and asked me to pray for her again.

Thelma describes another perspective of life in a rural community. Because there are fewer people, you can get to know many people. Several of the participants described how you wave to each car, regardless if you know them or not. Even the local grocery stores can become places of interaction. This is especially true in this county because there is just one large grocery store. This closeness helps to promote an atmosphere where all classes and races intermingle:

Well, I think it [living here] is wonderful. It gives you great opportunities that you would not have if [you] lived in a city. Because you would be in an area, I guess, you would not, you would live in an area that the same, uh, type folks of you, middle class or whatever lived. And here you have contacts with all different kinds. And I think that makes a difference.

The closeness that everyone feels toward one another is also a positive atmosphere for self-directed learning. If you need to know something, people feel the freedom to talk to a neighbor or someone in the community that knows the solution.

Negative

Although most of the comments from the participants were clearly positive, there were some negative comments about living in a rural and small town community. Most of these comments centered on lack of opportunities. For the African-Americans in the study they discussed negative aspects of being a minority, mainly when they were younger.

The three participants who are African-American tell a different story about life in this rural community. In many small towns the railroad tracks often divide White and Black citizens. All three participants lived “across the tracks.” This is where most African-Americans in this town live; even Bill called it the “quarters.” All three discussed positive and negative aspects of living as a minority. In this particular town the racial mix is 89-90% White and 10-11% Black. However, all three of these participants own their own home. They have many White and Black friends as well as large families. All three are well respected in the community. They discuss the difficulty of the past and how some negative memories linger. They also talked about opportunities a larger town would have provided and that their part of town is often overlooked. Yet they were very clear to emphasize there have been improvements in this area and that they enjoy living here.

Hattie feels many in her community do not get their fair share of the tax base. She feels they are promised a lot, but it rarely happens:

Well, no, now, let me give it to you. The cops is fine, cause they treat this area like they treat the other areas. They constantly coming through like they are supposed to. And I feel like they are given a fair shake. But now, like, what I am stressing on, it is a lot of times the mayors have tried to do things. But, they haven't been pushing, and they stopped. But we had somebody in there to be firm with it, and to tell us that we gonna do such a such a thing on [my street]...And it don't never come through...And they said they asked the mayor about putting, you know, paved streets up there for them. And he promised, but he ain't got there yet [laughter]. But that is the kind of thing; when you ask for things, you

know, give them a good reason why they can't do it you know. Don't tell them we will do it and then don't never get there.

This negative situation also became the incentive for Hattie to learn on her own how to make a difference in her part of town.

Bill talked a lot about repression in the past and that his people had a difficult time getting ahead in this county:

Well, I wanted to send my children to school. Back then you couldn't borrow no money to send children to school. We had to go to Ft. Valley or Savannah State. We couldn't go to school like in Valdosta, Val Tech, ABAC, Albany. It wasn't nothing like that. We had to go to Savannah or Ft. Valley, Ft. Valley was closest...Back in them times we didn't even have a high school in [this] county. Ya'll had one but we didn't have one. Ya'll had a bus to take ya'lls children to school but we didn't have any buses.

Later in the conversation I asked Bill how he survived. I wanted to know what he learned to become a successful man in this community:

Well, you knew the rules and the regulations. So you had to abide by the rules and regulations. You could try to buck the system if you want to, but it didn't work...But that was the system [high voice]! So, nothing to do about it, but join the system.

Similar to Hattie, Bill realized what he had to do to become a success and survive in this area.

Another negative aspect of living in a rural area is the lack of resources or opportunities. These missed opportunities of life in a rural area were discussed by two of the participants. Wilbur's wife states:

So having lived here all of my life it has been its been fairly good, you know, considering. I know and realize the fact that uh, if I had been, been born in a town where I would have, that I would have been fortunate enough to have gone to a college...To me, I could have maybe bettered myself in that way. But even, being born there and ...coming to a small town like this it has been fairly good, I would say.

Betty enjoys studying and researching complex topics. In her search for knowledge she has continually used the Internet. Here she discusses the lack of access to services that larger areas may have:

So, uh, we need help! Smaller towns desperately need technicians who will come to their homes for a reasonable fee and help them with a minor problem. We don't have that in [this town], we have [a person] who will come and won't let you pay him. You don't feel free to ask him to come again, if he has taken his valuable time. And we have Computer Design, who, work on institutional machines. Big machines here and there; their time is so full. They don't have time to make house calls, you have to undo all those wires and pick up the heavy computer. Which it is hard for [my husband] and me. And it would be hard for many people to get it physically moved. Maybe the printer also if it is a print problem over to their place. And maybe in five minutes they discover why it isn't working. I lost my [computer technician] when I switched from McIntosh to PC. And I don't have access to Computer, uh, Images in Valdosta anymore to cure minor problems like that. So that is something we need in [this town] very much!

But more than this, Betty states that she cannot really discuss the topics that she is personally learning. She says that she feels alone in this pursuit of knowledge. Or, if she did really express her mind, there may be social reprisals:

It would be hard to do in isolation. It would be so much better if there could be discussions of these matters. I would dearly love to have somebody, “Well, what do you think about this, and what do you think about that?” But I can’t do it because of our culture here in [this town]. If I were to spring some of these ideas that I have come to believe are so definitely bedrock truth, on a lot of people, they would think I had gone out of my mind [high voice]! [That] I was a heretic or I was delusional. You can’t do it. Because, uh, most of course I don’t know there might be a lot of people who think along these same lines here in [this town], but I haven’t found them.

Betty summarizes the way she feels: “I don’t know, I don’t get into any groups. *You said you wanted to talk about rural life, well, that is the consequence of rural life. You become isolated, and I am one of them*” [emphasis added]. However, this did not stop Betty. This negative issue became an impetus for studying and learning on her own.

Like a careful teacher setting the right atmosphere for a class, the rural context is also the right atmosphere for SDL. Living in an area that is quiet, simple, close to nature, with people who are willing to help provides a positive environment for learning. However, resources may not be available to all and some people may feel alone in this rural area.

Chapter Summary

The ten participants in this study discussed the nature and process of self-directed learning. They also spoke of their late life adjustments as well as the rural context of their lives. An interesting aspect of these findings was the variety and the amount of time each participant engaged in learning activities.

The people in this study stated that the nature of learning is highly engaging, variably structured, collaborative, and goal-directed. The learning for these participants was enjoyable, fun, and exciting. The structure of the learning was characterized by a dialectical genre of new and old information, deliberate and serendipitous events, and simple and complex topics. These people discussed how they have learned as a result of conversations with friends, family, and acquaintances.

Each person described in detail various processes they undertake to pursue SDL. This process begins with an impetus to learn, sometimes internal such as an urge to learn about nutrition, and sometimes external, such as a grandchild asking for help with homework. The person decides if he or she is interested in the topic, and if so, they will then begin to access resources. The learner will devote systematic attention to the activity, and eventually there will be a resolution. Either the learning activity comes to a close or they continue this process. Interspersed in this progression is an unpredictable catalyst that speeds the process along. The catalyst may occur at anytime during the course of learning and often involves another person encouraging the older adult to continue.

Another interesting finding is that a variety of SDL activities were occurring at the same time. This created somewhat of a whirlwind of activity within the life of the older adult; in addition, these adventures of personal learning were at various stages in

this process. For example, while Robert and his wife were in the resolution of a project for his church, they were also accessing resources for a trip out west.

Late life adjustments were stated as time, family, and loss. Retirement has occurred for each participant, yet two of them have continued to work. Nevertheless, all found they had to adjust to having more time than when working or raising a family. The main activity to fill this time is a myriad of projects where SDL is taking place. The influence of one's family has a marked bearing on one's learning activity, especially adjusting to new situations concerning children and grandchildren. All of the participants have experienced a significant amount of loss. These difficult losses have included personal health and social connections.

The older adults in this study discussed the positive aspects of living in a rural area. This was apparent by their commentary on the simple and peaceful atmosphere, the closeness to nature, and a community of fellow learners. Some of the participants stated there are negative aspects of living in a rural area. These comments revolved around the difficulty of the lack of resources and of being a minority.

These ten participants portray a different view of life in rural south Georgia. Defying stereotypes of older adults, these participants portray positive images of active, self-directed learners even in late life. The various adjustments that occur in the life of the older adult become the impetus to personally learn an assortment of significant topics. The rural setting was found to be a predominantly positive environment for SDL.

Older adults have an extra amount of time usually because of retirement. This new time, allows for the pursuit of self-directed learning. Many times the desire to learn is initiated by the changes in the older adult's life – especially changes in health and in

one's family. The process of learning is enjoyable; structured in various forms, has a goal, and involves other people. During the process an event may occur that spurs the older adult to continue with this learning; this catalyst is usually another person or some event. One of the reasons this learning is so enjoyable is because of the richness of life in rural areas. There seems to be time for learning in this quiet and simple area, and if the older adult needs to ask a question there is a community available to help. Because of the social change in being an older adult, they may feel limited or frustrated in this search for knowledge. If the activity is enjoyable, they may decide to continue.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS and DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to understand how rural, older adults utilize self-directed learning in late life adjustments. The research questions guiding this study focused on four areas: (a) What is the nature of self-directed learning of these older adults? (b) What is the process of self-directed learning? (c) What are the late life adjustments of these older adults? (d) How does the rural context shape the self-directed learning of these older adults? A qualitative design was used to explore these areas, and data were analyzed inductively using the constant comparative method.

Ten older adults, five males and five females were purposefully selected and interviewed for this study. All lived in the same county in a rural area in south Georgia. The semi-structured interviews lasted four hours, and they provided the primary data for this study. A follow-up meeting with six participants served as a member check and confirmed the findings of this study.

Three conclusions regarding the way older adults utilize self-directed learning in late life adjustment can be drawn from this study: late life adjustments are a primary incentive for self-directed learning, self-directed learning is an integral process in the lives of older adults, and the rural environment is a predominantly positive context for learning. In this chapter I will discuss the conclusions drawn from these findings and present implications for practice and recommendations for further research.

Conclusions and Discussion

This study has arrived at three conclusions: 1). Late life adjustments are a primary incentive for self-directed learning (SDL); 2). Self-directed learning is an integral process in the lives of older adults; and 3). The rural environment is a predominantly positive context for learning.

Late Life Adjustments are a Primary Incentive for Learning

This research uncovered three main adjustments that older adults make in late life. These are adjustments to time, to family, and to loss. These adjustments may be the incentive for learning in the lives of older adults.

Making adjustments is a personal process of modification in order to bring a more natural fit in one's later life. This reconciliation or accommodation is dependent on one's ability and willingness to yield to the changes of later life by utilizing self-directed learning. As participants learned to adjust to time, family, and loss, these changes become personal projects of growth and learning.

Various authors have also discussed the role of SDL in one's development. Lamdin (1997) states that self-directed learning of older adults is a direct response to the individual's need or interest. "The self-directed learning project typically begins with a question, a problem, a need to know, or a curiosity. It is frequently triggered by some event or change in the person's environment" (p. 117). These needs or interests are a result of the developmental stage; my research summarizes these adjustments as time, family, and loss. According to Havighurst (1972), the developmental tasks of older adults include adjustments to declining strength and health, retirement, reduced income, death of a spouse, establishing affiliation with one's age group, and learning to live in a

satisfactory way. Similar to the findings of this research, each of these adjustments provides what Havighurst (1972) calls the “teachable moment:” “When the body is ripe, and society requires, and the self is ready to achieve a sensitive task, the teachable moment has come” (p. 7).

Kleiber (1999) states the older adult must be prepared for retirement, grandchildren, and the loss of a spouse. He discusses the role of leisure in this time of preparation and self-directed learning. Knowles (1984) outlines a perspective of learning for adults in contrast to learning for children. One of the primary points of these ideas is that adults learn in response to their stage of life. “Any change...loss of job, divorce, death of a friend or relative, change of residence is likely to trigger a readiness to learn” (Knowles, 1984, p. 11).

Time. One of the primary areas of adjustment for the older adult concerns time. The dominant aspect of this adjustment is connected to retirement. The adjustment involves the fact that there is so much more discretionary time than when one was working full time.

This life event is closely related to the concept of modernization as well as the western mindset (de Grazia, 1962). Westerners and people who live in modern, time-segmented societies are told to plan for and look forward to retirement throughout their life (Quadagno, 1999). In addition, the labor market and society have incorporated retirement as a significant aspect of one’s life. Retirement has become a societal adjustment with its own set of positive and negative aspects. Antonovsky and Sagy (1990) discuss four transitions during retirement: active involvement, reevaluation of life satisfaction, worldview, and health maintenance. These four transitions were also evident

in my participants. All of them have continued to stay active, retiring from work has forced them to reevaluate their worldview, and their main focus is maintaining health.

The participants discussed various transitions before and during retirement. Robert discussed the impact of leaving a group of fellow workers as well as adjusting to the amount of time. Jarvis (2001) elaborates on these transitions by stating that the retiree must learn how to retire and how to manage time. Jarvis recommends pre-retirement education, acceptance of a new identity, and continual learning:

Retirement takes us all into a new realm and most of us have not had past experiences of such freedom, so that while we can rely on much of our past to help us structure our present, we have to learn a lot from our new situation. (p. 70)

The participants in this study enjoy retirement although two of them choose to continue to work for pay. The adjustment in retirement becomes how the older adult will utilize this extra time. In essence, retirement has given them the time and social permission to pursue the activities that interest them. Similar to the advice of Jarvis (2001), these participants were actively continuing to learn and staying involved in their community. However, some activities such as gardening or yard work have become more than activities to fill new segments of time. Participants have become knowledgeable as a result of these personally crafted learning projects, and several have developed expertise in these areas.

Self-directed learning is a natural process of survival throughout one's life.

Retirement produces a significant amount of time to allow for individual choice of learning as well as personal reflection. There is a strong correlation between leisure and retirement as the hallmark of leisure is the freedom to choose one's activities (Goodale & Godbey, 1988). These older adults may even excel and live life more positively because they are experiencing leisure in retirement (Mannell, 1999; McGuire, Boyd, & Tedrick, 1996; Russell, 1987). For many, religious activities and volunteering for various projects are a significant part of this time. These activities, in turn, become intentional learning projects. Some older adults become involved in an activity because they are asked. Activities that are freely chosen become lifelong pursuits of learning, whereas externally oriented activities often come to a close.

Time for leisure is essential for the older adult because during this new allotment of time developmental tasks are attended to (Kleiber, 1999). Kleiber discusses how the leisure experience is tied to one's development. "Leisure is a result of developmental change.... In the wake of developmental change or serious life events, leisure can be a respite or buffer...." (pp. 26 – 27). For example, after becoming widowed, Dora related how her freely chosen activities of working in the yard and church also became a place of learning, healing, and recovery.

The freely chosen activities of retirees can produce an experience of "serious leisure" or "flow" where the person is involved in high investment activity (Mannell, 1993). Although the participants in this study were personally learning about various activities, each one was committed to one or two which were particularly meaningful. This commitment to freely chosen activities helps to promote an enjoyable retirement. Mannell states:

Some activities, such as sports, games, art, and hobbies, appear to consistently produce flow... Well being results from how people experience their day to day activities... To improve quality of life, one must learn to transform one's daily pursuit into flow-producing activity. (p. 132)

A flow activity is a freely chosen pursuit that engages the participant (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). Flow activities are not boring; they match the individual's competence, provide challenge, and hold the attention of the participant. These high investment activities can help to compensate for many of the losses in the older adult and contribute to what Csikszentmihalyi (1991) calls "complexity" (p. 249). People who experience flow in these SDL activities have chosen projects that are challenging. For

example, as Betty was writing thinking through a list of thought provoking questions for her grandchildren, she described this as “completely absorbing.” The ensuing optimal experience tends to develop increasingly complex personalities that enable the individual to handle greater demands of life (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988). As the individual becomes more complex, there is also an increased capacity for learning. Sue seems to have an insatiable interest in learning. She is interested in many topics and has participated in various SDL activities. Her capacity to learn and handle new and difficult information seems to have increased with her age.

Similarly, other participants experienced a special pursuit that required concentration, focus of energy, and it was something they enjoyed. Robert’s travel experiences, the model trains in Norman’s house, Sue’s work with animals, the morning ritual of reading for Betty, Hattie’s participation in city affairs, the excitement of learning something new at the fire station for Wilbur, Dora’s work in the yard, flowers neatly arranged by Thelma, and Charlie’s listening to a music were all examples of high investment activity resulting in a greater capacity for personal learning.

Jarvis (2001) writes that during retirement older adults assume one of three roles - sage, doer, or harmony seeker. This is similar to Houle’s (1961) three types of learners – activity oriented, goal oriented, and learning oriented. The learning oriented and the sage are the older adults who continually desire to learn. The activity oriented, goal oriented and the doer fill their time with various projects; this resonates with activity theory (Hooyman & Kiyak, 1993). And the harmony seeker, similar to Erikson’s (1950) concept of ego integrity or Cumming and Henry’s (1961) disengagement, realizes the end is near and seeks harmony with themselves and others.

One of the participants represents this concept of learning-oriented or the sage. Betty is interested in learning about all aspects of life, and she spends time contemplating the meaning of life. She desires to learn and is daily involved in an effort to make sense of her life by reading various subjects and writing out her thoughts.

Most of the participants were goal-oriented, activity-oriented (Houle, 1961), or as Jarvis (2002) states, the doer. These doers wanted to fill their day with activities that they enjoyed and in turn became activities of self-directed learning. Usually the participant is so involved, it does not appear to them a learning activity. It was somewhat surprising to realize how busy these older adults were and the whirlwind of activity surrounding their lives. For example, Wilbur has chosen to continue to work during his retirement. So this essentially leaves evenings and weekends for his free time. He is a member of the City Council, the Volunteer Fire department, Church, and several other organizations. He is a doer, a busy man. It was difficult scheduling appointments with these doers, and when I went to their homes often they would have to stop some activity for the interview.

Many in this study stated there is more time, yet they also said there is less. Laughingly, Thelma said, "Yeah, I have more time, but it takes me longer to do everything." Betty stated with urgency, "I know that time is running out." This often becomes the incentive needed to work on a particular project or learning activity. This compression of time, perhaps an admission of one's mortality, is an important part of the older adult's adjustment.

The older adult is not going to spend his or her remaining time on learning about unimportant topics; rather they will choose topics that are interesting and significant to them. This practical perspective of learning reflects Lindeman's (1928/1961) ideas that

“Education is life, and life is education.” (p. 4). When Robert reads a word he does not know, he will stop, go to the dictionary and look it up. Sue wants to learn about goat milk because she is confident it helps with her arthritis. The positive impact of eating your own vegetables is a driving force in Charlie’s daily chores in his garden. Hattie wants to learn how to change her neighborhood; she wants to leave a safe and nice place for the next generation.

Family. A dominant theme from my research of older adulthood is the change and adjustment to one’s family. Throughout adulthood, each individual is vertically situated between one’s parents and their own children. Adults are also horizontally situated among siblings. The relationship with family continually changes as each individual ages. The developmental task that Erikson (1950) calls generativity provides a stimulus to continue to learn about one’s children and grandchildren. Erikson (1963) describes generativity as the responsibility of one generation to replace themselves by bearing, nurturing, and guiding the next generation. “Generativity is the concern in establishing and guiding the next generation” (p. 267). The opposite of generativity is stagnation.

The interest of genealogy, perhaps a reverse generativity, should not be overlooked; several of the participants were involved in self-directed learning about their ancestry. But more prevalent was the daily focus on one’s children and grandchildren and their various activities. The participants in my study validate this modern role of today’s grandparent. They are more active and involved with their grandchildren than previous generations (Quadagno, 1999). Erikson, Erikson, and Kivnick (1986) state:

The later-life experience of grandparenthood provides them an additional opportunity to integrate feelings of responsible nurturance with those of less

productive self-concern. Research indicates that grandparenthood offers many individuals a “second chance” at generativity. That is, it presents the possibility of caring for the newest generation more robustly, and less ambivalently than they did for their own young children.... (p. 91)

This second chance is also a platform for a variety of intentional learning activities.

However, generativity is not limited to those with children or grandchildren. Erikson (1950) and Kleiber (1999) emphasize that caring for the next generation is evident in a variety of ways. These generative activities of personal learning take place through one’s contribution to community, by volunteering, as well as creative efforts such as artwork and writing. Kleiber states:

The best opportunity for finding generativity...is in the nurturance of children, whether they are one’s own or others’. The experience of shared enjoyment of activities that are challenging and intrinsically interesting may serve to shape an optimism...that brings meaning and satisfaction to later life. (p. 150)

In addition, some of these activities may pose various challenges such as unfulfilled expectations or an inability to help. Just because time is spent with a younger person is no guarantee the activity will be rewarding or beneficial.

These generative activities that promote SDL were obvious in my research. For example, Hattie is interested in helping the community. Her vision includes a new community recreation center in her part of town. She is motivated to work on this project and to learn about other ways to improve the community. However, this does not match the interest, love, and concern she has for her own children and grandchildren. “We just love one another, we have one heart. They are here for me, and I am there for them.”

These emotional bonds are rarely replicated outside of family. Generativity may be more natural with one's family, yet other arenas such as volunteering and mentoring can also be fulfilling and provide opportunities for personal learning.

Erikson (1950) discusses that older adults attempt to leave a legacy. Very similar to generativity, legacy involves a desire to leave something behind for future generations (Kleiber, 1999). The drive to leave a legacy combines helping the next generation and making sense of one's life. This stimulates the older adult to learn more about their particular interests, such as their offspring or some particular project. This legacy can assume various forms, such as memories, time together, and even physical objects. Betty wants to write a book for her children and grandchildren. Another aspect of this is when the older adult intentionally learns whatever is necessary to help their offspring succeed. Thelma is close with two granddaughters and looks forward to spending weekends with them. SDL becomes the context for generative activities such as helping them with social skills, paying for piano lessons, taking them on a trip, and even helping them to learn to read.

Older adults who have children and grandchildren have multiple reasons to continue to learn. Each child and grandchild becomes an impetus to learn about that child and their activities. In addition, these older adults want to continue a relationship with these offspring. They are not just learning about them and their activities, but they are also learning about how to be involved in their life. One of Hattie's grandchildren has been living with her for several years. Not surprisingly, intergenerational programs are one of the fastest growing areas in non-traditional education such as Elderhostel (Mills, 1993). Additionally, in family situations that require assistance or help, older adults

become more involved and active. If one of their offspring has a problem or some concern, these older adults are motivated into action applying resources and needed help.

This generative action motivates the older adult to utilize SDL to help meet the needs of their family. There are a variety of creative ways that older adults can influence the next generation. As discussed earlier, they may write a book, try to change a policy, build a building, or leave someone an inheritance. Volunteering, coaching, mentoring, and service in a variety of ways are a part of this. Kleiber (1999) discusses how the leisure experience can become context for a generative experience:

Mentoring appears to be another excellent vehicle for generativity, especially for those without children.... The generative potential of coaching, teaching, and mentoring often depends, paradoxically, on just the detachment that leisure typically brings, since relaxation and trust create conditions for optimal receptivity and learning. (p. 150)

The generative experience promotes growth and even personal transformation especially through interaction with others such as Hattie's involvement with disabled adults, or Norman's volunteer activities at school and church. The relaxed atmosphere of leisure allows the older adult the time to pursue a learning activity and to reflect on their life.

Sue has an assortment of ideas in her head that she wants to write down; she is attempting to write some stories for the next generation. Thelma discussed how much she enjoyed assisting with a local volunteer program of reading; yet, one of her favorite activities is to visit her grandchildren.

Loss. Time and family can produce a variety of positive adjustments for older adults. Yet the complete picture of late life also includes loss. Older adults face a host of

situations involving loss of health and loss of social connections. These losses revolve around the continual change in one's body and eventual death, as well as the loss of social connection. Fisher (1993) and Peck (1956) also stress the unpopular topic of loss in the older adult. Both seem to state that without some "involuntary transition" (Fisher, p. 81) adults would always remain at middle age. Loss and the adjustment to loss become a defining issue of older adulthood.

These losses also become the origin of SDL, as many of these participants have compensated for losses through learning (Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Lamdin, 1997). Tragedy was also seen as a catalyst to learn more about a specific topic. This was evident in the sickness and death of several of the spouses of the participants. Wilbur and his wife continually discuss the impact of the tragedy of losing children. Four of the participants had lost children. This unexpected loss or off-time event is the trigger to learn, adjust, and change. Caregivers often are learners of practical information because of living with a loved one with a serious disease. Thelma, Charlie, and Sue all discussed the difficult aspect of becoming a caregiver.

The impact of continual loss is one of the more difficult aspects of the adjustment to being an older adult. Yet within the older adult is also a developmental need to make sense of these losses. Erikson's (1950) notion of integrity states that the older adult is thinking through their life and trying to understand how everything fits together. This reflection causes deeper spiritual interest and is translated into thinking, remembering, and making sense of one's life. "It [ego integrity] is the acceptance of one's one and only life cycle as something that had to be and that, by necessity, permitted of no substitutions: it thus means a new, a different love of one's parents " (p. 268). In my study all of the

participants were involved in various religious activities. This spiritual focus of SDL is one of the ways that they continue to make sense of their life and to answer the difficult questions associated with loss.

The death of one's spouse can be a monumental loss, and in some situations takes years for recovery. Other losses such as the death of friends, the change in one's community, the loss of social respect, and the loss of health and "beauty" can become common in the lives of older adults (Peck, 1956). Yet, each of these losses also becomes a personal adjustment utilizing self-directed learning (Guilmette, 1992; Patterson, 1996). It takes a strong person to handle these losses and not to give up while encountering an assortment of negative life events (Erikson, Erikson, Kivnick, 1986; Kleiber, 1999). Self-concept is an important, yet often overlooked concern for the older adult (Jarvis, 2001). If they give up or if they have lost hope they may succumb to the increasing losses in their life. The loss of a spouse was difficult for the participants to discuss, but some mentioned some positive aspects such as more time, freedom, and personal choice (Lopata, 1993). My research indicated these older adults have become masters of adaptation because they were utilizing SDL to adjust to change. These participants wanted to learn; they acted on the internal and external incentive in their process of learning and in turn have a stronger sense of self.

The participants in this study were seemingly happy people and enjoyable to be around, yet each of them has had significant loss and suffering. Two participants discussed depression; yet, it was obvious that each person was personally learning to handle the negative aspects of their lives. Similar to Dupuis and Smale (1995), these

older adults have experienced well-being in spite of difficulties in part because of the number of important learning activities in their life.

Perhaps looming death is an impetus to becoming more comfortable with and knowledgeable about this final chapter in one's life (Erikson, 1986; Fisher, 1993). This stage of life is marked by increased physical decline and the process of dying and may last a few months or days (Lamdin, 1997). Interestingly, and in contrast to some of the literature (Erikson 1950, 1986; Fisher, 1993; Jarvis, 2001; Peck, 1956), the older adults in this study did not discuss death and dying. Their focus was on enjoying life and learning how to improve their health.

Of special concern to these older adults is the impetus to personally learn about their health. Despite the promises of exercise, nutrition, and mental fitness, older adults will continually face a diminishing reserve of physical ability leading to a compromised body (Baltes & Baltes, 1990). Also Rowe and Kahn (1998) discuss that even older adults who are aging normally have "a substantial risk for disease or disability. This is a large percentage of all older people" (p. 54). In addition, Schneider and Brody (1983) make this point: "Since the number of very older people is increasing rapidly...the average period of diminished vigor will probably increase [and]...chronic diseases will probably occupy a larger proportion of our life span" (p. 854). Fisher's (1993) work with older adults identified the significance of declining physical health. Also, Peck (1956) discusses that most of the adjustments of older adults are because of their physical changes:

One of the inescapable consequences of aging, after the late twenties, is a decrease in physical strength, stamina, and attractiveness.... Since physical

powers inevitably declines, such people tend to grow increasingly depressed, bitter...unhappy as they grow older.... Old age brings to almost everyone a marked decline in resistance to illness, a decline in recuperative powers, and increasing experience with bodily aches and pains.... It recognizes that physical decline occurs, but it also takes account of mental and social powers which may actually increase with age.... (pp. 45-47)

Similarly, Antonovsky and Sagy (1990) found that health maintenance was one of the main developmental tasks of older adults. It is these changes in one's physical health that forces the older adult to become involved in SDL.

As discussed earlier, the desire to learn about one's health is a priority with older adults. SDL is a powerful shield against untimely health change and an impetus for constructive improvement. "Self-directed learning can be a potent force [emphasis added] against the possibility of premature decline and dependency in old age" (Lamdin, 1997, p. 128). These participants have learned how to prevent future health problems. For example, Dora takes classes offered in her community to learn about a variety of health concerns; she explained she wants to be prepared when something happens. Similarly, Robert's wife exercises on a weekly basis because she has learned how exercise can delay early aging.

SDL is a tool for the motivated person to learn what is necessary for physical change and to prevent premature frailty (Schneider & Brady, 1983). The older adults in my study have begun to understand the impact of goal-directed learning about exercise and nutrition (Garry & Vellas, 1996; Guigoz, Vellas, & Garry, 1996). For example, each person in this study was learning about his or her medical situation through seminars, pamphlets inserted in prescriptions, and conversations with medical staff. This was specific and empowering information that helped them to understand more about their particular situation as well as their doctor and pharmacist.

Because seniors are living longer, there is the potential for pain and disease to occupy a longer period of time than previously. SDL allows the aging adult to learn what is necessary about their health. Baltes, Kliegal and Dittmann-Kohli (1988) stated the following: "On the basis of our results, it seems clear that many elderly adults are quite capable of reaching high levels of cognitive functioning in educational contexts entailing the use of self-directed learning strategies [emphasis added]" (p. 399). These experts in health and physical exercise acknowledge the powerful potential of self-directed learning to offset future problems. Rather than waiting for the next disorder, older adults can extend their future and quality of life through self-directed learning activities.

Many older adults are learning about the impact of recreation and sports fitness to offset these negative losses (Bee, 1998; Dun, Anderson, & Jakicic, 1998; Garry & Vellas, 1997; Higgins, 1995; Haskell, 1994; Haskell & Phillips, 1995; Riddick & Daniel, 1984). Haskell states: “There is substantial support for the value of moderate intensity activity, especially for the chronically sedentary, overweight person, patients, and the elderly” (p. 657). All of the older adults in this study were involved in the adaptation to a personal loss of health. The majority was actively engaged in exercise programs, especially that of walking.

Each person learned in their own unique way to solve the personal problems of aging. Baltes and Baltes’ (1990) theory of selection, optimization, and compensation is a multidisciplinary medical perspective on successful aging. This research stresses that successful aging is an adapting process where each person learns on his or her own how to age. These strategies are the result of personal education, social influence, and recognition of the importance of exercise. “Studies have repeatedly demonstrated that most old people, like young people possess sizable reserves that can be activated via learning, exercise, or training” (p. 9). My participants selected what they want to focus on, they are optimizing their situation, and they are compensating for losses. The primary way this has occurred is through unique personal learning. Similar to ideas of McClusky (1963), self-esteem and attitude is a vital aspect of this process.

In summary, these difficult lessons of life become teachable moments for the older adult (Havighurst, 1972). The aging older adult has the time to learn about the various losses in their life. Each loss becomes a unique opportunity for SDL. Baltes and Baltes (1990) discuss the attitude of selection, optimization and compensation. This process of selecting and restricting one’s world, optimizing one’s situation, and compensating for loss is the repeated theme of development toward successful aging (Rowe & Kahn, 1997). In order to survive older adults must learn to adapt, adjust, and change (McGuire, Boyd, & Tedrick, 1996).

Self-Directed Learning is an Integral Process in the Lives of Older Adults

The personal learning was a central part of the lives of these older adults. Interwoven and connected throughout their activities was a natural desire to continue to learn. This research uncovered various details of the nature and process of their personal learning.

Nature of learning. The participants discussed the highly engaging nature of this self-directed learning as enjoyable, fun, and exciting. Participants were absorbed in these activities; their life was focused around this learning. Charlie enjoys testing his knowledge on various home repairs, and he may spend an afternoon repairing a friend's appliance. This highly engaging activity is enjoyable to him and fun. Sear's (1989) research found that older adults complete two learning projects each year primarily for self-enjoyment and self-fulfillment.

One of the reasons personal learning is enjoyable is because it affirms the interests of the person. Fisher (1988) elaborates on the enjoyable and exciting aspect of SDL. "Self-directed learning may clearly reflect a person's affirmation of self, his or her accomplishments, and the social environment through confidence in his or her own initiative..." (p. 144). An example of this was obvious as Robert described in detail an activity where he researched information about his great grandfather. This was enjoyable, fun, and allowed he and his wife to discuss the genealogy of his family. His excitement was evident as he shared the story of his great grandfather at a Confederate memorial. "All of our family was there, my children, and their children. *I was real proud* [emphasis added]."

Enjoyable activities can be powerful experiences that help lessen the influence of loss. These participants shared about significant learning experiences they have had during their unique times of fun and recreation. Similarly, Verduin, Miller, and Greer (1986) state how learning in recreational pursuits is a powerful experience:

Numerous learning experiences of a formal and informal nature can be defined to help adult's live fuller lives and which can give more meaning to personal enrichment, leisure, and recreational activities....The self-directed mode of adult learning has been found to be a very popular vehicle to acquiring new information in this area of leisure and self-enrichment. (p. 12)
After a trip out west, Robert said: "I just can't tell you what it was like for me, a man from south Georgia to stand on the Continental Divide."

Each person has created a home that also promotes self-directed learning in an enjoyable atmosphere. All of the participants in this study lived in their own homes. Dychtwald (1999) discusses that many senior citizens are choosing to stay in their homes and predicts this number will increase. Fries (1990) adds: "Ninety-nine percent of individuals below the age of 75 years are not in nursing homes.... Eighty percent of those over age 85 years, with an average age of nearly 90 years, are not in nursing homes" (p. 2355). My participant's homes were a physical representation of 75 – 86 years of learning, reading, and personal growth. These personally crafted places of living and learning reflect the important of atmosphere in learning (Rogers, 1994). Knowles (1984) says, "[Learning] should be an adventure, spiced with the excitement of discovery. It should be fun" (p. 16). From tool sheds to gardens to books to birdfeeders, these older adults have created places of enjoyment and learning. These homes have become a solace for self-directed learning through conversation, personal choice of subjects, play, and active involvement in one's community (Goodale & Godbey, 1989).

Adding to this concept of enjoyment in SDL is the significant amount of research in the arena of self-directed learning and life satisfaction (Candy, 1991). Brockett (1985a, 1987) and Fisher (1986, 1988) have researched the positive influence of SDL on older adults. Similar to my study, their research indicated the positive and engaging nature of personal learning. "Gerontologists who strive to promote quality of life in older persons

could find it beneficial to look to adult education, especially *self-directed learning activity* [emphasis added], as a helping strategy” (Brockett, 1987, p. 234).

The nature of this learning is variably structured including new and old information, deliberate and serendipitous experiences, and simple and complex topics. This SDL involved not only new material, but also old information. Each person discussed learning new topics; but they also talked about lessons from the past that have been reshaped since becoming older. Bill tries to impact today’s generation by sharing information from his past; he tries to share with them the old lessons he learned while growing up as a sharecropper. Also, Bill reflects on the lessons he learned while starting the first Black business in this county and tries to share these thoughts today. Yet, Bill also keeps up with new information on nutrition and high blood pressure. This reference to old lessons or old knowledge was a common part of the interviews. This is discussed by Lamdin (1997):

Older people come to learning, whether self-generated or formal, with a lifetime of experience in which to ground new data, concepts, and theories. They are uniquely able to question old truths or to test the applicability of those truths to specific situations. The richness of their backgrounds contributes to the richness of their response to unfamiliar constructs, and the results of their learning add immeasurably to their own sense of the meaning of their lives. (p. 128)

Similarly, Spear and Mocker (1984) describe this interplay of new and old information in their research of how adults organize learning. Their research portrays a process where learning is assembled throughout one’s life and from a variety of separate and unrelated settings into meaningful constructs. Spear and Mocker describe this process:

During their life spans, individuals assemble random bits of information, observations, or perceptions for no special purpose and whose retention over time is unexplained. When the decision is made to learn a skill or gain competence in a related area, the catalog of related information is the organizing factor. (p. 7)

This structure of personal learning was also deliberate and serendipitous. Sue deliberately takes time to learn more about raising goats; yet, at the same time she learns serendipitously. She explained how she learns by looking closely at nature, from grass to the birth of new animals. She states, “All nature teaches you.” Tough (1971) would describe these deliberate activities as self-planned or highly deliberate efforts to learn. Yet the learning I observed went beyond well-organized or well-planned activities. The participants also spoke about the role of activities that were spontaneous, out of their control, and even mysterious. It is important to consider and make room for the role of unplanned events in the self-planned process of self-directed learning.

The concept of serendipity in my research includes thoughts and impressions, intrusions and uninvited activities, as well as mystery and even spirituality. Merriam and Caffarella (1999) provide a brief explanation of informal learning: “Informal learning refers to experiences of everyday living from which we learn something” (p. 21). Similarly, Mocker and Spear (1982) discuss how chance occurrences can provide opportunities for informal learning. This is a provision for encounters that are not expected, yet have an influence on the learner and their learning activity. In addition, Jarvis (2001) discusses incidental learning: “But a great deal of our learning is unplanned or incidental” (p. 21). He explains incidental learning expands our ideas of formal, non-formal, and informal learning to include those situations outside of our planning. It is

these spontaneous, unplanned or serendipitous events that promote self-directed learning in new and different ways.

Candy's (1991) discussion of the auto-didactic learner is similar to these ideas of learning informally. Auto-didactic implies an individual's non-institutional pursuit of learning in natural settings. For example, Thelma has learned about flower arranging and native plants throughout her life, but she emphasizes her learning is mainly "trial and error" and an incorporation of the informal advice of others. Incidental and informal learning is not the same as self-directed learning; rather it has a role in the process of personal learning.

All of the participants attend church. Religious or faith-based activities seem to be structured in this dialectic of deliberate and serendipitous activity. Dora deliberately attends church, yet the experience may result in a variety of serendipitous learning events. She learns during the deliberate and organized service, Bible Study, singing, and working in the nursery. Yet, she also learns from situations such as an impression during prayer, a comment from a friend, a gesture from a child, or the conversation with friends after the service. Jarvis (2001) discusses the importance of learning about the spiritual dimension:

In being forced to contemplate the meaning of life they [older adults] enter the spiritual dimension and as we lose the full use of our physical powers we have to learn to be more dependent on others but also to be more dependent on our inner resources. (p. 118)

The structure of SDL is also described as simple and complex. Everyday Charlie methodically reads through the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*. This simple reading of headlines and looking for articles of interest is a daily ritual of personal learning. He will leave the paper opened on a table, walk outside, and attempt to unravel a problem of

rewiring a broken lamp. After working on this complex electrical problem, he will return to the house, turn a page of the paper, and read the editorials. Betty enjoys the simplicity of re-reading *Chesapeake*. The book lies open on the coffee table. She will pick it up and read for about 20 minutes. This is a simple and entertaining break of her day while simply learning about American history. However, the focus of her attention is working, researching, and thinking about a book she is writing. Her book is full of organized information that helps to explain various topics such as psychology and religion. She will also spend hours slowly reading through the complex subjects found in the journal *IONS – Noetic Science Review*. Her day is spent moving between these simple and complex topics of learning.

Hake (1999) describes intentional learning as a key to survival in the modern world. Similar to Jarvis (2001), he states that adults must learn to re-arrange their biographies through self-directed learning. My research uncovered a structure of learning that allows the individual to choose an appropriate style of learning. The individual can reach into the past or they can learn new information. They can deliberately choose to learn a certain topic, and they can learn from serendipitous experiences. They may enjoy a simple crossword puzzle while a complex movie is unfolding on the television.

Personal learning is distinctive for each older adult because older adults become more unique through their life. Defying stereotypes that people over 65 are similar, many writers discuss the uniqueness of older adults and their learning (Eisen, 1998; Lassey & Lassey, 2001; Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998). Knowles, Holton and Swanson (1998) try to emphasize the difference among older learners: “The key point is clear: individuals vary in their approaches, strategies and preferences....Understanding of

individuals differences helps make andragogy more effective” (p. 165). Part of this is the ability to go back and forth between these structures of learning. The participants were involved in learning that was highly engaging, but this research also uncovered the structure of their personal learning. This research disclosed that these participants would move from structures of new and old information, to deliberate and serendipitous experiences, to simple and complex topics in the same day.

SDL is a collaborative process. Even though the name self-directed implies individual effort, there is usually the inclusion of other people. In Tough’s (1971) description of learning projects he describes how each participant sought out the opinions of others. Contacting others from friends to experts was embedded in the participant’s process of learning. Thelma knows how to arrange flowers, but she is always looking for ideas from her friends. Bill likes to walk around town and talk to people in the community. Charlie has skill in a variety of topics, but he will also ask the county agent or a professional electrician for more information. Sue has raised champion Dachshunds, but she also consults her veterinarian. Similarly, Gibbons et al.’s (1980) research on self-education revealed the following: “Self-education is best cultivated in a warm, supportive, coherent environment in which people generally are active and there is a close relationship with at least one other person” (p. 54). According to Lamdin (1997) other people such as “friends, neighbors, experts, teachers, mentors, tutors are usually involved in self-directed learning projects at some stage” (p. 120).

Candy (1991) discusses that one of the myths of SDL is that it is carried out in isolation. Similarly Brookfield (1985a, 1985b) states the community orientation of SDL is often ignored by others, yet is an integral part of this learning process. He emphasizes

it is natural to seek information from others. Also, Houle (1961) discusses the impact of a group of learners that align themselves with similar learning interests. These enclaves of learning can take the process of individual learning to a deeper level. For example, Hattie seeks advice from others, especially in regard to community action. One of Wilbur's favorite activities is participating with the Volunteer Fire Department. This group is also bound together by a common interest of learning about fire protection. There is a weekly meeting with videos, discussion, and practice on fire fighting and safety.

SDL is goal-directed. Probably the most consistent line of thought concerning SDL is that it is centered on a certain goal and objective (Knowles, 1984; Tough, 1971). Tough (1971) discusses how the self-planned learner must invest a minimum of seven hours toward a self-planned effort. Similarly, Lamdin's recent survey revealed that 12 hours of concentrated effort toward a particular subject warranted a self-directed learning effort. She also stated that SDL is the main way that older adults learn:

Self-directed learning is the single most prevalent mode of learning among older adults, growing out of the learner's unique interests and needs and carried on at levels comfortable for the individual. Opportunities for self-directed learning are low cost and readily available to the physically active, the handicapped, and the homebound, irrespective of gender, race, or class. (p. 162)

Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) suggest SDL is a way of life. They feel the essence of SDL is when the learner takes responsibility for this self-planned education rather than a certain amount of time on a learning activity. The data in this research also supports the idea that SDL is more of a continuum of learning from individual personal efforts to a lifestyle of learning. This continuum swings from a short specified time on a specific

goal, to a lifelong pursuit of some topic. Similar to ideas of Brookfield (1985a), Brockett and Hiemstra (1991), Spear and Mocker (1984), and Leean (1981), I uncovered people whose learning was more of a lifestyle and incorporated the advice of friends or the technique of a facilitator. This self-directed learning also reflected the daily events of one's life, especially those chance and unplanned situations.

SDL initially begins with an internal or external incentive to learn. However, this model also allows for the influence of serendipitous events and the motivation of an unplanned catalyst. These chance happenings are a daily reality and can spur the older adult to SDL. Candy's (1991) description of SDL allows for an inclusion of surprise and unplanned events. He discusses how autodidactic learning is an intentional self-education that allows for these serendipitous events:

This is not to say that autodidacts are directionless victims of circumstance, lacking in any clear goals or intentions. On the contrary, they tend to be more purposeful, tenacious, and disciplined than other learners, and are constantly alert to the possibility of learning in all sorts of situations. (p. 171)

Candy felt that Tough's original perspective of SDL does not allow for these unplanned events in the learning process. Candy states that SDL usually has some "other" influence in this process of learning. This "other" can be the impact of accident, serendipity, or unplanned events in the life of the learner.

Similarly, Spear and Mocker (1984) challenge us to go beyond the typical view that SDL is a deliberate, well planned, and linear series of episodes. My participants continually referred to these chance situations as adding to their learning, either in the form of serendipitous events or a catalyst to learning. They discussed a variety of chance

occurrences from a grandchild inviting them on a trip to the 9/11 terrorist attack. Adding to this information is the research by Llean (1981) in rural Vermont. One of the main findings from her study is the role of non-rational aspects of SDL and that many experiences in the SDL process are unrelated.

Tough (1971) was one of the first writers to discuss the prevalence of goal-oriented learning. He also stated that these activities were highly deliberate efforts to learn, differentiating it from happenstance or incidental learning. Similar to my research, I found that there was a distinct difference, but at times they can be blurred. For example, Charlie reads the paper everyday. This is a leisurely and enjoyable activity. But beneath this perusal of headlines, is also a highly deliberate effort to read and understand the editorials. He wants to know and to understand the opinions stated in the editorials; within the daily routine of reading through the newspaper is a self-directed lifelong learning project of reading editorials.

Tough (1971), Candy (1991), and Lamdin (1997) stated that this blurry line is often hard to distinguish. Some goal oriented, highly deliberate efforts to learn are cloaked behind enjoyable and fun activities of one's leisure. For example, Robert and his wife learned a great deal about the geography of the United States during a trip out west. Although the participants may not be able to name their learning activity, their daily schedule often reveals systematic attention and hours of learning. For example, Dora would not say she is learning about gerontology, but an examination of her schedule reveals she spends six hours a day working at a nursing home. This often leads her to self-directed learning projects concerning the care of older adults.

Tough (1971) felt that the clear distinction for SDL is that half of the person's total motivation would be to gain and retain certain knowledge and skill, or to produce some change in self. This should take place in a series of related episodes adding up to seven hours in six months. Each of the participants in my study had several of these short term and on-going learning projects occurring at the same time.

Similarly, Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) felt the defining characteristic of SDL is that the learner takes responsibility for his or her own learning. One of the main characteristics of the participants of my study was that they were continually taking the initiative to learn. This was seen by a commitment to learn, the systematic attention given to a certain topic, and the adjustments that it are often necessary to pursue learning. They may take a class, attend a seminar, or ask a question, but the responsibility to learn resided with the learner. Candy (1991) discusses how the self-directed learner must decide the goal, task, and strategies of their personal learning. Lastly, it should be stated that the individual generates these goals of learning. Rogers (1994) felt the defining aspect of SDL is when the learning is self-initiated and when the goals of the learning come from the student.

Process of learning. The process of SDL is an individual and natural phenomenon marked by gradual changes leading to a particular result. The process of learning of these ten participants moved from an internal or external incentive to interest in the topic to accessing resources, from systematic attention to making adjustments with the activity, and eventually a final resolution (See Figure 1.) During this process there is often a catalyst that helps the course of action to continue. This catalyst, independent of the learner, was some external event. Often, this was another person who encouraged the

participant to continue their learning. This catalyst occurred at differing times in the process.

A variety of authors outline a process of self-directed learning. In Tough's (1971, 1979) discussion of highly deliberate efforts to learn, he lists a detailed linear process of 26 steps on how the learner carries out this process. Much of Tough's model centers on the various decisions in the initial phases of learning. Eventually, the learner moves through a series of steps where he or she plans the learning activity.

In comparison, my model is a general summary of the detailed process that Tough (1971, 1979) describes. In contrast to Tough, my model shows a learning process from start to finish and allows for lifelong learning. My model also discusses how external and internal forces influence the process of learning and includes the personal interest of the learner. Tough's model focuses on the internal plans and ideas of the initial phases of learning. I also discuss the role of a catalyst in the process of learning. Similarities to Tough's model include accessing of resources as well as the systematic attention to the learning activity. Kasworm (1992) breaks Tough's (1979) steps into four main activities: the decision to begin, choosing a resource, factors that influence the choice of a planner, and the activities in the planning process. My model would place his "decision to begin" in the first two steps, that of internal or external incentive and personal interest.

Knowles (1975, 1984) describes a process of self-directed learning in six consecutive steps: climate setting, diagnosing learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes. In comparison, my process also reveals a general flow of SDL in six gradual steps. Identifying resources is

evident in my circle of accessing resources. Also, appropriate learning strategies were found in my area of systematic attention as well as the following step of making adjustments to the learning. However, my model of learning also includes a catalyst allowing for spontaneous interventions in the process. In contrast, Knowles' process is more formal where he encourages the participant to incorporate a contract of learning delineating specific goals and the signature of the learner. My participants were not so organized, rather deferring to comments like "trial and error" or "go with the flow." Rarely did my participants diagnose, evaluate, or set a climate purposely, and this did not seem to impede their learning. Rather, I observed, these important aspects of learning were more subtle and hidden within the psychological dynamic of the learner. For example, Dora's pile of books or Charlie's tool sheds were never planned; rather they were the trial and error of how the person enjoys self-directed learning. Perhaps Knowles' evaluation could be included in my sphere where participants made adjustments in their learning process.

One model that incorporates a variety of factors in SDL is Spear and Mocker's (1984) organizing circumstance. Their model is based on three interactive areas: opportunities the person finds in their unique environment, past or new knowledge the learner brings to the activity, and chance occurrences. In comparison to my model, opportunities in one's environment are included in the first step of my process – the incentive to learn. The internal or external incentive to learn is a part of the unique situation of one's life. Chance occurrences and the fortuitous environment are included in my description of the random catalyst that spurs individuals to continue the process of personal learning. The past or new knowledge of the participants is part of the findings

related to the nature of SDL. In addition, Spear and Mocker emphasize that learning is an interactive process, whereas I present a fairly general flow of learning from start to finish.

Cavaliere's (1992) model, also an interactive model, is a case study of the experiences of how the Wright brothers learned to fly. This historical research revealed a SDL process based on inquiring, modeling, experimenting and practicing, theorizing and perfecting, and actualizing. Within each of these modes there were four processes that occurred: goal setting, focusing, persevering, and reformulation. She also revealed the interplay of frustration and confusion within the SDL process.

In comparison to my model, Cavaliere's (1992) ideas include more attention on the cognitive aspect of learning. Also, the actualizing phase in her process was not as evident in the self-directed learning efforts of my participants. Similar to my model, the adjustment phase would also include what Cavaliere described as focusing, persevering, and reformulation. The adjustment is when the learner has to adapt their learning activity in order to finish. The frustration and confusion that Cavaliere found with the Wright brothers would be included in my sphere of adjustment. The practicing and experimenting is demonstrated in what I labeled the systematic attention. This is where the learner spends a significant time on the actual learning. Modeling is evident in the collaborative nature of learning, where the learner accesses information from others in the community.

Danis and Tremblay (1987, 1988), similar to my study, investigated the SDL efforts of ten adults. Danis and Tremblay discussed how their participants incorporated multiple approaches in their learning process. In comparison to my study, during the systematic attention phase my participants also incorporated a variety of approaches in

SDL. Also, similar to the catalyst in my process, Danis and Tremblay saw random events as various opportunities in the process of learning. They noted that the learners took advantage of any opportunity to further their personal learning. Also, Danis and Tremblay found their participants specified learning goals after they mastered the skills. This insight was also a part of my sphere of adjustments. After becoming confident, the participant would often adjust the SDL for additional or more appropriate information.

Jarvis (2001) also discusses a process of personal learning. His detailed and complicated route is based on the learner's contemplation and reflection. "We think and reflect upon what we have experienced" (p. 14). In comparison to my model, this occurs during systematic attention and the making of adjustments. Jarvis states that there are three aspects of reflective learning: contemplation, reflective skills learning, and experimental learning. Contemplation involves "the process of thinking about an experience and reaching a conclusion about it without necessarily referring to the wider social reality" (p. 19). Reflective skills learning refers to when someone is "learning on their feet....it involves not only learning a skill but also learning the concepts that undergird the practice" (p. 20). Experimental learning is explained by the following:

Theory is tried out in practice, and the result is a new form of knowledge that captures social reality. This approach to learning demonstrates the way that individuals are always thinking and devising new practical knowledge for themselves in every walk of life. (p. 20)

Similarly, my participants were thinking or contemplating about the SDL activity throughout the process. Internal incentives of learning often turned into lifelong activities of learning. For example, during the interviews I asked Dora if she could name something she felt she had learned on her own. "I guess you could say, working with children, I have been a volunteer at the Church nursery for 50 years!" During this time, she would incorporate experience from raising her own children into the nursery. But she

would also learn, as Jarvis stated “on your feet,” by working with younger generations. She would also talk with other volunteers about the children in the nursery and how to improve. This is a practical illustration of contemplation throughout the learning process.

The contribution of my model is that it is based on learning experiences of older adults aged 75 - 86, and the process I observed indicates that SDL is often a response to developmental issues of that particular life stage. However, my model seems rather simplistic, as it does not capture the intricacies of each person’s learning. Jarvis (2001) describes the difficulties in his process of learning:

There are a variety of routes through it, indicating that there are many forms of learning...these routes are only illustrative of the complex processes which we call learning and they do not include all of them...Learning is about the person as well as the process. It is the person who learns and this is more important than what is learnt [sic]. (p. 14)

My research disclosed a process of SDL that begins with an incentive to learn. The internal incentive initiates from within the individual, and it is usually based on some adjustment in late life. This desire to learn often becomes a lifelong learning project. An external incentive originates outside the person; this project may be put away after the project is over. However, in some instances it converts to an internal interest and becomes a lifelong learning project. Lamdin (1997) states, “The self-directed learning project typically begins with a...need to know...triggered by some event or change in the person’s environment” (p. 117). After this internal or external incentive to learn, the person decides if they have an interest in pursuing this topic. The interest arises from a personal need or curiosity of the person. This need is based on the personality, background, needs (Maslow, 1970), self-image (Lawrence, 2000), and stage of life of the person (Tough, 1971).

When the person decides to act on this interest, he or she will begin to access resources for SDL. The participants utilized a variety of resources. These in order of use are: newspaper, television, seminars and classes, library, church activities, periodicals and pamphlets, and Internet. Lamdin (1997) describes the resources that older adults use in their learning:

The resources with which people carry out their self-directed learning projects are varied and usually represent their conscious or intuitive perceptions of their own learning styles. Printed materials are basic....Television is another familiar resource...the computer can serve as a brilliant teacher. (p. 120-121)

Lamdin's research also discussed the popular use of libraries, churches and synagogues, classes, travel, and various meetings and organizations. In addition, Sear's (1989) study stated that older adults utilize books, pamphlets, and newspapers and seem to enjoy this printed material.

Accessing resources is embedded in the learner's daily life. If someone goes to the library to ask for a book, they get input from the librarian or a friend. Likewise, Houle (1961) states that in the process of learning there are stimulators. Similar to the catalyst, these stimulators are people who come alongside the person and help them to learn more. Houle's stimulators are people who love to learn and are encouraging others to join them in their activity.

At this point in the process the individual begins to systematically attend to the activity. This is when the participants focus on the activity; Betty shared how every morning before breakfast she would spend one to two hours reading. In order to continue to learn they will make some adjustment in their process of learning. For example, Norman started listening to music during the long hours on the computer. After this adjustment, the process enters a stage of resolution. Projects that originate externally are often put away – often in neatly organized boxes; projects that originate internally continue. Similar to ideas of Lamdin's (1997) research, this process could last a lifetime or a few days: "Some projects are narrowly focused and can be accomplished within hours or weeks....Others are never-ending" (p. 120).

This research indicated that the differences between the external and internal incentives, as well as short term and lifelong learning are not so clear. When a project

comes to an end, there may be a variety of lessons that can be generalized to other learning activities. Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) discuss that the most valuable aspect of short-term projects may not be the content, rather what the participant understood about learning. They suggest specific learning may be generalizable from project to project, such as a greater interest in the subject, a stronger desire to continue learning, a more positive self-concept, an increase in retention, and a more positive attitude about instruction.

Of special interest is that these participants are involved in a myriad of SDL activities. Betty attended class at a nearby university for a certification requirement; this was an activity of external incentive in the interest stage. After class she would check out various books from the library on religion and psychology; this was an internal incentive that was in the systematic attention phase. This dual activity of learning in different phases was seen in each participant representing a complicated, powerful dynamic of personal learning. The certification class has come and gone, but Betty continues to pursue this internally motivated interest of spiritual growth.

The prevalence of self-directed learning (SDL) was apparent in this study; every participant was involved in several SDL activities. This is similar to Tough's (1971, 1979) finding that 90% of the population is involved in one project a year, with the average adult involved in five to seven projects. In addition, there are "high learners" (p. 28) who devote their life to learning and may participate in 15 – 20 projects amassing thousands of hours in self-directed learning. Similarly, Lamdin's (1997) Elderlearning survey also disclosed a high density of learning activities:

Our own research revealed that older people are learning in numbers and amounts of time expended at a rate far exceeding even our original expectations. The average amount of time spent per month in formal learning (goals are set by teacher) is 17.75 hours....The average number of hours per month spent in informal (non-classroom-based or self-directed) learning was 27.86 [emphasis added]. (p. 85)

My research indicated that a catalyst enhances the process of SDL. This external event in the older adult's life was often people. Close friends, children and grandchildren, even strangers can take the role of this catalyst. The catalyst also can be a significant event, perhaps a tragedy, or a special occasion. The catalyst functions to encourage or provoke the learner to continue to pursue an activity of learning. The individual often thinks or reflects about this intrusion into their life (Brookfield, 1985; Jarvis, 2001). A stranger in a meeting told Hattie that she would be able to get a sidewalk on her side of town. Betty's grandchildren are going to college; this motivated her to continue writing. Wilbur's granddaughter is the first in this county to attend an Ivy League Law School; he is motivated to stay healthy to be involved in her life.

In summary, this research delved into the details of the nature and process of personal learning. This research indicated that the nature of SDL is highly engaging, variably structured, collaborative, and goal-directed. This research found a specific process of learning for each participant, one that begins with an internal or external incentive to learn, followed by an interest in the topic. The learning then accesses resources, makes adjustments, and comes to a resolution or an ongoing activity. A catalyst may speed the process along as well as promote in-depth interest in the topic.

The Rural Environment is a Predominantly Positive Context for Learning

Life in rural areas is changing throughout the world, and many of these places have been abandoned for steady work in cities (Quadagno, 1999). However, these urban centers have fallen short in contrast to the richness of rural life. Western countries have witnessed the rise of an industrial society that has taken precedence over an agrarian life. The enjoyable atmosphere of rural life was often exchanged for a dependable salary. The rural dynamic is in constant shift, and today's information society makes it easier to live in rural areas (Hill & Moore, 2000).

In contrast to the findings in my research, there is a significant amount of literature that portrays a bleak existence in rural areas. Researchers have discussed difficult situations in these locations that include poverty, fewer cultural attractions, poor housing standards, isolation, reduced resources, and illiteracy (Hill & Moore, 2000; Quadagno, 1999; Tilburg & Moore, 1989). Galbraith (1992) includes many important topics of life in rural areas, but avoids any positive dimensions of rural life. Some residents are frustrated with or leave rural areas because it is too restrictive and isolated (Tilburg & Moore, 1989). As discussed earlier, this sample consisted of active, older adults who continue to learn. It should be noted that because they have lived in this area all of their life, they have most likely learned ways to enjoy their life in this rural context, and compensate for lack of services and resources. Personal learning may have contributed to the lessening of the negative aspects of life in a rural area.

McCormick and McGuire (1996) indicated older adults in rural areas have more difficulty because of the erosion of the social structures in their communities. Rural older adults may be at a greater disadvantage than those in populated areas. In addition, older adults with disabilities, without family, or from other cultural backgrounds may have less resources (Krout & Coward, 1998). Two of my participants mentioned the lack of resources in this area, but overall, they emphasized they were pleased with life in this rural county.

Life in a rural area is different in many ways than life in an urban area (Galbraith, 1992; Quadagno, 1999); those who live in a rural area share a unique culture (Tilburg & Moore, 1989). There is usually open country and farming in rural areas. Rather than being closed in or crowded with people, buildings or traffic, there is a sense of openness. Many of the participants discussed how in contrast to Atlanta, they preferred living in this area. There is also a notion of simplicity in rural areas. Thelma stated, “Why, if I need something, I can get in my car, run to the store, and be back in five or ten minutes.” Waiting in line, traffic, or road construction are rare events. If someone has to wait, it is often because they have seen a friend and there is an expectation to “visit.” Since many of the participants recognize or know others that live in this area, they are comfortable with each other. Unlocked doors, waving at passing cars, unannounced visits, and friendliness may be the expectation in rural areas.

Leann’s (1981) research indicated some negative aspects of rural life, yet she also discussed the positive quality to living in a rural area. She pointed out how learning takes place in a variety of unique ways in rural situations that may elude urban or non-rural areas. These include thoughts and impressions while doing chores or walking in the

outdoors. This is similar to ideas of Tilburg and Moore (1989) that living in a rural area may force individuals to be more self-reliant and independent. Other researchers (Hill & Moore, 2000) list positive aspects of life in rural areas as a slower pace of life, wealth of natural resources, friendliness, lower crime rates, and diverse activities. My participants affirmed all of these, but primarily talked about the people in the community and the outdoors.

The communal aspect of rural life involves the friendliness and helpful attitude from neighbors, family, and friends. As discussed earlier, part of the nature of SDL of these participants is that it is collaborative. The link to rural life is that the collaborators are more accessible. If Sue needs to know something, without hesitation she will call or visit a neighbor. Norman knows he can count on his neighbors to take him to the doctor. As a widower, he can relax, and enjoy various activities without needless worry. Rogers (1969) and Rogers and Freiberg (1994) wrote about the influence of the relationship between the teacher and the student. He encourages a close relationship, one that borders on friendliness and openness. The close atmosphere of rural areas promotes these interactions between learners and those with answers. Norman discussed how an instructor in a computer class would often drop by his house to help out with learning the computer. This man, 40-50 years younger, attends the same church, and they have a relationship that includes learning and friendship.

Knowles (1984) discusses the importance of considering the physical and the psychological environment: "In my estimation, a climate that is conducive to learning is a prerequisite to effective learning; and it seems tragic to me that so little attention is paid to climate in traditional education" (p. 14). The link to education is that this idyllic setting

also helps to create a positive atmosphere for self-directed learning (Borish, 1991; Cajete, 1994; Cornell, 1989; Neill, 2003).

Each participant discussed that living in this area is simple, peaceful, and quiet. This “simple” area enables older adults to easily obtain resources needed for personal learning. The lack of traffic congestions and knowledge of the town contributes to the participant’s willingness to be involved in activities. Safety did not seem to be a concern even among the participants who lived alone and in remote areas. Quietness in the area also allows the learner to be free from distraction, and may allow the person to listen and learn. This county is abundant in pine forests, ponds, lakes, swamps, and farms and many of the residents in this county are active gardeners.

From transcendentalists such as Emerson and Thoreau, to modern day activists like Muir and Leopold (1970), writers have long discussed the positive impact of the outdoors on one’s life (Fleck, 1990; Gollancz, 1901; Haines, 1977). Research has also substantiated the constructive sway of nature on the general well being of one’s life (Segall, 2003). Thoreau in 1854 from his essay *Walking* (Atkinson, 1950) writes about a sunset as if he is walking along a sandy dirt road in south Georgia:

The sun sets on some retired meadow, where no house is visible, with all the glory and splendor that it lavishes on cities, and perchance as it has never sat before....We walked in so pure and bright a light, gilding the withered grass and leaves, so softly and serenely bright, I thought I had never bathed in such a golden flood, without a ripple or a murmur to it. The west side of every wood and rising ground gleamed like the boundary of Elysium, and the sun on our backs seemed like a gentle herdsman driving us home at evening. (p. 632)

In summary, there are several links with rural areas and SDL. First, the scarcity of experts may motivate those who live in rural areas to become more resourceful and create unique ways of adapting (Penrod, Gueldner, & Poon, 2000; Tilburg & Moore, 1990). Second, the peace, quiet, and closeness to nature help to create a positive atmosphere for personal learning. Knowles (1984), Rogers (1969,1994), and Foley (2001) emphasize the context and atmosphere of learning as essential aspects for one's education. And third, the closeness that people feel toward one another creates a community of trust, openness, and willingness to talk with one another about activities of SDL (Wenger, 1998).

Implications for Practice

With census projections for the year 2030 predicting that 65.5 million people will be older than 65 years and approximately 50% of those will be 75 and over, there is a need for more detailed information concerning older adults (Quadagno, 1999). Older adults in the future will have the advantages of better education, more advanced technology, improved nutrition and healthier lifestyles, and greater financial security than previous generations. One can anticipate that these older adults may seek more challenging ways to remain productive through self-directed learning activities.

The main implication of practice from my research is for older adults as well as facilitators of older adult learning. Of special concern are gerontologists, those who work with or promote programs with the elderly. We can assume that SDL is occurring in the lives of older adults, because this is the natural way for adults to learn (Knowles, 1984); therefore, SDL should be encouraged as a part of any program. SDL is positively related to life satisfaction (Brockett, 1985a), it empowers the learner (Lamdin, 1997), yet allows for the differences of each older person (Knowles, 1984). Schon (1987) suggests that

facilitators should reflect on their own experience and practice to consider how to incorporate these ideas. Also, those who work with older adults should incorporate the participants in the planning process of their activities or classes (Cervero & Wilson, 1994; Forester, 1989). When the older adult encounters unforeseen difficulties or involuntary disengagement (Kleiber, 1999), this presents a natural opportunity for the older adult as well as facilitators to learn during these teachable moments (Havighurst, 1972).

It is also recommended that stereotypes of seniors be avoided and it be recognized that each older adult is unique (Peterson & Masunga, 1998). One of the myths is that intelligence decreases with age. Research indicates that fluid intelligence may decrease, but crystallized intelligence stays the same and may even increase with personal learning (Quadagno, 1999; Smith & Earles, 1996). Furthermore, when coupled with motivation of the learner, overall learning may increase for the healthy older adult (Barber & Kozoll, 1994; Romaniuk, 1986). This can hopefully motivate the older adult as well as facilitators to incorporate self-directed learning as part of their program.

Facilitators can encourage adults to continue to learn throughout their life. Learning is the normal and natural response to change (Confessore, 1992; Tennant & Pogson, 1995). Because we age uniquely, each older adult will have his or her own set of personal topics to study (Bonham, 1992). Fisher and Wolf (2000) recommend programs focused on socialization with others, adjusting to retirement, and making meaning out of one's life. Courtenay (1989) summarizes for the facilitator:

Older adults represent a significant clientele for adult educators over the next several decades. Current participation data...reflect the variety of interests among

individual older learners and serve to rebut the myth that older adults cannot learn or are not interested in learning. (p. 553)

Those involved with formal classes should consider this mature learner is comfortable asking questions as well as speaking out in class or seminars (Beatty & Wolf, 1996). Older adults often have insight into the subtle issues of a topic; they may challenge and even correct the presenter because they enter a class or program with many years of life experience (Knowles, 1984). Presenters should be prepared for insightful questions since many older adults have become dialectical in their thinking (Kleiber, 1999). This is exciting student oriented education that should be encouraged.

Because of years of experience, older adults have confidence in a variety of areas. For example, many of them have expertise in their field of work, parenting, relationships, government, or various hobbies. However, living in a society that prizes youth, older adults are often the victims of gradual marginalization. This subtle social constraint, or ageism, places some adults for the first time in the throes of rejection. This may be confounded by the surprise at the degenerative changes in one's body. Self-image of older adults is often in repair because of changes in the physical body and fear of competition. In addition, many older adults have encountered significant loss and are struggling during this emotional instability (Wilhite, Sheldon, & Jekubovich-Fenton, 1994). These factors can contribute to low self-esteem, diminished confidence, and depression, and the older adult may appear cautious or lack interest (Fisher, 1993; Kegan, 1994; Kleiber, 1999; Rowe & Kahn, 1998; Snider & Ceridwyn, 1986). Programmers can foster self-esteem by incorporating learning contracts, oral history, exercise, and mentoring.

Another important concern of older adults is that of friendships. Even though older adults are primarily focused on their children and grandchildren, many have grandchildren who are also adults. Neikrug et al.'s (1995) study indicated older adults wanted to develop friendships outside of their family after grandchildren have become older. The ensuing problems of modernization, especially that of separation from others, coupled with the continual death of friends, presents a need for older adults to establish friendships (Adams, 1993). Older adults who have become widowed may be unsure how to make social connections (Quadagno, 1999). Older adults and facilitators of older adults might provide a forum for social activity and be creative in helping older adults to meet and get to know one another.

An important implication of this study involves the use of the computer. An increasing number of older adults enjoy using the resources of the computer and Internet for self-directed learning activities. Older adults are not only learning about the computer, they are also learning with the computer (Lamdin, 1997). For example, utilizing Internet resources for health such as SeniorNet.org or Webmd could be a valuable resource. In my study, five of the participants have taken classes on the computer, and three of them have computers at home. Timmerman (1998) suggests patience for these older learners, especially with the fine motor skills required in the use of computers. Lamdin discusses the impact of the computer on older adults:

Language study is an especially dramatic example of the computer as a tool for learning, but the Elderlearning Survey respondents have found many others. They report using genealogical programs to structure their search for family information, financial programs to learn how to manage their money, online new

reports to keep up with politics, geography and encyclopedia programs to plan their travel, and CD-ROMs of great art collections to study Renaissance painting. They dial onto online interest groups in organized gardening, self-help therapies, World War II history, pets, and astronomy. No area of study seems to lack a home on the Web. (Lamdin, 1997, p. 135)

One of the liberating aspects of the computer is that it can become a tool of significant self-directed learning on any topic. The technology of distance learning over the Internet can easily place the resources of colleges and other schools into the homes of these older learners. CD-ROMs and videotape have recorded an assortment of interesting programs from history to travel. In addition, the computer can transcend some of the difficulties that older rural adults may face when seeking educational opportunities. Every office that serves older adults should seek to incorporate computer technology as well as offering computer instruction for older adults.

Discussion groups are a simple way that older adults and facilitators can add substance to their various programs. Older adults can connect with other people, especially in their neighborhoods and organizations, during these small groups. Popular subjects for discussion groups with older adults include various novels, health, finance, and cooking. The participants shared how much they enjoy discussion groups in their church and in various programs in the community.

Volunteering is a practical way the older adult can pursue self-directed learning. Volunteerism has become a viable asset for communities and is experiencing a rapid growth. Contacts and referrals can be made between those who have the time and energy for volunteerism and those needing the services. In my study, eight out of the ten

participants discussed volunteer activities. Lamdin describes this potential army of volunteers:

Older adults are also being trained to serve as aids in classrooms, as docents in museums and galleries, and as para-professional librarians. They take on a wide variety of jobs that hard-pressed educational, cultural, and social agencies can no longer afford to staff. (p. 154)

Intergenerational volunteer programs, where older and younger generations come together for a specific purpose, can be meaningful to all ages. For example, older adults can become mentors in all facets of life especially in their areas of expertise.

Every person in this study used a local library. Lamdin (1997) discusses the impact of libraries:

The current older generation is a natural consumer of what is still libraries' primary commodity – print based materials.... At this time of life, reading is most often optional, recreational, or curiosity-driven rather than required. Technology gives libraries the potential to assume an even more important role in elder learning. (p. 131)

Librarians may want to offer a self-directed learning area in the library for older adults especially with information on their particular adjustments. This would include adjustments to time or retirement, family, and loss. Librarians can start an outreach program to older adults by bringing in speakers that address particular topics that are relevant to older adults. The minorities in my study did not take advantage of the library as often as White citizens. While the reason for this is not clear, librarians might make a special effort to attract underrepresented populations.

Senior centers have a potential to meet the needs of older adults. I would encourage the staff of senior centers to think beyond traditional games of bingo and promote special workshops on exercise and nutrition. Jarvis (2001) suggests programs of mental fitness through games and puzzles, discussion, developing a positive mental attitude, speaking out about what they are learning, and being involved in self-directed learning at home. Rowe and Kahn (1998) discuss how one of the main results of The MacArthur Foundation Study is that exercise and nutrition help to reverse the effects of aging; therefore, make programs of nutrition and exercise a top priority. Various trips or outings have become a popular activity for senior centers. Provide day trips for these older adults, and also offer annual trips abroad incorporating education. Have seminars or special outreach for caregivers; this group is often overlooked and taken for granted (Quadagno, 1999). Senior centers could become the gathering place where older adults can learn about volunteer options in the community. In addition, senior centers in rural areas should take care that all older adults are included in their programs.

One of the findings in this study is the positive influence of rural areas. The peace, quiet, nature, and people in rural areas provide a positive atmosphere for growth and learning. People who live in rural areas can take advantage of this to promote their town or county as a retirement area. Those who live in cities and urban areas could attempt to incorporate the positive qualities of rural areas. Lastly, city planners can enlist or “deputize” older adults to assist with various needs in the community and give them official powers in the local governments. Five of the participants in my study had some official role in the local county government.

All of the participants in my study discussed the importance of their faith. Older adults are looking for places to worship and learn in this personal dimension of their life. Synagogues, Churches, and Mosques can encourage older adults by addressing the needs of late life adjustment rather than focusing on youth oriented ministries. Jarvis (2001) states the following about one's faith: "As we age, then, the spiritual dimension of life enables us to transcend the problem of having no further horizons or mountains to climb and the frailties of the body. It enables us to appreciate existence itself" (p. 117). Places of worship can provide safe places where older adults can meet others and share with one another about their life. Houses of faith can also be active in the community by providing services for older adults in need. They may be able to provide many of the services that may be lacking in rural areas for older adults.

All of the participants in this study were avid readers of daily local and regional newspapers. Surprisingly, many of them discussed how they read one or two papers "from front to back - every day." Not only did these periodicals provide entertainment, they were also a major source of information especially concerning meetings and events in the community. Newspapers can target the needs of older adults by providing special sections on successful aging as well as community information for older citizens. Four of the participants spoke about specific learning in the newspapers through editorials as well as the bridge column.

Local school systems in every segment of our society can integrate older adults. It is time to reopen the doors of the public school system to all ages by incorporating the perspective that education occurs throughout the lifetime (Chapman & Aspin, 1997). Programs such as Learning in Retirement and Elderhostel are effective, but leave out

many older adults who don't want to travel. Every public school system could set up a similar program offering the expertise from lifelong learners. Lamdin discusses how older adults continue to learn throughout their life:

And they are learning about computers, in classes at schools, computer stores, senior centers, bookstores, and retirement centers; on their own by trial and error, with books and manuals, with programmed learning texts, and with help from friends, neighbors, and grandchildren. (pp. 133-134)

Nursing homes, or assisted health care centers are especially significant for older adults. These places are often seen as the final place of life. Rather than holding the hands of frail older adults, facilitators could promote a revolutionary perspective. Jarvis (2001) admonishes nursing homes not only to meet the needs of dying citizens, but to also encourage learning: "Create an atmosphere and an environment in which it is not only possible to continue learning, but that older people regard it as something that is not exceptional, but rather that they are expected to be interested in things" (p. 142). Nursing homes or assisted facilities can become places of learning about aging for families (Ralston, 1978). Although they will not have the strength or energy as young or middle old, learning continues in the healthy older adult. Nursing homes could begin to hire adult educators as part of the staff. Rather than dingy walls and a terminal outlook, you can reshape nursing homes by providing the occupants with exercise, brightly colored rooms, art, and libraries.

Museums are often magnets for older adults to learn a variety of topics. Retired older adults have the time to attend museums. Museums similar to libraries, promote the concept of learning on your own. Special programs for the elderly can focus on the

unique aspects of the museum. In addition, many older adults have the time and the desire to become facilitators within the museum. Classes on how to become a docent within a museum of one's interest could benefit the older adult. In rural areas, older adults could join together to form a local museum of interest.

Finally, one of the most popular avenues of learning for older adults is travel. Travel agents can appeal to older adults by designing trips that meet the needs of older adults and promotes self-directed learning. Lamdin (1997) emphasizes the impact of travel on older adults:

Travel emerged from the Elderlearning Survey as almost everybody's *favorite source and mode of learning* [emphasis added]. Whether it's a community sponsored trip to a museum in the next town, a family trip to a nearby battlefield, or a major trip abroad, travel is almost universally viewed as an educationally and recreationally significant event, an opportunity to find out more about the culture, history, geography, flora, fauna, people and foods of another place, and as a way to enlarge one's perspective on the world. (p. 138)

In summary, the conclusions from this study have broad appeal to those in social agencies, businesses, religious organizations, and community groups who work with older adults. These conclusions can also appeal to various professional groups such as academic administrators and educators who have various reasons to adjust their institutions to the learning needs of older adults. Finally, the conclusions of this study should especially appeal to the older adult. This growing and influential group is motivated to learn what is necessary to continue to age successfully.

Recommendations for Future Research

The purpose of this study was to understand how older, rural adults utilized self-directed learning in late life adjustment. This study incorporated a qualitative research methodology to investigate the links between adult development and self-directed learning. Based on the research findings, the following recommendations are made for further research:

1. Repeat this study with a sample of minorities. The population for this study was a diverse sample of seven Caucasian and three African-American participants. The three African-American participants offered an interesting viewpoint on personal learning. I recommend a study in a rural area with a sample from a minority population. Similar to my study, future research could focus on the self-directed learning activities of minorities.

2. I recommend a survey study to add to the findings in this study. The purpose of a survey is to understand more about the characteristics of a group of people. It would be interesting to conduct this survey in the same county of my research. A survey could provide broad information on personal learning. One recommendation would be to incorporate Lamdin's (1997) Elderlearning Survey Questionnaire. This survey contains demographic information, what the participant chooses to learn, why they are learning, how they prefer to learn, where they are learning, barriers to learning, time spent in learning, as well as a section on self-planned learning.

3. I chose active older adults who were recommended because they continue to learn. We would learn more about older adults and their personal learning by choosing

participants from a general pool of older adults and/or who are in an assisted living facility or have some chronic condition.

4. Future research could focus on the notion of self-concept. It was obvious that the older adults in this study had a strong sense of self and a positive self-image. Learning about the interplay of self-image and learning is an important concern.

5. All of the participants discussed the importance of attending church as well as their faith. It was interesting to realize the amount of learning that took place on their own through reading inspirational books and in programs at their church. I recommend a study that investigates more about the role of the spiritual dynamic in the life of the older adult, and how this relates to learning.

6. Finally, I recommend a study that looks more specifically into the interplay of nature and learning. The participants in my study continually discussed the beauty of the area, as well as the enjoyment of being in the outdoors by bird watching, gardening, and walking. Although the connection between learning and nature was stated in this research, more research would add to the literature.

Chapter Summary

Based on the analysis of in-depth interviews with ten older adults who live in rural settings, three conclusions were presented on how late life adjustment impacts self-directed learning. First, late life adjustments are a primary incentive for self-directed learning (SDL). Second, self-directed learning is an integral process in the lives of older adults. Third, the rural environment is a predominantly positive context for learning.

These older adults utilized self-directed learning to adapt to their aging process. As a result of late-life adjustments they became motivated to learn some particular topic.

Making adjustments is a personal process of learning in order to bring a more natural fit in one's later life. As older adults adjust to time, family, and loss, these changes become personal projects of growth and learning.

Self-directed learning is an integral process in the lives of older adults. The personal learning is a central part of the lives of these older adults. Interwoven and connected throughout the many activities of older adults is a natural desire to continue to learn. Each person has his or her own process of learning. And, this research also revealed a process of learning that involves a desire to learn, followed by a personal interest to continue this learning. Next, the learner accesses resources, spends time with the learning activity, and makes adjustments in this process. Eventually there is a resolution to this learning, internally motivated learning activities usually continue, externally motivated activities often come to an end. Interspersed within this process is a catalyst that helps to pace the process along.

The rural environment is a positive context for self-directed learning. Rural life is constantly changing, plus many rural areas have been abandoned for consistent work in cities. However, these urban centers have fallen short in contrast to the richness of rural life. The richness of rural life includes natural beauty, quiet, simplicity, as well as a close community. These attributes contribute to a positive atmosphere for learning.

This study of older adults revealed people with hope, good news, and future plans. This research investigated older adults who are fully engaged with life even though each one had encountered significant loss. The graying of America does not have to become the diminishing of America. As the older adult, even in rural areas, encounters change, this can motivate them to learn what is necessary to continue to live a full and active life.

In essence, the older adult can incorporate self-directed learning to meet the challenge of adaptation.

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APPENDIX A
OVERALL PLAN FOR RESEARCH

1. Obtain a list of contacts from librarians, county agent, pastors, etc. Ask them - Do you know of someone older, who is continuing to learn? Or do you know of someone that is involved in activities of learning?
2. Contact each referral by phone, and ask if they are willing to be involved in the research.
3. On the phone introduce the research and explain that you are looking to interview people who continue to learn. See Appendix B.
4. If they meet the criteria, send them a letter (Appendix C) and the consent form (Appendix D).
5. Set up the first and second interview.
6. Have the tapes transcribed and begin analysis.

APPENDIX B
TELEPHONE QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Name.
2. Address.
3. Phone.
4. Best time to call.
5. E-mail.
6. Age.
7. Race.
8. Gender.
9. Marital Status.
10. Health status. How would you describe your personal health?
11. Where do you live and whom do you live with?
12. Occupation/Employment status.
13. If retired previous employment.
14. Formal Education. How much formal school were you able to complete?
15. Children/Grandchildren.
16. What have you been involved with in the last few years that you have gotten a lot out of?

APPENDIX C

LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

(Use UGA Official Letterhead.)

University of Georgia
Department of Adult Education
Rivers Crossing
Athens, GA 30602

Dear People,

This letter confirms that you have been nominated by someone in your community to participate in a research project that is a part of the University of Georgia. I am interested in talking with people age 70 + who would like to discuss important activities and issues in their life. This research involves interviews concerning how you have been changing and learning as an older adult. Hopefully these interviews will occur during August and September. I am required at that time to have a signature from you indicating your approval and agreement to participate in this research.

This research is especially interested in learning that you have done on your own, and which has helped to improve your life, and perhaps others. The research and information will be anonymous. The first interview will be a general discussion about your life and especially learning during the last few years. The second interview is more personal and will go into greater detail about this learning. Thanks for your help, and keep on learning!

Donald N. Roberson, Jr.
(Local address).
Athens, GA 30605
Telephone:

Email:

APPENDIX D
CONSENT FORM

I agree to take part in a research study titled “Self-Directed Learning in Older Adults”, which is being conducted by Donald N. Roberson, Jr., in the department of Adult Education at the University of Georgia. He may be contacted at his telephone number. I do not have to take part in this study, and I can stop taking part at any time without giving any reason, and without penalty. I can ask to have information related to me, returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

I understand that this is a research project related to dissertation work for Donald N. Roberson, Jr. The purpose of this project is to learn more about older adults who are involved in learning on their own. This is an important study because of the impact of personal learning on the quality of life and its ability to enhance one’s life. The benefits of this research for me will be the process of telling my story of learning also knowing that this research can impact other people.

I understand that I will undergo one to three interviews of approximately one hour each. These interviews will be tape-recorded and possibly videotaped. These interviews will take place at a time and a place that is convenient for me. No discomforts or stresses are expected. I understand that I have a right to review/edit the tapes, and that they will be used for educational purposes.

I understand that I may be asked to be video taped. I will be video taped only if I want to be video taped. The videotape will focus on actual learning projects in which I

am involved. I also understand that these videotapes may be used in the future in presentations at conferences or in classrooms. If I am video taped, I will clearly understand when and where I will be videotaped. I understand that I can change my mind about being video taped, and can ask in the future to have the tapes destroyed.

I prefer not to be videotaped_____.

I do not mind being videotaped_____.

Date_____.

The only people who will know that I am a research subject are members of the research team. The research team consists of Donny Roberson and the doctoral research committee. No information about me, provided by me during the research, will be shared with others without my written permission, except if necessary to protect my rights or welfare; or if required by law. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with me will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with my permission. All information concerning me will be kept private. If information about me is published, it will be written in a way that I cannot be recognized.

The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone, or by email.

My signature below indicates that the researcher has answered all of my questions to my satisfaction and that I consent to volunteer for this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____(Researcher and Date.)

(Participant and Date.)

For questions or problems about your rights please call or write: Chris Joseph,
Ph.D., Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia, 606A Graduate Studies Research
Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone 706-542-6514.

APPENDIX E
INTERVIEW GUIDE

First Interview.

1. Exchange of personal information.
2. Description of tape recording.
3. Explanation of interviews and the research.
4. Life history – video tape approximately 10 minutes.
5. Follow-up/confirm questions from initial letter and telephone interview.
Focus on the self directed learning project.
6. Don't ask the primary research questions – focus on the questions listed after each research question.

[1). Research Question - What is the nature of SDL of these older adults?]

What activities have you been involved with in the last several years? Can you think of some particular activity from which you have learned a lot? Tell me about this learning activity. Are there others?

Can I see this project?

Can you describe for me how you learned this? What works for you?

How much time do you spend on this?

How did you decide on learning this? Why this particular activity?

What is it like for you to be involved in this learning project?

What meaning did this have for you?

Can you describe for me a typical day?

(Be available for suggestions that they may have.)

Second Interview

[2). Research Question - What is the process of SDL of these older adults?]

Can you explain for me how you went about learning this activity?

Tell me about this learning project. How do you prefer to learn?

Let's recreate the situation of learning, what happened first, second, third, etc?

Can you tell me some story about learning this?

What do your friends or family say about this?

What have you gained from this?

Where did you participate in this learning?

Who did you go with?

What resources did you have?

What difficulties or barriers were there to this learning?

Can you estimate the amount of time you spent on this?

[3). Research Question - What are the late life adjustments of these older adults?]

What is it like to be an older adult?

Can you describe this for me?

What changes have you experienced as an older adult?

What have you done about these changes?

What do you feel like you have done to make it to this point in your life? (Physical, social, mental, spiritual)?

Can you tell a story about being an older adult?

What is different about you now?

[4). Research Question – How does the rural context shape the learning?]

What is it like to live where you are living?

In what ways does living in the country affect this project?

Can you tell me a story about living in this area?

Was there anything that was negative about living here?

APPENDIX F

LEARNING CONTRACT

The learning contract is a device whereby you can plan and personalize any learning experience. It can take on many shapes and forms ranging from audiotapes, to outlines, to descriptive statements to elaborate explanations of process and product. Most contracts contain information on your learning goals, anticipated learning resources and strategies, a projected time line, and ideas for how you will evaluate or validate your learning achievements. Internet resources for information on self-directed learning [<http://home.twcny.rr.com/Hiemstra/sdltools.html>] [www.andragogy.net] Last retrieved April 11, 2003.

The following is an example of a learning contract.

Learning goal:

Resources to reach this goal:

Strategy to reach this goal:

Time line:

How to evaluate this goal:

Sign with name:

APPENDIX G
RESOURCES FOR OLDER LEARNERS

General Website:

[www.medlineplus.gov] This is a website provided by the U.S. National Library of Medicine and the National Institutes of Health.

[www.healthfinder.gov] This website has links to more than 1,800 health related organizations.

Internet Websites for Older Adults

SeniorNet: [www.SeniorNet.org]

University Continuing Education Association: [www.ncea.com]

Medical: [www.webmd.com]

National Institute of Aging: [www.nia.nih.gov]

National Institute of Health: [www.health.nih.gov]

Age of Reason: [www.ageofreason.com]

National Elderlearning Programs

Elderhostel: [www.elderhostel.org]

Institutes for Learning in Retirement: 56 Dover Rd., Durham, NH 03824

Oasis: (email address) oasisinst@aol.com

Study/Travel Programs

Discovery Tours: (email address) discovery@amnh.org

Elderhostel: [www.elderhostel.org]

Interhostel: 6 Garrison Ave., Durham, NH 03824

Smithsonian: [www.smithsonianassociates.si.edu]

Independent Learning (Distance learning is growing rapidly – contact a nearby university to see if they have a distance learning program.)

American Open University of New York: Building 66, Office 227; Central Islip, NY 11722

Center for Distance Learning: [www.esc.edu]

Governor's State University at Western Illinois University:

[www.ecnet.net/users/miebis]

Knowledge TV: [www.jec.edu]

Ohio University External Student Program: 309 Tupper Hall Athens; OH 45701

Regents College of the University of the State of New York: Cultural Education Center; Albany, NY 12230; Phone: 518-474-3703

Thomas A. Edison State College: 1010 West State St., Trenton, NJ 08625

Other Opportunities for Learning:

John C. Campbell Folk School: [www.folkschool.org] (800-folk sch).