

LEARNING, GROWING, AND AGING:

LIFELONG LEARNERS IN THE ACADEMY

OF SENIOR PROFESSIONALS IN

BETHANY, OKLAHOMA

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## CHAPTER 1

### A TREE GROWS IN BETHANY

Teach us your steadfastness, your quiet growing,  
Sending your roots deep into the living earth.  
Tell us the sacred peace you gain in knowing  
Sunshine and sorrow, solitude and mirth;  
Sing us your music, playing with breezy fingers  
Over the strings that winds have torn and swept,  
Symbol of song, a century's music lingers  
After the tears our foolish hearts have wept.  
Tell us your secret, Lyre Tree above us.  
-- Mary Esther Badley Burgoyne

### A Tree as a Metaphor

Trees are important symbols of growth, maturity, and wisdom. Trees have been the theme of poets as they have expressed their thoughts and feelings on paper. Thomas Paine (1775) used a tree as a symbol in his poem, "The Liberty Tree." Joyce Kilmer (1914) in his famous poem, "Trees", penned,

Trees  
I think that I shall never see  
A poem as lovely as a tree,  
A tree whose hungry mouth is prest  
Against the earth's sweet flowing breast;  
A tree that looks at God all day,  
And lifts her leafy arms to pray;  
A tree that may in Summer wear  
A nest of robins in her hair;  
Upon whose bosom snow has lain;  
Who intimately lives with rain.  
Poems are made by fools like me,  
But only God can make a tree.

Trees have been used by many people and many cultures to explain various theories, philosophies, and ideologies.

Charles Darwin (1859) used the metaphor of the tree to explain evolution and ecology in his Origin of the Species. Buddha sat under a Bodhi tree until he received enlightenment; consequently, thousands of Buddhists pilgrimage each year to the site of the Bodhi tree in their own quests for enlightenment (Gates, 2000; Whitcomb, 2000). Aboriginal and native peoples in Australia, Hawaii, and various Native American tribes in the United States have trees that they consider to be holy or are used in the holiest of ceremonies (Gates, 2000; Whitcomb, 2000). In the Bible, the palm tree is the symbol of the garden of paradise (Whitcomb, 2000). In Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, after the bombing of the Alfred Murrah Federal Building in 1995, an elm tree that survived the blast of the bomb became the symbol for hope and renewal for the families of the bombing victims, the survivors, and the citizens of Oklahoma (Oklahoma City National Memorial, <http://www.oklahomacitynationalmemorial.org>).

What is it about a tree that inspires poets, philosophers, and theologians? Kim Taplin (1989) in Tongues of the Trees suggests:

Because they are primeval, because they outlive us, because they are fixed, trees seem to emanate a sense of permanence. And though rooted in earth, they seem to touch the sky. For these reasons it is natural to feel we might learn

wisdom from them, to haunt about them with the idea that if we could only read their silent riddle rightly we should learn some secret vital to our own lives; or even, more specifically, some secret vital to our real, our lasting and spiritual existence. (p. 14)

Trees provide shade from the summer heat, shelter for creatures that live in the boughs, food for nourishment, and beauty for the aesthetics. Thus, because of their stature, their longevity, their productivity, and their changing but continual growth throughout all the seasons, trees become representations for wisdom, aging, and long life. It is this dualistic attribute of aging while yet continuing to grow and be productive that the metaphor of the tree lends itself to a study of older adult learners.

#### Senior Adults

Opinions about aging and the activities of senior adults are changing. This is due, in part, to the fact that the demographics of America are changing. The United States is becoming a country with a growing population of older adults (Cross, 1981; Dyctwald, 1986; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Where the United States was once a youth-oriented society, it is now seeing two adult generations, which consists of the current senior adults and the adults born since 1946, merging to form the largest segment of the population. The Census Bureau projects that life

expectancy in 2040 will be 75 years for men and 83 for women; additionally, the National Health Institute on Aging, a division of the Institutes for Health, projects that life expectancy to be 86 years for men and 91.5 for women (Dychtwald, 1989). "Throughout most of recorded human history, only one in ten people could expect to live to the age of 65. Today, nearly 80 percent of Americans will live to be past that age" (Dychtwald, 1989, p. 6).

This merging population of senior adults represents the best-educated people in American history. The United States veterans returning from World War II were able to take advantage of the educational benefits of the G.I. Bill (Knowles, 1977). Additionally, beginning in the late 1950's, the emergence of the community college systems, "open admissions", and external degree programs provided an even broader opportunity for higher education for people wanting a college education (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982; Knowles, 1977). The Census Bureau (1989) reported the median years of schooling has risen from just higher than an eighth-grade level for those age 65-and-older in 1950 to more than 12 years of formal education for that same age-group in 1989. In 1989, 11% of those age 65 and older had completed 4 or more years of college; this figure will rise to 20% by the year 2010 (Manheimer, 1998). Furthermore,

these adults have been part of the beginning of the Information Age. Studies show that intellectual and creative stimulation promotes longevity and better quality of life (Dychtwald, 1989; Goff, 1992).

Because of better health, living longer, and being educated, opinions of leisure and retirement are changing. Many senior adults choose to continue in lifelong learning that includes specific educational learning experiences. In 1975, the Elderhostel Institute Network was formed. Elderhostel is an activity in which older adults participate in short-term, educational programs, which are usually associated with a learning institution such as a college, university, or museum (Abraham, 1998; Arsenault, Anderson & Swedburg, 1998; Lamdin & Fugate, 1997; Manheimer, 1998). Other associations have formed with the purpose of providing learning enrichment activities for senior adults. The Shepherd's Center of Kansas City, Institutes for Retired Professionals, Older Adult Service and Information System, and SeniorNet represent the many organizations that are formed for the purpose of intellectual growth for senior adults (Manheimer, 1998).

Like a tree, senior adults have grown through the seasons. Through their growing and maturing, the current group of senior adults have experienced the Great

Depression, World War II, and the beginning of the Information Age. These senior adults have learned how to travel on the nation's superhighways and how to maneuver through the information highway of the World Wide Web. Now in another season of life, many senior adults choose to continue to learn, to grow, and to develop during retirement. A group of these growing and maturing senior adults live in Bethany, Oklahoma.

#### The Academy of Senior Professionals

In 1990 in Bethany, Oklahoma, a group of senior adults formed an organization called "The Academy of Senior Professionals (ASP)". With a published purpose to provide a climate of continuing intellectual stimulation, over 100 senior adults meet monthly to explore various forms of intellectual, cultural, spiritual, and service activities. Monthly meetings, small group research teams, monthly newsletters, and service projects represent the kinds of learning activities in which the members participate. At monthly meetings the members have a meal and listen to speakers, but they also share with the group their continuing, self-directed educational pursuits such as writing of memoirs, displaying art work, and providing musical entertainment. In addition to the monthly meetings, small groups of the members meet for research on topics of

interest. This group conducts surveys to find out the learning interests of the membership at large, researches the topics, and provides information for the programs at the monthly meetings. Members who have expertise in writing and publication produce a monthly newsletter.

The Academy of Senior Professionals is associated with Southern Nazarene University; however, membership is neither restricted to Nazarenes nor alumni of the university. Furthermore, the development and control of the academy is totally within the membership. The Academy of Senior Professionals represents a unique group of learners in the long history and continuing development in the field of adult education.

#### Adult Education

Some were merchants. Some were craftsmen. Wealth was enjoyed by a few while most lived modest lives. Some lived in the city, and others came from the countryside. Most were everyday kind of people, and a few were well known throughout the country. All had the desire to learn. The year was 1727, and the place was Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Benjamin Franklin organized a small group of 11 people to meet for the purposes of debate on issues such as morals, politics, and philosophy. This discussion group, the Junto, which later became the American



Philosophical Society, was the beginning of the adult education movement in the United States (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982; Knowles, 1977). From those early beginnings, the seeds were planted for further adult education kinds of experiences. The Lyceum founded by Josiah Holbrook in 1826, the Chautauqua Movement of 1874, Myles Horton's Highlander School in 1932, the contemporary adult basic education programs, and the human resource development of corporate America are but a few in the myriad of adult education movements and programs that have developed since Franklin's time (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982; Knowles, 1977).

One of the first leaders in modern adult education was Eduard Lindeman. Writing in 1926, Lindeman described his vision of adult education.

Small groups of aspiring adults who desire to keep their minds fresh and vigorous; who begin to learn by confronting pertinent situations; who dig down into the reservoirs of their experience before resorting to texts and secondary facts; who are led in the discussion by teachers who are also searchers after wisdom and not oracles: this constitutes the setting for adult education, the modern quest for life's meaning. (p. 11)

From that vision adult educators initially focused their attention on program development and administration of adult learning programs as the modern adult education movement expanded. Defining adult education, identifying

what constitutes an adult learner, describing adult programs, developing methodologies for teaching, and understanding what motivates adult learners to participate were important concerns (Houle, 1961; Kidd, 1973; Knowles, 1970; 1984; 1988).

However, as program-related issues were given a clearer description, a change in focus occurred. Adult educators wanted to know more about the adult learners and how they learned (Smith, 1982). "The focus of the adult education field is shifting to adult learning. . . . Attention is presently being given to learning that is relevant to the living tasks of the individual--real-life learning" (Fellenz & Conti, 1989, p. vii). Adults as learners, real-life learning, learning how to learn, critical reflection of life experiences, self-directed learning, and personal learning strategies are trends in the field of adult education as the focus moves from adult education to adult learning (Fellenz & Conti, 1989).

#### Adult Learning

Erikson in his Eight Stages of Man (1963) describes adulthood as a time of exploration. For many, it is a time to begin to make sense of what has happened during childhood. Furthermore, for many adults, middle and late adulthood can be a time to establish significant

relationships and to start giving back to others. For other adults, life roles have been in the care of families and community. Consequently, it is during middle and late adulthood that they can discover new options and new abilities for self-improvement and self-awareness (Edelstein, 1997). As an adult ages, new understandings are formed that can be ultimately culminated in older adulthood in what Erikson calls "a mature adult." He defines a mature adult as one who has formed a strong foundation of basic trust, who has a sense of independence, who has the capacity for initiative and purpose, who has developed a sense of competencies, who has a sense of identity, and who understands that wisdom is self-acceptance and a confirmation that one's life is worthwhile (Fowler, 1984). Adults are intrinsically motivated (Knowles, 1970), and they are in a stage of life where they are ready to assess where they have come from, where they are, and where they are going. They want to understand their world and their place in it (Merriam & Clark, 1991).

Often referred to as andragogy, the characteristics of adult learners differ from those of children or adolescence (Kidd, 1973; Knowles, 1970). Adults want to learn about their potential, and they see learning as a way to develop competencies as a means to achieve their potential

(Knowles, 1970; 1980; Maslow, 1970). Adult learners seek to understand and to make applications of their learning so that in some way the knowledge improves their lives (Kidd, 1973; Knowles, 1970; Smith, 1982). Because adult learners want application-oriented, problem-solving learning experiences, the importance of the learning depends on how it will directly benefit the learner.

Children have been conditioned to have a subject-centered orientation to most learning, whereas adults tend to have a problem-centered orientation to learning. This difference is primarily the result of the difference in time perspective. The child's time perspective toward learning is one of postponed application. The adult, on the other hand, comes into an education activity largely because he is experiencing some inadequacy in coping with current life problems. He wants to apply tomorrow what he learns today, so his time perspective is one of immediacy of application. Therefore, he enters into education with a problem-centered orientation to learning. (Knowles, 1970, p. 48)

Adults have a wealth of experience. They draw from and add to their abundance of life experiences as they endeavor to understand and make meaning from these experiences (Kidd, 1973; Knowles, 1970, 1980; Lindeman, 1926; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). They are in a prime stage of life to analyze their life experiences because have they have the ability to do reflective thought, which is developmental in nature (Kitchener & King, 1990).

Because adults live in a constantly changing world, they need to know how to conduct learning projects in different ways in order to meet the challenges of the day. "Learning how to learn. . . involves having people having or acquiring whatever understanding or skills they require to learn effectively in the situations or settings they encounter" (Smith, 1983, p.97). Since there is no such thing as a complete learner (Smith, 1982, 1983), adults need to acquire a wide variety of skills so that learning becomes meaningful and useful. As adults understand themselves as learners, develop more skills, and become more flexible in ways to approach learning, they gain increased control, confidence and satisfaction in learning projects (Smith, 1982, 1983).

Learning in adulthood can be transformational. Mezirow (1990; 1991; 2000) argues that adulthood is the time to reassess life experiences and previously held assumptions. He suggests that learning is a result of critical reflection, which is the examination of the very nature and origin of one's life experiences. He proposes a theory of adult learning that incorporates a sequence of steps that begins with a critical incident or disorienting dilemma followed by self-examining feelings, critically reflecting, exploring and planning new roles, negotiating

relationships, building confidence, and developing a discriminating perspective (Mezirow, 1990, 1991, 2000; Taylor, 1997). Often critically reflecting on life experiences brings about a transformation in perspective, understanding, and behavior (Adams, 1992; Brookfield, 1995; Conti, 1977; Conti & Fellenz, 1986; Cranton, 1994; Freire, 1972; Horton, Kohl, & Kohl, 1990; Hudson, 1991; Mezirow, 1990, 1991; Taylor, 1997; Tennent & Pogson, 1995). Consequently, adult learning is characterized by analyzing previous experiences, exploring new knowledge, developing new ways to learn, and synthesizing the past and present for immediate, personal application (Fowler, 1984; Knowles, 1970, 1988; Knox, 1986; Mezirow, 1991).

#### Self-Directed Learning

To better understand adult learners, adult educators want to know where adults pursue learning. One of the field's main research questions has been to identify the kinds of settings in which adults explore and learn. Researchers found that there are four types of opportunities for learning: formal settings, informal settings, nonformal settings, and self-directed learning (Candy, 1991; Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Mocker & Spear, 1982; Tough, 1971).

Formal settings are structured classroom instruction, are usually connected with an organization, and are not regulated to any specific age group. Colleges, universities, vocational and technical institutions, libraries, museums, religious organizations, and industry represent the kinds of places that formal settings for learning occur (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982; Knowles, 1970; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Traditional kinds of adult education experiences often take place in formal learning situations such as classes, courses of study, workshops, and seminars. Consequently, this kind of learning situation has received much attention in the literature due to the fact that many adult educators are employed in the agencies providing the formal learning opportunities (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982, p. 152).

Informal settings are less structured learning environments (Mocker & Spear, 1982). Private instruction, group lessons, literary discussion groups, political groups, and horticultural clubs are typical of the kinds of learning opportunities that occur in an informal learning setting. The learning objectives may be set by someone other than the learner; however, the learner decides the means by which the learning will be obtained. Usually loosely structured, these learning groups occur in natural

settings and are not connected with an organization

(Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982; Mocker & Spear, 1982).

Nonformal settings refers to learning that occurs in a more flexible fashion than formal and informal learning

environments. Nonformal learning environments are often

associated with community learning opportunities and

indigenous learning with social action and change as the

primary focus (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p.21).

Community-based learning finds people gathering to discuss

pertinent social and community concerns. In recent years,

more attention has been given to the importance of

indigenous learning. "Indigenous learning is linked with a

culture. . . .Often steeped in oral traditions and art

forms, conscious use of indigenous forms of learning can

enhance nonformal learning" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999,

p. 31).

However, of the four opportunities for learning, self-

directed learning represents the kind of learning situation

that occurs for most adult learning projects (Cross, 1981;

Tough, 1971). Developmentally, adults move from dependency

to independence; consequently, they have a need to be self-

directed (Knowles, 1970; 1975; 1980). They want a say in

what happens in their learning projects. Self-directed

learning, therefore, is a process in which people take the



primary initiative for planning, carrying out, and evaluating their own learning experiences (Candy, 1991; Knowles, 1975, 1988). "By most conservative estimates, a large part of what adults learn purposefully and systematically is acquired on an individual basis without benefit of organizational sponsorship" (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982, p. 152). Indeed, nearly 70% of all adult learning situations occur through independent, self-planning, self-teaching, and self-evaluation learning avenues (Cross, 1981; Tough, 1971).

There are several goals of self-directed learning. A primary goal of self-directed learning is to improve the ability of adult learners to be self-directed (Knowles, 1975). Another goal of self-directed learning is to enhance the transformational learning of adults through a process of critically reflecting on life experiences (Meizrow, 1990, 1991). Additionally, social change through emancipatory learning can also be a result of self-directed learning (Freire, 1972; Horton et al., 1990).

Self-directed learning does not mean that learning is necessarily done in isolation. Groups of learners may come together for a singular purpose, but each conducts the learning in personal ways (Knowles, 1975; Mocker & Spear, 1982). Most importantly, the focus of the learning

experience is always learner controlled rather than teacher or institution controlled (Candy, 1991; Knowles, 1975).

### Learning Styles and Strategies

People approach learning situations in individual, personal ways. Knowing how adults undertake learning projects by investigating learning styles and personal learning strategies has been of great interest to adult educators (Bonham, 1989; Briggs & Myers, 1987; Conti & Kolody, 1999; Conti & Wellborn, 1989; Even, 1987; Holtzclaw, 1985; Kolb, 1984, 1985; Korhonen & McCall, 1986; Smith, 1983; Sweeney, 1988). Equally important, adults need to understand themselves as learners in order to be more efficient in knowing how to learn. Understanding personal learning styles and learning strategies can help learners in making choices about what, when, where, and how to learn (Smith, 1983).

A learning style is an internal cognitive process which reflects how a person perceives and processes information (Kolb, 1984). "Learning styles encompasses the various approaches to learning developed by individuals over time" (McFarland, 1997, p. 13). The development of learning styles or traits is a dynamic process that continues to change and develop as an individual matures (Conti & Wellborn, 1989; Kolb, 1984, 1985). Kolb (1984,

1985) suggests that a learning style is developed and shaped by several factors including personality type or disposition, academic training, career choice, and current job responsibilities. Kolb maintains that during mid-life, adults integrate a variety of learning styles as a result of career demands and life circumstances.

Identifying learning styles helps adults to understand more clearly how they solve problems, set goals, and deal with new situations (Kolb, 1984, 1985).

Understanding learning strategies is of ongoing interest to adult educators (Conti & Kolody, 1999). While learning styles are cognitive traits, learning strategies are the techniques used to accomplish a specific learning task (Fellenz & Conti, 1989, p.7). One of the major characteristics of adult learning is that it is generally undertaken for immediate application to real-life situations (Fellenz & Conti, 1989; Knowles, 1975).

Learning strategy research results show that there are no relationships with demographic variables; consequently, learning strategies are equally distributed across different segments of the population (Conti & Kolody, 1999). However, there are distinct learning strategy groups (Fellenz & Conti, 1989; Conti & Kolody, 1999). When learning strategies are applied to adult learning, the

emphasis is not placed on a traditional study skill approach; rather, the learning strategy preference reflects the metacognition, motivation, memory, resource management, and critical thinking strategies that adult learners use in approaching real-life learning situations (Fellenz & Conti, 1989).

Using this conceptualization of adult learning strategies, three learning strategy groups have been identified. These are Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers (Conti & Kolody, 1999). Characteristics of the learning strategy profiles reveal that people initially approach new learning projects either through external resources or by having an internal sense of importance. Navigators and Problem Solvers rely upon external aids, critical use of resources, and planning and monitoring of the task. Engagers must have an internal sense of importance of the learning before becoming involved in the learning project (Conti & Kolody, 1999). Understanding a personal learning strategy can help adult learners to conceptualize their own learning processes (Conti & Kolody, 1999).

#### Problem Statement

Since the 1926 vision of Eduard Lindeman for adult education, there has been an explosion of adult education

programs. Much time and effort has been given by adult education researchers to understand how to conduct adult learning programs and how to administer adult programs. Additionally, much attention has been given to learning why adults choose to participate and predictors for participation in formal adult learning programs. Leaders in the field of adult education such as Kidd and Knowles have been instrumental in helping this extremely diverse field of education to have a distinctive educational methodology. However, as educational methodology and program development have become more defined and refined, a major shift in the focus of adult education has resulted. Emphasis is being placed more on how adults learn rather than the structure of adult education. More specifically, educators want to know how adults learn in real-world settings.

Basic to any consideration of trends in adult learning is the attention presently being given to learning that is relevant to the living tasks of the individual in contrast to those tasks considered more appropriate to formal education. Such learning is often referred to as "real-life" or "real-world" learning or learning that results in "practical" knowledge.

(Fellenz & Conti, 1989, p. 3)

Consequently, adult educators are interested in knowing more about the people and how they learn. Self-directed learning, learning how to learn, strategies for learning, and perspective transformation through critically

reflecting on life experiences are key research issues for this ever-developing field.

The challenges for adult educators to understand adult learners are increasing. The senior adult population is growing larger due to the current older generation living longer and to the generation born since 1946 becoming senior adults. Many senior adult learners choose to continue in lifelong learning experiences that address their "real-world" living. They seek new learning experiences that will add to their already vast reservoir of experience and learning. They explore ways to understand and solve the problems that are unique to their stage of life. They strive to remain connected with other senior adult learners who have same interests and goals.

There are adult learning theories that are explained in general. However, what would these adult learning theories look like in a specific group of self-directed senior adult learners, such as the senior adults in the Academy of Senior Professionals (ASP) in Bethany, Oklahoma? ASP is a unique group that was formed by the members 10 years ago and continues to meet on a regular basis. Over 100 senior adults of the membership carry out a wide range of learning activities that range from the simple to the complex, and which includes individual learning and group

projects. This group exemplifies the many characteristics of self-directed learning. Yet, the learning patterns of this group have not been examined to see how they can inform the overall learning process of adult learners. How do these senior adults view themselves as learners? What do their learning projects look like? How do they learn in "real-world" situations? What learning strategies do they use? How do they use process and reflection in the pursuit of the meaning of life experiences?

#### Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to describe the perceptions of the learning patterns of the senior adult learners in the Academy of Senior Professionals (ASP) in Bethany, Oklahoma. The focus was on describing the learning activities and the attitudes and values of the learners towards learning. Emphasis was placed on adult learning principles, self-directed learning, learning how to learn, and critical reflection.

#### Research Questions

Several research questions were addressed in this project. These questions included:

1. What do the learning projects of ASP look like?
2. How do the ASP members understand themselves as learners?

3. How do ASP members acquire the knowledge and skill to learn effectively in specific learning situations?
4. What role does learning play in the lives of ASP members?
5. What are the life learning experiences that brought the members into ASP?
6. How does the community of faith of the ASP members relate to the learning?

#### Limitations

This study was limited to a selected number of individuals involved in the Academy of Senior Professionals on the campus of Southern Nazarene University in Bethany, Oklahoma. As individuals who have lifelong ties to the Church of the Nazarene, their responses are reflective of a lifestyle that is born out of a tradition of service to the Church of the Nazarene and education provided through the Church of the Nazarene. Their uniqueness provides an opportunity to describe the impact of lifelong learning within a particular context.

Their understandings do not necessarily represent other lifelong learners in the local Bethany, Oklahoma Church of the Nazarene community who are not a part of the Academy of Senior Professionals. The participants' commonality of church membership, affiliation through their higher education experiences, and self-identification as a senior professional provides the distinction. However, their perceptions can be embraced through the naturalistic



inquiry approach of this study with its mandate for a description of the learning patterns of the senior adult learners in the Academy of Senior Professionals.

The participants' commonality of educational and religious experiences has produced a close connection of friends and co-workers. Nearly half of the participants are married couples, and many of the married couples met their spouses during their college years. Most of the participants went to college together, attend church together, and some are close friends. Consequently, many of the participants know each other very well. Indeed, the researcher is acquainted with most of the participants and knows some of them very well.

#### Assumptions

Even though the participants are members of the Academy of Senior Professionals, they were all members on a voluntary basis and had the ability to choose from a number of senior adult activities within and outside of the local Church of the Nazarene community in Bethany, Oklahoma. Because of their membership in an organization that has continual learning as a part of its mission statement, it was assumed that the participants value lifelong learning. Furthermore, since the focus of the study was limited to those individuals within the Academy of Senior

Professionals, which is affiliated with an institution of higher learning of the Church of the Nazarene, it was assumed that in some way the Church of the Nazarene or other like religious organizations have been an active force in their lives. Consequently, they were aware to some degree of the relationship they held with the Church of the Nazarene and its impact upon them as learners.

## CHAPTER 2

### PREPARING FOR GROWTH

Trees and shrubs are a permanent part of a landscape. If properly selected and planted. . .they will provide shade, weather protection, privacy, and year-round enjoyment.

Because they are such an important investment, take care with their planting.

- - J.E. Klett & D. E. Whiting

#### Introduction

A nurseryman inspects the ground. He bends down, takes a clod of dirt in his hands, and rubs it between his fingers. He scans the surrounding environment, observing the other trees and foliage. Brushing the dirt from his hands, he rubs his chin thoughtfully. His eyes gaze upward, looking towards the sun. He has many things to consider before he starts to plant. Should he plant a tree? Is a tree even needed or wanted? If so, what kind of tree should be planted? What is the condition of the soil? Will the soil be too heavy in clay with poor drainage, or will the conditions be right for growing? Are there any rocks or other obstructions that might inhibit growth? Will there be enough sunlight? How far does he need to dig in order to plant the tree? How often will he need to water the tree? After the growing begins, how will he evaluate the growth of the tree? As he studies the situation, a plan develops for planting. He identifies the tree to be

planted. He examines the conditions for planting. He analyzes the soil, and he determines what he needs to do to help the tree develop and grow. Picking up his tools, he begins to dig.

Preparing to plant a tree is much like preparing to do a research study. Much planning and careful preparation is needed. As with a nurseryman who plans before planting, a researcher must determine who is to be studied, why the topic is important to study, how the study is going to be conducted, and how the data from the study will be analyzed. Consequently, understanding the design and methodology of the study is fundamental.

#### The Design

This naturalistic study utilized a descriptive design to collect data related to understanding the learning patterns of the members of the Academy of Senior Professionals. Naturalistic inquiry is a fluid, subjective approach to research. The purposes of naturalistic inquiry are discovery, description, understanding, and interpretation within a specific context (Crabtree & Miller, 1992; Glesne & Peskin, 1992; Patton, 1990). The researcher is the primary data collection instrument, and personal involvement of the researcher is expected (Guba, 1978; Merriam, 1988). Rigor and

trustworthiness of a study are central concerns. While naturalistic inquiry is neither generalizable nor objective, there are ways to conduct the study so that the study is credible and trustworthy. Rigor is reflected in the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Triangulation, which involves multiple ways of gathering information such as interviewing, observation, and document analysis; rich, thick descriptions; prolonged engagement in the field; member checks; peer debriefings; and audit trails help to establish the trustworthiness of the research (Crabtree & Miller, 1992; Glasner, 1999; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Guba, 1978; Kvale, 1996; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Merriam, 1988; Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Yin, 1994).

#### Case Study

One method of doing naturalistic research is through a case study design. Merriam (1988) identifies four characteristics of a case study:

1. Case studies focus on a particular situation, event, or phenomenon. Therefore, they are problem centered and small scale endeavors.
2. The end product of a case study is description. Using rich, thick descriptions, case studies are considered holistic and lifelike.
3. Case studies illuminate the reader's understanding of the situation being studied with a discovery of

new meaning or a confirmation of what is already known.

4. For the most part, case studies rely on inductive reasoning. Generalizations, concepts, or hypothesis emerge from the examination of the data. (pp. 11-13)

Case study knowledge is contextual, concrete, and aids in the understanding of processes of events, projects, and programs. Additionally, case studies help to discover context characteristics that give new meaning on an issue or subject (Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Merriam, 1988; Yin, 1994).

This project used a case study methodology because the purpose of the project was to describe the perceptions of the learning patterns of the senior adult learners in the Academy of Senior Professionals. The researcher was the principle research tool for obtaining data through interviews, observation, and document analysis. Through a process of coding, patterns or theories emerged from the data that were interpreted by the researcher.

#### The Researcher

Since the researcher is the primary data collection instrument for a naturalistic research project, an understanding of the relationship of the researcher to the context of the study is important (Guba, 1978; Merriam, 1988). "Data are mediated through this human instrument

. . . .The researcher as instrument is responsive to the context; he or she can adapt techniques to the circumstances; the total context can be considered"

(Merriam, 1988, p. 19).

[Qualitative research requires] the evaluator get close to the people and situations being studied in order to understand the minutiae of the program life. The evaluator gets close to the program through physical proximity for a period of time, as well as through development of closeness in the social sense of intimacy and confidentiality.  
(Patton, 1983, p. 43)

The design of this study takes into account the fact that I have been directly involved with the greater Church of the Nazarene community of faith since childhood. Being raised in a Nazarene pastor's home, I lived in various Nazarene communities across the United States. California, Colorado, Florida, Missouri, Oklahoma, Texas, and Washington were states called "home". The Nazarene churches and Nazarene communities I have been affiliated with range from very small congregations of less than 100 members to large congregations of over 1,000 members.

Furthermore, several of these Nazarene communities in California, Missouri, and Washington have historical and organizational importance for the Church of the Nazarene. Los Angeles, California, First Church of the Nazarene and Walla Walla, Washington, First Church of the Nazarene were

two of the first organized churches in the denomination; consequently, these churches are steeped in Nazarene history with each having extensive archives and libraries. Kansas City, Missouri, First Church of the Nazarene is located in the same city as the international headquarters of the Church of the Nazarene. Consequently, I had opportunity to know many of the denominational church leaders.

My higher educational background and professional career have also been directly linked to the Church of the Nazarene. I graduated from Southern Nazarene University in Bethany, Oklahoma, with both Bachelor's and Master's degrees. For the past 21 years, I have been a faculty member at Southern Nazarene University as a professional educator in the field of adult education with teaching responsibilities in the School of Adult Studies. As a part of my responsibilities within the School of Adult Studies, I developed and administer the Assessment of Prior Learning Program. This program provides opportunity for older adults students, who are returning to college to finish baccalaureate degrees, to submit documentation of learning acquired through career and other life experiences in order to be evaluated for college credit.



As a result of my background in the Church of the Nazarene and my career path, I bring to this research project an understanding of the Nazarene culture and particular interests in adult learning. As part of the Bethany, Oklahoma, community of Nazarenes, I have knowledge of the local Nazarene culture, and I have had the opportunity to know several of the members of ASP through family, friendship and church affiliations, and as former professors and colleagues. Additionally, I bring to the research project my interests in adult learning theory, adult development, learning how to learn, and critical reflection on life experiences.

#### ATLAS

While the researcher was the primary data collection instrument, the Assessing The Learning Strategies of Adults (ATLAS) was used as a mechanism for talking about the ways ASP members go about attacking new learning projects. This easy to administer inventory quickly identified the respondents' learning strategy profiles. ATLAS is an instrument that provides profiles and information concerning personal learning strategies (Conti & Kolody, 1999). The ATLAS was completed rapidly, usually in one to three minutes.

The ATLAS uses a flow-chart design (Conti & Kolody, 1999). Items are printed on 5.5" x 11" pages of colored card stock. Sentence stems, which are in the top box on the page, lead to options in other boxes that complete the stem. Connecting arrows direct the respondent to the options. Each option leads the respondent to proceed to another colored page or to the concluding profile page that provides information about the respondent's correct group placement as a Navigator, Problem Solver, or Engager. Each profile has a description of the learning strategy characteristics and suggestions for conducting learning activities that complement the learning strategy profile (Conti & Kolody, 1999).

Incorporating ATLAS into the interview sessions enabled the researcher to gain more insight into how the adult learners of ASP acquire the knowledge and skill to learn effectively in specific learning situations that occur on an every-day basis. This is referred to as real-life learning (Fellenz & Conti, 1989). Often older adults have difficulty understanding every day, real-life learning as actual "learning" (Lamdin & Fugate, 1997). Therefore, the ATLAS served an important purpose in beginning the interview process. After completing the ATLAS, the participants were asked if the ATLAS correctly identified

their learning strategies. Most of the participants quickly affirmed that the ATLAS did correctly reflect the way they go about completing learning tasks. More importantly, the clearly defined descriptions helped the participants to articulate every day, real-life learning in those terms. Additionally, the ATLAS became a springboard for probing questions concerning how the adults see themselves as learners. Consequently, ATLAS was an important tool in the interview process as the respondents had a concrete way to identify and articulate their real-life learning. Information gained from the using the ATLAS was incorporated into the overall interpretive analysis but was not used in a quantitative analysis.

### Validity

Validity of an instrument is critical. Validity attempts to answer the question of what the instrument purports to measure. There are three types of validity that are important in education: construct, content, and criterion-related (Kerlinger, 1973).

Construct validity assesses the underlying theory of the instrument and allows for the assigning of "meaning" to the instrument (Kerlinger, 1973). "The process of establishing construct validity for ATLAS was to synthesize the results of the numerous research studies using SKILLS

[The Self-Knowledge Inventory of Lifelong Learning Strategies] and to consolidate these results" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 110). Consequently, the construct validity of the ATLAS was established by reviewing the literature using SKILLS in field-based research and by consolidating the findings of over 15 doctoral dissertations using the SKILLS and national studies in the United States and Canada using the SKILLS. This resulted in the identification of three groups with similar learning patterns. The distribution among the three groups was relatively equal, and these groups have been named Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers. (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p.18).

Content validity refers to the sampling adequacy of the instrument (Kerlinger, 1973). Content validity for ATLAS is concerned "with the degree to which the items are representative of learning strategy characteristics of the three groups identified in the SKILLS' research" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p.18). Content validity was established by using discriminate analysis to determine the exact pattern of the learning strategies used by each group when it was compared to the other groups. "While ATLAS has only a few items, each item was based on the powerful multivariate procedure of discriminate analysis. . . .to precisely

describe the content for each item" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 19).

Criterion-related validity compares an instrument's scores with external criteria known or believed to measure the attribute under the study (Kerlinger, 1973). The criterion-related validity for ATLAS was established by comparing ATLAS scores to actual group placement using SKILLS. The current version of ATLAS correctly places approximately 70% of the respondents in their corresponding SKILLS group (Conti & Kolody, 1999). Since validity of an instrument is a long process rather than a single event (Tyler & Walsh, 1979), the process of establishing the criterion-related validity is on-going with focus groups being conducted to gather qualitative data to describe the exact ways members of each group go about learning, the barriers faced in the learning process, and ways facilitators can help and hinder the learning process (Conti & Kolody, 1999). The authors of ATLAS are also collecting criterion-related data through the results of numerous research projects (Conti, personal communication, February, 2001). Research using the ATLAS instrument has found the ATLAS to be an accurate instrument for identifying and for describing personal learning strategy profiles (Ghost Bear, 2001; James, 2000; Spencer, 2000;

Willyard, 2000). Studies involving Internet users (Ghost Bear, 2001; Spencer, 2000) have discovered that the ATLAS groupings accurately described the learning strategy preferences of 90% of the participants. Another study of high school noncompleters "consistently indicated their agreement with the ATLAS description of their learning strategies" (James, 2000, p. 92). This is consistent with "follow-up studies involving nearly 1,000 participants, approximately 90% of the respondents indicated that the ATLAS classification of their learning strategy preference is an accurate description of their actual behavior" (Willyard, 2000, p.88).

#### The Sample

The population of a study is an entire group of persons, things, or events which have at least one trait in common (Sprinthall, 1994). The population for this study was the members of the Academy of Senior Professionals (ASP). ASP is an autonomous, self-directed organization of senior adult learners who have been meeting on a regular basis for 10 years for the purposes of continuing intellectual, cultural, and spiritual growth. Although they meet on the campus of Southern Nazarene University, ASP is controlled by the membership. Only members and activities directly associated with ASP were part of the study. No

other senior adult organizations were involved.

Furthermore, even though ASP is affiliated with Southern Nazarene University, officials of the university were not included in the population.

Within a case study there are usually many events and activities to observe, people to interview, and documents to evaluate (Merriam, 1988). Since it is impossible to interview everyone, observe everything, and gather all the related materials, the researcher needs to identify the specific activities, people, and documents to be included within the study (Merriam, 1988). In a quantitative study, a probability sampling is used. With probability sampling, "one can specify for each element of the population the probability that it will be included within the sample" (Merriam, 1988, p. 47), which results in the researcher being able to generalize the outcomes of the study.

However, the purpose of naturalistic design is not to generalize but rather it is to discover and gain understanding within a particular context. "Quantitative sampling concerns itself with representativeness and qualitative sampling with information-richness" (Patton, 1990, p.169). Therefore, the most common form of sampling for a naturalistic design is purposive or purposeful.

"Purposive sample is based on the assumption that one wants

to discover, understand, gain insight; therefore, one needs to select a sample from which one can learn the most" (Merriam, 1988, p. 48). In purposive sampling, people are chosen who are knowledgeable about the subject and who provide an overall sense of the meaning of a concept, theme, or process (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Sometimes the sample is determined before the study begins while in other naturalistic studies the sample is identified as the study progresses. The goal, however, is to find conversational partners who are knowledgeable, willing to talk, and represent a range of points of view (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

A purposive sample was used in this study. The activities that were observed and the documents that were analyzed were identified as the study progressed. Likewise, the participants were also identified in like fashion. The participants were chosen from those members who expressed a willingness to be a part of the project through the completion of a demographic survey given to the members of the ASP who were at the May, 2000 meeting. Also, some participants were chosen from their expressions of interest that they made to the researcher during observations of the activities of the ASP. Other participants were chosen as a result of some of the participants identifying other ASP members as good informants.



## The Participants

In this case study, 30 individuals, who are members of the Academy of Senior Professionals (ASP) in Bethany, Oklahoma, were interviewed. All participate in the activities of ASP on a regular basis. All of the participants have some college hours, with most having earned bachelor degrees, and many have advanced degrees. Furthermore, all but two of the participants have been a part of the local Nazarene community for many years.

All the participants are Caucasians. Their ages range from 62 years of age to 89 years of age. Fourteen of the participants are male and 16 are female. Even though all are of retirement age, some of participants' learning interests are closely related to their pre-retirement work. For example, some of the participants who were educators and preachers still, on occasion, teach a class at the university or preach in one of the local Nazarene churches. However, a striking characteristic of the participants is the diversity of their learning interests. For example, the oldest of the participants, a male, is a retired history professor who lives in a retirement center and enjoys yard work, taking care of horses, genealogy, and reading. The youngest of the participants is a female who

still works part time in her chosen career as a professional church musician and enjoys doing oil painting.

Eighteen of the participants are married couples who both attend ASP. "Henry" and "Sally" are typical of many of the married couples. They have been married for nearly 50 years, and they have lived in their home for many years.

Both have college degrees; however, Sally earned her degree in middle adulthood after their children were raised.

Henry is a retired college professor, and Sally is a retired college librarian. They have been long-time active members of their local Church of the Nazarene, and they continue even as older adults to be actively involved in the life of their church. They have known many of the ASP members for many years as colleagues and as personal friends.

There are other married couples who have not lived in the Bethany, Oklahoma, area until retirement. "Jack" and "Joyce", like Henry and Sally, have been married for many years; however, they have just recently retired to the Bethany, Oklahoma, area. At one time Jack taught at Southern Nazarene University, and many of Joyce's family live in the greater Oklahoma City area. Both Jack and Joyce have college degrees, with Jack earning a doctorate and Joyce earning a master's degree. Jack retired as a

university professor from a state university. Upon retirement, Joyce sold her very successful real estate business. As retirees, they are devoted world travelers who spend a great deal of time visiting new countries and learning about new cultures. Like Henry and Sally, they have known many of the ASP members for many years through church and college affiliations.

There are two couples who have a slightly different profile due to marrying later in life. "Walter", age 74 and "Lucy", age 67, have been married for three years. They both had been previously married to their first spouses for many years before these spouses died. Walter and Lucy are finding a companionship in later life that is enhanced by a common religious background in the Church of the Nazarene, common friends, and common interests, such as ASP.

Seven participants, five females and two males, are single as a result of the death of a spouse or divorce. "Helen" and "Anne" are both single; however, Helen has been divorced several years while Anne is widowed. Both of these women have earned bachelor degrees, with Helen earning a master's degree. Both of the women were single mothers, had full-time careers, and both are actively involved in the life of their local Nazarene church. Helen loves to garden and does water aerobics. Anne is an avid

reader of history and philosophy. Both the men who are single have earned advanced degrees and are retired college professors. "Fred" became a widower after the death of his spouse, while "Jerry" has been single for many years. They are both published authors, and writing still is a part of their lives in retirement.

Six of the participants, two females and four males, are married but their spouses do not attend ASP or only attend occasionally. All of these participants have earned college degrees, and all are active members of their local Church of the Nazarene. "Arthur" and "Robert" are recently retired. They attend ASP without their spouses due to the fact that their wives are still employed full-time in their careers. Arthur retired from a bi-vocational career as a Nazarene minister and as a civil servant. Robert is a former dean of a college. Although officially retired, he still serves as a regular consultant to the college in the administrative arena. "Jane", like Arthur and Robert, is married, but her husband does not attend on a regular basis. Jane is new to the Bethany, Oklahoma, area, and since her relocation, she has become part of the Nazarene community. As a result, she is very interested in Nazarene church history and the role of women in the Nazarene church.

## Procedures

Data were gathered by a variety of means. "The use of multiple methods of collecting data is. . .called triangulation (Merriam, 1988, p.69). The reason for gathering data through multiple means is that a holistic understanding can be formed that gives plausible explanations about the focus of the study (Merriam, 1988, p. 169). Therefore, multiple methods of collecting data help to establish the credibility and dependability of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The data for this project was gathered through demographic information sheets, interviews, observations, and document analysis.

### Demographic Information Sheets

Demographic information sheets were completed by 78 of the ASP members during the May, 2000 luncheon-lecture meeting. After the main speaker, the researcher was given opportunity to address the membership. Prior to the beginning of the luncheon-lecture meeting, the researcher placed at each table handouts describing the research project, demographic information sheets, and pens, enough for each person. The researcher referred the members to the handouts, explained the purpose of the research study, and then requested the demographic information sheets be completed, strictly on a voluntary basis. The completed

demographic sheets were left on the table where the researcher collected them when the meeting was concluded.

These demographic information sheets provided data concerning age, gender, marital status, level of education, occupation before retirement, and college or university alma mater. A dual purpose was served through the demographic information sheets. First, the researcher was able to understand in a holistic way the demographic profile of the membership of ASP. Second, they provided a means to identify possible participants for the interviewing process. ASP members voluntarily signed their names and phone numbers as an indication they would be willing to take an active part in the research study. Of the 78 ASP members who completed the profiles, 50 indicated they were willing to be actively involved in the research project.

#### Document Analysis

In addition to the demographic information sheets, various documents such as the monthly newsletters of ASP, yearly ASP reports, and ASP minutes were read. The documents were supplied by the current ASP President and the ASP Treasurer. The archives of ASP are quite extensive, with documents of minutes of meetings, by-laws, yearly reports, brochures, and membership records. Also,

ASP has a homepage on the Southern Nazarene University website that contains information concerning the organization, its mission statement, motto, and a description of their learning interest groups. Information that was important to the study was noted or copied for further reference.

As the study progressed, the participants provided memoirs, journals, books, poems, Sunday School lessons, and journal articles written by the participants. All of these documents were reviewed. Pertinent information was noted in the field notebook or copied and placed in analytic files.

#### Observations

The researcher observed 10 monthly luncheon ASP meetings, five Research Interest Group (RIG) meetings, and five Memoir Writing Workshops (MWW), and one Strategic Planning Committee (SPC). Each of the luncheon meetings lasted for approximately one hour and 45 minutes. The learning interest groups each last approximately one hour. All of these meetings were held on the campus of Southern Nazarene University in either the Royce Brown Business Building or the Webster Commons Building.

During the observations of the luncheon meetings, the researcher made notes in a condensed account in the field note journal. Special attention was given to the

procedures of the meetings, the arrangement of the room, the buffet, the special speakers, and the members attending. Also, the people sitting at the researcher's table and the conversations around the table were also described in the field note journal.

During the learning groups, the researcher took field notes, as well. The members attending, the arrangement of the room, the description of activities, and the discussions were described in her field note journal. The researcher collected a variety of handouts, such as list of possible research topics for the RIG, writing tips from MWW, and minutes from SPC. These handouts and materials were filed in topical or analytic files for further reference. Additionally, the researcher conducted informal interviews with the members in the groups during the small group discussions. These conversations became a part of the data in the field note journal.

After the luncheon meetings and the learning interest groups, an elaborative account was written from the field note journals. All field note accounts were identified by the dates, the settings, and the participants. Also, sketches of the rooms and other physical characteristics of the learning environment were noted in the field notes as well.



Four participants involved in self-directed learning projects outside of the activities of the Academy were observed. These included one participant teaching Sunday School at his local Nazarene church, a husband and wife sharing art collections with an art appreciation class at Southern Nazarene University, and one man singing in the choir and then singing a solo during the Sunday morning service at his local Nazarene church. These observations lasted between 45 minutes to one hour and a half. The researcher wrote thick descriptions that were noted in the field note journal of the researcher.

### Interviews

For all thirty structured interviews, the same basic questions were asked about how the individual feels about learning, the importance of lifelong learning, why they chose to be a member of the ASP, and the description of their own personal learning projects. Most of the interviews began with ATLAS. ATLAS was found to be a good introduction to the interview process. The researcher found that on occasion the participants seem to be a little nervous or even doubtful of why the researcher was interested in them. ATLAS was a way to bridge those initial awkward moments and to get the conversation started.

After completing ATLAS, the researcher began the interview process. To understand how each person learns and to gain information about their learning projects and learning attitudes, participants were asked the following types of questions in a conversational format:

1. Describe what you are learning or one of your learning interests in terms [ATLAS] we just talked about.
2. What is your background in the Nazarene church?
3. What motivated you to go to college?
4. Tell me about ASP.
5. Describe the activities you have been a part of in ASP.
6. How do you like to spend your time?
7. What are you currently reading or working on now?
8. What is something you have learned since retirement?
9. What does it mean to be a lifelong learner?

Academic language was not used in the interviews because most of the participants were not familiar with adult learning terminology. Most people do not consciously think about the best way that they learn, nor do they recognize that what they learn in an everyday fashion is significant. Consequently, as the interviews progressed, the questions became more focused as some questions were found to be more difficult to answer initially. For example, when asked, "Describe something new you have learned", the participants often scratched their heads, winced, and said, "I don't know that I am learning anything new." However, when the question was changed to "What is something that you have

learned to do since retirement?", the participants were able to more quickly answer the question. Through this probing process about their learning activities and learning attitudes, learning patterns of the participants were identified.

All interviews were tape recorded for transcription, and most of the interviews lasted 45 minutes to an hour. Twenty-five interviews were conducted in the homes of the participants. Usually, the participants and the researcher sat on couches or chairs in the living room or around the kitchen table. Two interviews were conducted in the dining room during the noon meal at a local retirement home. Three interviews were conducted in the office of the researcher on the campus of Southern Nazarene University. Seven follow-up interviews were conducted in order to clarify or expand on information given by the participant; these, too, were tape recorded. Furthermore, the researcher interviewed several participants in an informal basis through discussions during ASP luncheon meetings or interest groups. These conversations were noted and described in the field note journals of the researcher at the end of the ASP meetings.

### Peer Briefings and Member Checks

After the majority of interviews were completed, the researcher presented the preliminary findings to three different groups for peer briefings and member checks. Peer briefing is a consultation with other experts who help to confirm the initial research findings to provide additional insights in the interpretation of the data (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Merriam, 1988). Member check is another way to confirm the research findings by reviewing the researcher's insights with the participants in the research project (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Merriam, 1988). This process of having findings verified by another independent source is one means of triangulation and helps to confirm the credibility of the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Merriam, 1988).

A research group of other doctoral students was used for peer briefings. This group, known as the MIS (Make it So) group, was made up of five Oklahoma State University (OSU) doctoral students and one OSU faculty advisor who met at least twice a month for the purposes of discussing and evaluating their on-going research projects. During several of these meetings, the researcher presented the themes that were emerging from the data analysis and ideas for reporting the data findings.

During one of the Research Interest Group (RIG) meetings of ASP, the researcher presented the themes and data analysis to this group for their feedback. Several of the members of RIG were participants in the research project so their feedback on the researcher's interpretations was valuable. Additionally, the RIG group asked the researcher to write a column in the ASP monthly newsletter, describing the progress of the research project. Under the heading, "Partners in Research", the researcher wrote two articles describing the progress of the research project and elicited feedback from the membership at large. Although no feedback was received from the membership at large, the articles were a means of reminding the members that an ongoing research project was being conducted.

Furthermore, eight participants reviewed specific sections concerning the activities of the participants in early and middle adulthood years as they interacted within their community of faith. The researcher with the participants read these selected sections. Their evaluations and reactions were tape recorded and the researcher noted their reactions in the field note journal. Also, participants whose specific stories were used in the narrative were given a copy for their approval.

As part of the data analysis process, the researcher wrote three analytic memos to the dissertation research committee. Analytic memos are short, analytical reflections of the progress of the study in a narrative form (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Analytic memos were a helpful way to systematically assess where the project was going, to develop new questions, and to consider new ways of approaching the research. Furthermore, the memos kept the committee members advised of the progress of the project and allowed them opportunity for input.

### Presentation of the Findings

#### Data Analysis

Qualitative research projects are characterized by the use of multiple methods of gathering data (Glasser & Strauss, 1967; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Merriam 1988; Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Yin, 1994). Consequently, as the research project progresses and as copious amounts of data in a variety of forms accumulates, the data must be analyzed. "Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data" (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p. 112). Therefore, the data must be categorized, synthesized, and interpreted (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Merriam, 1988;

Yin, 1994). The data must be reduced into the boundaries of the study. The means that is used to identify what data is pertinent to the study is a system of coding, categorizing, and theme development (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Merriam, 1988; Patton, 1999; Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

Coding is basically a system for grouping (a) interviewees' responses, (b) thick description from observations, (c) notes from document analysis, and (d) key concepts or ideas from the literature and theory together according to similar words, ideas, or concepts (Crabtree & Miller, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Merriam, 1988; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). These words or phrases become the basis of the coding for the study. As more interviews and observations are conducted, the researcher uses the codes as a template for a constant comparing of the text (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Because it is an iterative process, new codes may be added while other codes may be set aside (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). As the coding progresses, the researcher starts to combine or "chunk" the codes together according to categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). The number of categories identified depends on the data and the focus of the research; however, some researchers suggest the fewer the

categories, the greater the abstraction (Merriam, 1988). As the data analysis progresses, categories begin to "link" together to form overarching themes. "The data analysis ends when you have found overarching themes and put them in the context of broader theory and answered the question, 'So What?'" (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 256).

During the process of coding, categorizing, and theme development, it is often advantageous to put these findings in some sort of data display. "A data display provides the skeleton of your work. . . .A data display helps you to see the overall patterns in your research without getting lost in the details" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 137). Data displays can be used throughout the study to visually represent the progress of data collection, data analysis, and presentation of the study (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Marshall & Rossman, 1989). During the data analysis for this study, several different data displays were used. These included a mind-mapping procedure of circles and arrows that identified and linked themes. Also, diagrams similar to flow charts were used to display the process of informal learning flowing out of formal learning experiences and the progression of the levels of theme abstraction emerging from the data analysis. However, the most meaningful data display was a tree. Indeed, the tree



became such a useful way to display the emerging themes that eventually a metaphor of a tree was used to present the written findings of the study

#### Developing the Metaphor

The written reports of qualitative inquiry can take a variety of forms. Consequently, there is no one conventional organizational format (Glesne & Peskin, 1992; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Writers can use a myriad of approaches in sharing the results depending on the themes arising from the data and how best the writer believes the themes can be convincingly represented. Presenting the world of the participants accurately, vividly, and convincingly is the goal of the writing (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Therefore, some qualitative reports may resemble more conventional organizational formats while other reports may be more like a novel with various chapters that represent the various themes (Glesne & Peskin, 1992; Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

During the data analysis process of this study, various themes developed from the coding. One major theme was the idea of "growth". Although all the participants are in senior adulthood, all are vitally concerned that they keep on being productive and active. As one 81-year-old woman said, "Well, you don't want to dry up and blow

away." Through personal reflection, the peer debriefings and the member checks, I determined that the best visual representation of the participants and the themes emerging from the data analysis was a tree.

My own reflections concerning the participants and how best to portray their understandings of learning through rich, vivid description has led to the structure of this project. Using a tree as metaphor, the chapters are designed to show the learning patterns and attitudes of the participants as part of a growing tree. Starting with a well developed root system and ending with a tree that is green and vital, the chapters intertwine the metaphor with adult education and adult learning theory and the participants' own, rich stories.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE ROOTS OF GROWTH

A man is a bundle of relations, a knot of roots, whose flower and fruitage is the world.

-- Ralph Waldo Emerson

#### Introduction

A seed drifts down from the top of the boughs. An acorn drops. The destination is earth. The future is unknown. Will it survive? Are there proper nutrients in the soil? Will enough water and sunlight be available? For a seed to eventually thrive and to grow into a large, stately tree will depend on the environment that helps to develop a healthy root system. As the root system develops, it becomes an anchor for the tree that not only holds it to the earth, but it also continues to supply the ever-growing organism with vital nutrients. A large tree has literally hundreds of miles of roots that can only be imagined by the human mind since the roots are hidden beneath the soil and are widely spread. Although hidden and out of sight, these critically important parts of the tree's growing processes will continue to influence the health and vitality of the tree throughout its life.

So, too, are the roots of people like the roots of a tree. The families people come from, the nurture of communities, the opportunities for educational, spiritual,

and cultural experiences, and the social milieu that exists all contribute to the health and vitality of a person.

These human roots are complex and intertwining, and the impact of their influence seems endless. However, unlike trees, in adulthood people can make choices about how they choose to grow. Do they choose new ways to grow? Do they continue to grow in the patterns established from their roots?

The roots of the participants from the Academy of Senior Professionals (ASP) lie deep within their community of faith. These roots have been established through family tradition, influenced by religious practice, enhanced by their college years, and nurtured through lifetime commitments to their community of faith. Woven throughout this intertwining root system of life and learning stories are common experiences, common values, common interests, and long-time friendships that connect them all. This root system has become their anchor. Therefore, to understand the learning projects and the learning interests of the participants from ASP, an understanding of the historical and sociological milieu during the development of their church, the impact of their higher education experiences, and the influence of service to their community of faith

upon their understanding of themselves as lifelong learners is needed.

## Historical Roots

### The Progressives

The American people at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had come through a period of time during the last half of the century that saw tremendous changes in demographic, social, educational, and religious structures (DeSantis, 1973; Gould, 1974; Wiebe, 1967). During this period, the country moved quickly beyond the divisiveness and destruction of the Civil War to become a major industrial power and to take its place among the great nations of the world (DeSantis, 1973; Garraty, 1968; Gould, 1974; Wiebe, 1967). The transformation of the country and its economy was a result of the industrial and transportation revolutions, the rapid growth of urbanization, the migration of rural Americans from the country and small towns to cities, and a rapid infusion of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe (DeSantis, 1973; Garraty, 1968; Gould, 1974; Link, Coben, Remini, Greenburg & McMath, 1987; Tindell, 1993; Wiebe, 1967).

It was an exciting but complex time that not only resulted in tremendous economic growth but also created great economic inequality, political corruption, widespread

poverty, and racism (DeSantis, 1973; Garraty, 1968; Link et al., 1987; Tindell, 1993; Wiebe, 1967). The enormous wealth produced decadence and corruption while poverty was accompanied by a variety of destructive social problems (Gould, 1974; DeSantis, 1973; Wiebe, 1967). Although these factors affected people at all levels of society, its greatest impact was on the poor (Gould, 1974; Link et al., 1987; Wiebe, 1967). Due to these staggering social problems, there arose within the citizenry a movement to address these critical social needs. This movement was called the Progressive Movement, and the people associated with it were called Progressives (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982; Gould, 1974; DeSantis, 1973; Link et al., 1987; Tindell, 1993).

Progressivism was the response of the great majority of the American people to problems raised by recent industrialization and urbanization. . . the breakdown of responsible democratic government in city and state; the spread of slums, crime and poverty in the large cities; the exploitation of workers, especially women and children; and . . . the emergence of great economic interests-railroads, large corporations, and banking empires that had the power profoundly to affect the destinies of the people and yet remained beyond popular control. (Link et al., 1987, p. 537)

Progressivism is often referred to as a movement, a mind set, and a philosophy. Progressives, who were mainly in the middle class, were deeply concerned with corruption and

social injustice (Gould, 1974; DeSantis, 1973; Garraty, 1968). Their motivation was to promote democracy, cooperation, order, efficiency, and productivity. Consequently, the response of Progressives was to attack the social problems of the day through cooperation and organization. (Gould, 1974; Link et al., 1987; Tindall, 1993)

This increasingly dominate middle class acted aggressively, and in the process, they created one of the most significant reform movements in American history (DeSantis, 1973; Gould, 1974; Wiebe, 1967). A myriad of social and bureaucratic programs was developed that addressed poverty and the exploitation of workers, children, and women (Gould, 1974; DeSantis, 1973; Wiebe, 1967). Additionally, reforms in higher and public education, opportunities for adult education, and religious revivals contributed to the transformation of the culture. (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982; Gould, 1974; Knowles, 1977; Link, et al., 1987; Smith, 1962; Tindall, 1993)

#### Demographic Changes

The nation transformed itself from a society that was predominantly rural and agricultural to one that was largely urban and industrial (DeSantis, 1973; Gould, 1974; Link et al., 1987; Tindall, 1993). Major cities like

Chicago and New York City doubled in size as rural Americans, many traveling on the fully developed railway system and inland river passages, streamed to the cities by the millions due to the growing need for workers in commerce and industry (DeSantis, 1973; Garraty, 1968; Link et al., 1987; Wiebe, 1967). Often transplanted rural Americans experienced conflicted values as they tried to hold on to a value system of community, family, and church while also adopting "modern thinking" (Link et al., 1987, p.571). The tremendous tide of immigrants came to the typically larger, urban areas with hopes of a better life than was had in the political and economic chaos in Europe (DeSantis, 1973; Gould, 1974; Wiebe, 1967). They brought with them their rich, cultural heritage, which they desired to maintain and to nurture; consequently, to maintain cohesion they clustered in ethnic neighborhoods.

Strangers in a new world and ignorant of its language and customs, immigrants of the same nationality flocked together in the same areas, spoke the same language, and attempted to preserve their own customs and beliefs. This tendency resulted in a modification of American society. (DeSantis, 1973, p. 99)

In combination, these demographic changes created tensions that increased economic disparities, racism, disenfranchisement, and radically altered the pattern of people's daily lives.



Residential areas were becoming more and more segregated along class and ethnic lines. In Chicago, as in most major cities, one could discern the now familiar radial pattern of residential segregation, with a decaying core inhabited by the poor, surrounded by rings where the more well to do lived. . . . This spatial transformation (and it was a departure from past practice) would bode ill for the economic and social well-being of the nation's major urban centers. (Link et al., 1987, p.519)

In addition to the problems arising from the rapid development of the urban areas, there continued to be a pervasive attitude of racism towards African-Americans (DeSantis, 1973; Link et al., 1987; Tindall, 1993; Wiebe, 1967). Southern states legally disenfranchised and segregated African-Americans. Consequently, the presumption of African-American inferiority, which prevailed through the 19<sup>th</sup> century, continued on (DeSantis, 1973; Link et al., 1987; Tindall, 1993; Wiebe, 1967). Property taxes, cumulative poll taxes, literacy tests, and violence towards African-Americans perpetuated a culture of poverty and discrimination (DeSantis, 1973; Link et al., 1987; Tindall, 1993; Wiebe, 1967).

### Social Programs

Throughout this period, many reformers from the genteel or middle-class attempted to provide a variety of programs and agendas to address the social ills of the day.

The great wave of reform which began early in

the century had included the temperance crusade, the drives to abolish slavery and emancipate women, and the campaign to restore social order by the establishment of asylums and penitentiaries for the insane, the infirm, and the criminal. . . . At heart, it had been optimistic about the prospects of reforming individuals (and, through them, the whole society) by moral suasion. (Link et al., 1987, p. 530).

One particular social movement came from a new understanding from some religious organizations as to the intent and meaning of the teachings of Jesus Christ. Referred to as the Social Gospel, the spokespeople for this group argued that the total application of the message of Jesus and salvation must relate to both the individual and to social and economic institutions (DeSantis, 1973; Gould, 1974; Link et al., 1987; Smith, 1962; Wiebe, 1967). Consequently, the Social Gospel movement built churches, hospitals, missions, and participated in social and relief work (DeSantis, 1973; Gould, 1974; Link et al., 1987; Smith, 1962; Wiebe, 1967). Specific religious organizations such as the Salvation Army, founded by William Booth in England in 1880, and the Roman Catholic Church concentrated their work with the urban poor. (DeSantis, 1973; Gould, 1974; Link et al., 1987; Smith, 1962; Tindall, 1993; Wiebe, 1967)

Other spear-heads for reform were established. The women's movement of 1889 resulted in the National American

Woman Suffrage Association (DeSantis, 1973; Gould, 1974; Wiebe, 1967). "They bequeathed a legacy of practical idealism and valuable experience in organizational management to a successor organization, the League of Women Voters, which was to make an outstanding record in adult education the period ahead" (Knowles, 1977, p. 62). The signing of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment in 1920, which gave women the right to vote, was "one of the crowning achievements of the progressive era" (Link et al., 1987, p. 550). However, the struggle for equal rights for women would continue throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Link et al., 1987; Tindall, 1993).

The conditions of the poor were of great interest to the Progressives. Jane Addam's Hull House, founded in Chicago in 1889, and Lillian D. Wald's Henry Street Settlement, founded in New York in 1893, provided social services in the heart of ghettos and slums (DeSantis, 1973; Gould, 1974; Link et al., 1987; Wiebe, 1967). In the south, Booker T. Washington led the fight for economic self-improvement and political and social equality for African-Americans (DeSantis, 1973; Gould, 1974; Link et al., 1987; Wiebe, 1967).

During this period of time, social work was professionalized (Link et al., 1987; Wiebe, 1967). Viewing

social work broadly to include professions such as medicine, law, education, and engineering, these professionals optimistically believed they held the solutions to social ills (Link et al., 1987; Wiebe, 1967). They held tight to the belief that "the application of scientific and bureaucratic methods would, they believed, bring results where less practical approaches had failed" (Link, et al., 1987, p. 531).

#### Educational Reform

Modern professionalism directly impacted the American higher educational system (DeSantis, 1973; Link et al., 1987; Wiebe, 1967). Up until the 1870's, higher education was seen as a classical course of study that provided a general education. Universities such as Harvard and Johns Hopkins led the way to broadening the purpose of higher education to include preparation for the professions (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982; DeSantis, 1973; Link et al., 1987; Wiebe, 1967).

Furthermore, the development of "land-grant" colleges broaden the social base and the academic content of higher education to include agriculture and engineering (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982; DeSantis, 1973; Garraty, 1968; Knowles, 1977; Link et al., 1987; Wiebe, 1967). In an educational domino effect, the expansion of curriculum for

higher education resulted in institutions of higher education requiring students to have a more rigorous high school education. Consequently, reforms in elementary and secondary education curriculum and standards were seen.

At the turn of the century, the outline of our modern educational system had taken shape, but the structure was far from complete. By 1900, free public education (and inexpensive parochial schooling) at the elementary level was within reach of children in most parts of the country. The fledgling system of high schools, most of which were situated in towns or cities were about to undergo a major expansion. Similarly, the colleges and universities, as influential as they were becoming, had a total enrollment of only slightly more than 100,000. However, that represented a sharp increase from the recent past, and much great expansion was just on the horizon. (Link, et al., 1987, p. 533)

One of the most influential educational philosophers of this time was John Dewey (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982; Elias & Merriam, 1995; DeSantis, 1973; Knowles, 1977). A true progressive, Dewey argued that education had a role in social reform and "That education would flourish if it took place in a democracy, but democracy would develop only if there were true education" (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982, p. 51). Throughout his prolific career, he promoted learning by doing rather than rote memory, and he argued that education should be concerned with the interests of the students and current problems (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982; Elias & Merriam, 1995; DeSantis, 1973; Knowles, 1977).

Furthermore, education should address not only intellectual development, but also the physical and the moral well being, as well (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982, p. 55). His philosophy and educational methodologies continues today to tremendously impact the classroom-learning transaction (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982, p. 52-57).

Even with the educational innovations that were derived from higher education, land-grant colleges, reforms in the curriculum and standards for secondary and elementary schools, and new educational philosophies and methodologies based on democratic ideals, it would not be until many years later that people on the fringe of American society would have equal opportunities for education. Up to 1896, education of white children was largely in the hands of private groups. Education of African-Americans was almost non-existent, and in some places, it was illegal. Practically all the race was illiterate (DeSantis, 1973; Link et al., 1987; Wiebe, 1967). In 1896, Plessy v Ferguson established the doctrine of "separate but equal" (DeSantis, 1973; Link et al., 1987; Tindall, 1993). From 1896 to 1954, Plessy v Ferguson was the standard used to determine whether or not inequality in education was based on race. In the years following Plessy v Ferguson, claims were made that that the African-American

schools and white schools became more equal in the tangibles: buildings, curricula, qualifications and salaries of teachers. These claims were dubious, at best. Consequently, children of color were segregated and denied admission to schools attended by white children (DeSantis, 1973; Link et al., 1987; Tindall, 1993).

Furthermore, even though more women were earning a college education in the early parts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, women were not encouraged to achieve a higher education (Hayes & Flannery, 2000). This was due, in part, to the fact that roles for women outside of the home were limited. Ironically, the Progressive Era with its tremendous social problems opened the doors for women to gain professions, mainly in the social agency structure (Link et al., 1987; Wiebe, 1967).

### Adult Education

For many of the people who had limited opportunities for learning because of poverty, race, or gender, adult education provided some of the earliest accesses for learning (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982; Knowles, 1977). This period became an era for opportunities to develop new programs and learning opportunities for adults. "Most of the types of institutions providing educational

opportunities to adults in our day trace their birth to this era" (Knowles, 1977, p.36).

One of the most significant adult education institutions was formed on the shores of the Chautauqua Lake in western New York in 1887 (Elias & Merriam, 1995; Knowles, 1977). The Chautauqua Institute, founded by John Vincent and Lewis Miller, was originally established with the purpose of providing a summer training school for Sunday school teachers for all denominations. The Institute soon became so popular that the curriculum was expanded to include every aspect of culture (Elias & Merriam, 1995; Knowles, 1977).

Other agencies for learning developed as a result of the industrial revolution and the establishment of land-grant colleges. Agricultural education, worker's education, and industrial education became a focus of trade associations (Knowles, 1977). Furthermore, the public library movement in the 1880's, provided new opportunities for learning. Andrew Carnegie, donating more than \$41,000,000 for the building of free public libraries, provided access to books that had up until that time been largely housed in subscription libraries in large cities or urban areas (Knowles, 1977).



As the 20<sup>th</sup> century advanced, new philosophies, ideologies, and methodologies were articulated and developed that resulted in an explosion of adult education programs in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1926, Eduard Lindeman's The Meaning of Adult Education laid the philosophical foundation for the meaning and purpose of adult education. A protégé of Dewey, Lindeman's vision of adult education included a deep concern for social justice, a belief in the possibilities of education and human action, and a deep commitment to democracy (Lindeman, 1926).

Other leaders in adult education viewed education as a way to reconstruct society. For over 50 years, Myles Horton worked with the poor in the southern part of the United States (Adams, 1975; Horton, Kohl, & Kohl, 1990). His vision for adult education began with his own personal philosophical sojourn that was born out of frustration with the educational methodologies of higher education and with working with labor rights during the labor unrest of the 1920's (Horton et al., 1990). In 1931, he founded the Highlander Folk School in Grundy County, Tennessee. For many years, Highlander was a place where people came to be trained as labor and community organizers. Horton was convinced that people find solutions to their own problems. He believed education is to be seen a process for creating

democracy rather than perpetuating traditional educational systems, as a way for people to make sense out of their world, and to prepare people for action in order to make their world more just (Adams, 1975; Conti & Fellenz, 1986; Horton, et al., 1990).

### Religious Revivals

Not only did the American culture experience great changes demographically, socially, and educationally, but the country also experienced religious revivals (Smith, 1962). Beginning before the start of the Civil War, a great holiness revival swept through the country in 1858.

Hundreds of mammoth daily prayer meetings broke out almost spontaneously in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, and nearly every city and town in the northern states. Ministers and laymen of all denominations took part. Churches everywhere scheduled special services. . . . The deepening of moral conviction hardened resistance against the sin of slavery. . .and rejuvenated as well the crusades against intemperance, Sabbath desecration, and neglect of the poor. It also inspired hundreds of Christians to seek holiness of heart and life. (Smith, 1962, p.11)

People within the movement included Methodists, Wesleyans, Free Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, and Quakers. This holiness revival movement gained momentum after the Civil War and continued nearly to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Smith, 1962, p. 15).

The holiness movement took a form of renewal or reform movement within the churches. Just as the modern professionals optimistically believed that they held the solution to the ills of society, so, too, did the leaders of the revival movement believe that "the gospel of Christian perfection was the key to a century of spiritual progress" (Smith, 1962, p. 12). They were deeply anxious about the moral condition of the nation and equally committed to reforming American society. While the mainline churches responded to social problems with a secularized Social Gospel, holiness people were convinced that the transforming power of the Holy Spirit offered the only hope of true reform (Smith, 1962).

In the years following the Civil War, holiness people channeled their energies through independent holiness associations such as the National Camp Meeting Association and the National Holiness Association (Smith, 1962). This was due, in part, to the lukewarm response of major denominational churches to embrace the movement. Camp meetings and revivals contributed to a rapid proliferation of holiness groups throughout the country. From this movement of the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, holiness periodicals, liberal arts colleges, Bible institutes, and vigorous home and foreign missions were established (Smith,

1962). Home missions went beyond church planting to active social work. Rescue missions, homes for "unfortunate girls", and the temperance movement were focal (Gresham & Gresham, 1998; Smith, 1962). In addition to meeting the short-term material needs of the poor, holiness social work aimed at the long-term solution to poverty by providing a church home for the poor. (Gresham & Gresham, 1998; Jernigan, 1919; Smith, 1962).

The holiness movement was truly a part of the Progressive movement. Just as those in social work, educational reform, women's rights, and bureaucratic agencies fervently believed in their causes, those in the holiness movement were equally committed to addressing the needs of the poor and other social problems through the message of holiness. As a result, a myriad of churches and holiness denominations were formed with holiness as the mission (Smith, 1962). It is from this movement that the Nazarene church, which is the community of faith for the ASP members, was established (Crow & Lively, 2000; Smith, 1962).

### Religious Roots

#### The Early Nazarenes

By the early 1890's, the opposition to holiness groups from the Methodist hierarchy increased. Many Methodist

Bishops were caught between the increasingly influential modernists and advocates of the Social Gospel on one side and holiness enthusiasts on the other. Many believed that if they wished to adhere to their holiness ways and continue with vital evangelical work, they would have to leave the church (Bangs, 1995; Crow & Lively, 2000; Smith, 1962).

One of these Methodists was Phineas Bresee (Bangs, 1995; Crow & Lively, 2000; Girvin, 1916; Smith, 1962). Believing that he could no longer function as he felt like he should in the aspect of promoting holiness within the Methodist church, Bresee founded the first Nazarene church in Los Angeles, California, in 1895 (Bangs, 1995; Girvin, 1916; Smith, 1962). Eighty-two members united as charter members of the Church of the Nazarene, and within a short time, their numbers had grown to 135. The first publication of the Church of the Nazarene announced:

The Church of the Nazarene is a simple, primitive church, a church of the people and for the people. It has no new doctrines, only the old, old Bible truths. It seeks to discard all superfluous forms and ecclesiasticism and go back to the plain simple words of Christ. It is not a mission, it is a church with a mission. It is a banding together of hearts that have found the peace of God, and which now in their gladness, go out to carry the message of the unsearchable riches of the gospel of Christ to other suffering, discourage, sin sick souls. Its mission is to everyone upon whom the battle of life has been sore, and to every heart

that hungers for cleansing from sin. Come.

(cited in Smith, 1962, p. 111)

The newly formed church saw rapid growth the first year to 350 members. In the subsequent years, membership grew to 1,500 and numerous churches were established. From this rapid growth, the leaders saw the need for the church to become formally organized (Bangs, 1995; Smith, 1962).

In many ways, the beliefs and actions of the first Nazarenes were molded by the same environment and experiences that influenced American society at large (Crow & Lively, 2000). Concerned with the poor, the uneducated, and the needy, early Nazarenes established guidelines that reflect these ideologies (Bangs, 1995; Crow & Lively, 2000; Smith, 1962). The government of the church was democratic (Smith, 1962, p. 113). All officers within the church were elected by the membership, no money-raising methods that would distinguish the poor from the rich were allowed, and the original constitution specifically recognized the right of women to preach (Smith, 1962, p. 113). Furthermore, the chief aim of the early church was to preach holiness to the poor (Bangs, 1995; Girvin, 1916; Smith, 1962). The first Manual, that constituted the by-laws of the church, outlined the purposes of the church. Through the agencies and services such as city missions, evangelistic services,

house-to-house visitation, caring for the poor, comforting the dying, they boldly proclaimed their mission was "to go into the poorer parts of the cities and the neglected places and by the power of the Holy Ghost create centers of fire" (Smith, 1962, p. 114). Equally significant, the early Nazarenes believed that "worship was joyously free" (Smith, 1962, p. 118). Sundays were seen as kind of a holiday with worshipers bringing their lunches in baskets so that after the morning worship service, everyone would eat together. In the afternoon, they spent time in services of praise and singing, visiting the poor, and conducting street meetings. Furthermore, Sunday School picnics and public holidays like Christmas, Fourth of July, and Thanksgiving became spiritual celebrations (Smith, 1962). All of these activities helped to address the social problems of the time and to build a community of people with a distinct world-view and mission (Crow & Lively, 2000).

#### The National Church

From 1900 to 1905, the Los Angeles Church of the Nazarene organized 26 congregations. These newly formed churches were founded in California, Idaho, Illinois, and Washington, and the membership of the Church had grown to 3,195 members. The church, led by Bresee, engaged in a variety of social and educational programs such as

prohibition and labor rights (Bangs, 1995; Smith, 1962). Additionally, Bresee published a monthly 12-page newspaper, The Nazarene Messenger, that contained columns with specific instructions about harmful "worldly indulgences", kept the membership apprised of events within the church, informed the readers about evangelistic meetings in various parts of the country, and editorials concerning local and national issues (Smith, 1962). However, evangelism remained the central concern (Bangs, 1995; Crow & Lively, 2000; Smith, 1962).

Many other holiness evangelists and small holiness organizations were recognizing the success of the Los Angeles Nazarene church and also recognizing the difficulty of accomplishing ambitious home and foreign missions projects effectively with limited resources. Consequently, the church began to grow as other holiness people joined with the Nazarenes. As these various holiness groups joined the Nazarenes, it became apparent to Bresee that a national church structure was needed (Bangs, 1995; Smith, 1962). In 1908 at Pilot Point, Texas, the Church of the Nazarene became a national denomination (Jernigan, 1919; Smith, 1962). Churches and church districts were formed. While Bresee remained the leader of the church, other men



and women took on leadership roles in evangelism, missions, and education (Smith, 1962).

This coming together was facilitated by the changes in transportation and communications that allowed these groups to form a denomination. The early leaders of the church traveled thousands of miles in the service of the church. They wrote, they rode the rails, and they used the telegraph. These men and women firmly believed in the absolute necessity of their holiness tradition. The admiration that many modern day Nazarenes have for these early people make them the heroes of the church (Crow & Lively, 2000; Smith, 1962).

#### The Church and Education

From the very beginning of the church, a great emphasis was placed on education (Smith, 1962). Not only did the early Nazarenes want a well-developed Sunday School structure, but soon they realized the need for a college or university. Originally to have its focus as a Bible college, Pacific Bible College, now Point Loma Nazarene University, was founded in 1901 with 42 students enrolling. The curriculum included Old Testament, New Testament, homiletics, and Bible holiness (Smith, 1962).

Education had been a hallmark of the holiness movement. Hundreds of Bible colleges and institutes were

organized as the men and women in the holiness movement recognized a need to educate their men, women, and children. Consequently, as various holiness organizations and churches joined with the Nazarenes, they brought with them their colleges and schools. Various colleges were merged to form new colleges, and by the early 1920s, the Church of the Nazarene established either through merging or planting six four-year liberal arts colleges in California, Idaho, Illinois, Massachusetts, Oklahoma, and Tennessee (Gresham & Gresham, 1998; Smith, 1962). This continuing emphasis on education is expressed in an article written in 1933 by one of the general church leaders:

There are several reasons why these holiness colleges are necessary. First, we need schools to preserve the fundamentals of our faith. . . . In the second place, we need the holiness college to build the right type of Christian character. . . . In the third place, we need holiness colleges in order to train men and women to propagate the doctrine of full salvation in the earth. . . . Our schools should be well attended and adequately supported. A church is made or destroyed by her educational institutions. (Williams, 1933, p. 1)

In 1945, the Nazarene Theological Seminary was founded (Smith, 1962). By the 1970s, two more liberal arts colleges were established in Kansas and Ohio and a Bible College in Colorado.

The Nazarenes divided the nation into educational zones, and the people in the churches supported the college

of their zone financially and by sending their young people to be educated (Gresham & Gresham, 1998; Smith, 1962).

Teams of musical and evangelistic groups from the colleges visited the churches, held meetings, and provided an opportunity for young people in the churches to embrace the idea of getting a college degree from a Nazarene college (Gresham & Gresham, 1998, p.102).

#### A Country and Church in Transition

The 1920's and the 1930's was a time of great hope, enormous despair, and a roller coaster economy (McElvaine, 1984; Link et al., 1987). Tremendous growth in industry, the development of electricity, Henry Ford's Model T, the invention of the telephone, the beginning of the motion picture industry, and the conquest of the air made the 1920's a decade of prosperity (McElvaine, 1984; Link et al., 1987). Great educational advances were made. High school enrollment doubled, and students enrolling in colleges and universities doubled from 598,000 in 1920 to more than 1,000,000 by 1930 (Link et al., 1987).

Literature and music flourished as this was the era of Thomas Wolfe, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, Jerome Kern, George Gershwin, and Irving Berlin (Link et al., 1987).

However, the 1920's was also a decade of fear (Leuchtenburg, 1958; McElvaine, 1984). Many believed that the American culture was experiencing a revolution in morals. Women were changing. "They bobbed their hair, wore short skirts, and began to smoke, drink and discuss with men hitherto usually tabooed matters such as the stock market, baseball, and sex" (Link et al., 1987; p. 630). Young people seemed to be in rebellion. F. Scott Fitzgerald's (1920) novel, This Side of Paradise, unwittingly helped to promote this concept as parents misinterpreted the work. Believing that the majority of college students drank in excess and lived a bohemian lifestyle, parents became fearful for their children (Link et al., 1987).

The most devastating and pervasive impact on the American society during this time was the Great Depression (McElvaine, 1984; Leuchtenburg, 1958; Link et al., 1987; Tindall, 1993). Beginning in 1929 and continuing throughout the 1930s, the United States passed through a trial of trauma for its entire citizenry. "The Great Depression was in many respects more devastating in its effect than the experience of fighting a great war" (Link et al., 1987, p.674). A reverse migration was seen as millions left the cities to return to rural areas in hopes

of making some kind of living. Large numbers of men and young boys illegally rode the railroads as they crisscrossed the United States looking for work. All resources were scarce. Indeed, people died from malnutrition and the lack of proper medical care. Families were torn apart by the despair that came to millions as they tried desperately to find work, shelter, and food (McElvaine, 1984; Leuchtenburg, 1958; Link et al., 1987; Tindall, 1993).

At the end of the 1920's, the fervor for Progressivism was diminishing (Gould, 1974; Link et al., 1987, Tindall, 1993). Although Progressivism was a nonpartisan movement, it was seriously hampered by a new and tremendously flawed federal government administration led by Warren Harding (Link et al., 1987; Tindall, 1993). Corruption in government, inept leadership, oil scandals, farm problems, and the Depression resulted in a mistrust of the government to help solve peoples' problems (Gould, 1974; Link et al., 1987, Tindall, 1993).

By the 1920's, the focus of the Nazarene church had shifted from the west coast to the heartland of the United States. The headquarters of the church was relocated to Kansas City, Missouri, and the church was in a time of transition, as was the American culture. New church leaders, who had little experience outside of the Nazarene

church, were taking the place of the more denominationally diverse original leaders (Crow & Lively, 2000; Smith, 1962). As the American people seemed to have lost interest in reform and Progressivism was waning, so, too, did the social work of the Nazarenes begin to take a secondary role (Smith, 1962). Like many Americans, the Nazarenes were fearful of the cultural influences on their families and their community of faith (Gresham & Gresham, 1998; Smith, 1962). The Roaring '20's with its ragtime, flappers, bathtub gin, and labor unrest was a confusing and anxious time for the fledgling church. In response, the church turned increasingly inward. Evangelism, service to the church, and a very strict code of conduct and dress, which they believed to be the outward manifestation of a holiness way of life, were stressed (Gresham & Gresham, 1998; Smith, 1962).

Ironically, as general church membership and attendance in the United States decreased during the Depression from 1929 to 1933 (Link et al., 1987), the Nazarene denomination witnessed steady growth; this continued even during the Depression of the 1930's (Smith, 1962). In the field of education, steady progress was made toward improving the liberal arts colleges and consolidating church control over the schools (Gresham &

Gresham, 1998; Smith, 1962). Concerns for the youth of the church resulted in the creation of the Nazarene Young People's Society as well as an increased emphasis on Sunday School (Smith, 1962).

For Nazarenes, life revolved around the church. Evangelism was promoted, camp meetings were held, new churches were formed, and missionaries were sent overseas. Consequently, a large Nazarene community of faith grew from the local church communities, the Nazarene colleges, and the national church. The commonalties that held this growing community of faith together were holiness, service to both the local church and church denomination, and evangelism. It is during this time that most of the participants from ASP became a part of the Nazarene community of faith.

#### Roots of Tradition

##### Becoming a Nazarene

For most of the participants, they became part of a Nazarene community almost from birth. As one 68-year-old woman exclaimed when asked if she had a background in the Nazarene denomination, "Oh, yes! I was practically born in the church! I was sickly when I was born, so it was about a month before they took me to church." Laughing, one

75-year-old man, talking about his wife's Nazarene background, said, "When they said 'amen' in church, she was born." Remembering her heritage in the Nazarene denomination, another 80-year-old woman said, "They [her parents] joined the church in 1908 in Pilot Point, Texas, and they never wavered a minute. They were wonderful, strong Nazarenes." A 70-year-old man explained, "My grandparents were Nazarenes and my parents. I just grew up a Nazarene, so that was that from the word go."

For other participants, however, their involvement with Nazarenes began later on as children, teenagers, and adults. One participant, a lady of 67 years, became acquainted with the Nazarenes as a child as a result of a bus that would come and pick her sister and her up for Sunday School. "We had been going to a little church in Mound City. The bus driver would come up the country road and pick up anyone who wanted to go to church." Another described how she attended country "brush arbor" camp meetings as a child and as a result started going to the little Nazarene church in her town.

Several of the participants became part of Nazarene communities as teenagers often as a result of attending special revival services at the local Nazarene churches in the towns where they lived. A 80-year-old man, reflecting



on how he met his wife, said, "We met at ENC [Eastern Nazarene College], of course. And low and behold, I found out after we were married that it was her uncle who was preaching in Cleveland 1<sup>st</sup> Church, the first time I was ever in church in my life. I was almost 16, and I was converted that night."

Some of the participants became Nazarenes as a result of being part of other holiness organizations. A 74-year-old man detailed his journey to the Nazarene denomination. "I started out as a Mennonite. My grandfather started a Mennonite church in Kansas. Then from there we went to the Free Methodist. And from the Free Methodists to the Nazarene, at the age of 16." Two participants were introduced to the Church of the Nazarene when they came to college, as explained by this 80-year-old female participant. "I joined the church [Nazarene] when I came to college here in 1938. We had been holiness people, but our Methodist church didn't preach holiness, but we had a holiness camp meeting once a year. . . .We had a holiness background, but there was no Nazarene church."

Only one participant, a 62-year-old woman, became part of a Nazarene community as an older adult as a result of moving to the city where the ASP members live. Although new to the Nazarene denomination, she had been a member of

several different holiness communities throughout her life. Consequently, the Nazarene community "felt like home."

### Educational Roots

#### Bethany Peniel College

The participants grew up in various places such as California, Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, Norway, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, and Texas. They were raised on farms and in cities. However, it was when they went to a small Nazarene college in the prairie of Oklahoma that their paths began to meet. Except for one participant, all others either attended Bethany Peniel College (now known as Southern Nazarene College), graduated from Bethany Peniel College, or taught there.

In many ways, the development of Bethany Peniel College mirrored the growth and development of the Nazarene church at large. The college would ultimately evolve into one college from the merging of 18 colleges, Bible schools, and Bible institutes spread throughout Arkansas, Kansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas (Gresham & Gresham, 1998). Arkansas Holiness College, Central Nazarene University, Oklahoma Holiness College, and Texas Holiness University are representative of the institutions that became part of the heritage of Bethany Peniel College (Gresham & Gresham, 1998; Smith, 1962).

Bethany Peniel College (Southern Nazarene University) is located 10 miles outside the limits of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, in the midst of blackjack trees on the edge of the great western prairie. Three main buildings, which housed classrooms, offices, the chapel, and dormitories, originally dotted the grounds. The Interurban Streetcar Line, which later was replaced by the famous U.S. Route 66, ran directly in front of the campus, and it was a main mode of transportation from Oklahoma City to the college. As the college expanded, a small town grew around it. A main street business area was developed on the other side of the Interurban, houses were built, schools were formed, and churches were established (Gresham & Gresham, 1998).

By the 1930's, the college had grown not only in the number of buildings on the campus but also in its course offerings and degrees. Included with degrees in theology and music, students now could earn baccalaureate degrees with "major study in the Departments of English, Public Speaking, French, German, Spanish, Social Studies (for a teaching major), Philosophy, History, Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics, and Music (piano and music theory)" (Gresham & Gresham, 1998, p. 45). Students participated in student government, newspaper and yearbook production, senior

trips, and traveling musical and evangelistic groups. A recruiting brochure from 1931 read:

Which College? The college you choose is important. Four things are of paramount importance: 1. Educational standing 2. Financial stability 3. Moral environment 4. Religious Training. In all of these Bethany-Peniel College has shown herself worth of confidence: 1. Bethany-Peniel College is a State accredited four year college. 2. Her financial and building record, together with her present endowment, promise financial stability for the future. 3. A good moral environment is assured by the personnel of the faculty and its students, and by the character of the community. 4. Religious training by highly qualified teachers is a most prominent feature of the school. You should choose Bethany-Peniel College. (cited in Gresham & Gresham, 1998, p.48)

The college experienced steady growth during the 1930's and 1940's even though the country was experiencing a depression and World War II (Gresham & Gresham, 1998). Students continued to receive a quality education and to participate in many activities that were typical of students in colleges and universities. However, the fundamental difference, which was the ultimate appeal to both students and parents, was the distinct blending of education, co-curricular activities, and holiness. Chapel and Bible courses were required. Rigid rules of dress and conduct were a comfort for parents and an occasional frustration to the students. The student body was small, but their common experiences and common values that grew

out of their holiness tradition made them very cohesive.

One 78-year-old woman described this:

Perhaps part of it was the effect of the world. Our poverty, we couldn't leave campus: How could you go, where would you go, what you do, what you spend once you got there? . . . These people saw you when you were young, and they still see you that way. . . . It's really a warm sense of connection.

### Education Valued

Many of the participants indicated that going to college was expected of them. This was often instilled by parents unable to earn a college degree for themselves but who valued a college education for their children.

However, it was not just a college education that they desired for their children; it was an education at a Christian college. For 22 of the participants that college would be Bethany Peniel College.

At our house, it was just considered, since my father didn't graduate, it was a rule just in our minds that we had to go to college. And back at that time, the only place to go was "Mecca", BPC. No other considerations. That's where he had gone. So, I don't know I can claim much credit for my choice of going to college or not. I think my father instilled it, kind of in the inner consciousness. (89-year-old man)

My mother and brother went there [BPC], and that was the way I was raised. There was no other thought than to go to Bethany. Not ever! . . . It was just never thought of that I would not go to college. Plus, my father stayed home to help his father on the farm while the rest of the children got a college education. They all became teachers

and professional people. Daddy was a common laborer because of that. He had the smarts. He was a self-taught person. He really was. He took adult education classes in typing, bookkeeping, and things that he needed for information. So education was valued. He saved for my college education for years. He did without things so he could pay for my college education. (67-year-old woman)

You just do that. You just go to college. You grow up and go to college. I had no thought about not going to college, ever! I was a good enough student, but it was just kind of the expectation. In fact, Dad was one of the first eight graduates from Hamlin, so we are a four generation family. It was just the expectation. I had no desire to do otherwise. . . .The thing is, you have to realize that our early leaders placed a very great emphasis on education. That is why Bethany, the town, even exists. I was growing up during that time where there was this emphasis on higher education and on Christian education. (78-year-old woman)

Some parents went to great extremes so their children could go to college, like "Anna". Anna was a strong willed, determined person. The deaths of two husbands, being a single mother, and the hard times that were to be found in the hills of Arkansas during the 1920's and 1930's would break a lesser person. She was a pragmatic woman that accepted life as it was handed to her and understood it as God's will. However, Anna had a dream, and this dream was for her daughter to have a Christian education at a small holiness college in Oklahoma called Bethany Peniel College. Limited resources and limited support did not sway her determination. At 81 years of age, her daughter reflects

on the sacrifice and commitment that her mother made in order for her to have a college education.

My mother got to about the eighth grade in Arkansas. . . .She married her childhood sweetheart, and she was 28-years old when her first husband died. She had four children. Then she and my dad were married a few years later, and I came along. I was the only one of them. Before she married the second time, before she married my dad, she considered very seriously bringing the other four children out here [Bethany] to go to school because she wanted them under the influence of a Christian school and college. . . .She always felt like God wanted to use her children, and I was the only one that would have the opportunity. When I was ready to come to college, like I said, we had nothing. . .but we sold that last heifer for \$18.00 and borrowed \$100.00 from my brother-in-law and sister who were in California and came to Bethany for one year. We didn't know if we could stay more than that or not. Everybody at home thought we would be back in the next month or so. But we found a little place to live, a little apartment, one room apartment, and it had everything in it. Mother and I. She helped me get through. I would of never made it without her help because she worked for the room and board, you might say. She would go out into homes and work in homes. Even during the depression days, she brought in enough to pay back the \$100.00 within a year. We had very little, but the Lord helped us through. He always supplied our needs. What a wonderful privilege it was. I had so many friends, a lot of them today that I met during those days.

A few had encouragement to go to college from sources other than family. Two participants reported that the pastors in their home churches helped them to get to college. Seven of the male participants who were World War II veterans indicated that the G.I. Bill afforded them the

opportunity to go to college. One participant attended Bethany Peniel College as an adult.

Three participants did not attend Bethany Peniel College but did attend one of the other six Nazarene colleges. Only one participant had no educational background at a Nazarene college until she became apart of ASP. At that point, she was introduced to Nazarene higher education through her participation in the Academy of Senior Professionals and her subsequent affiliation with the membership.

Education did not end at graduation from college for those of the Academy of Senior Professionals. Not only do all the participants have some college hours, five have bachelor degrees, three have seminary degrees, ten have master degrees, and seven have doctorates. They went on to graduate school in institutions like Harvard Divinity School, Kansas State University, Nazarene Theological Seminary, Oklahoma State University, Salem State University, Southern Nazarene University, University of Central Oklahoma, University of Illinois, University of Oklahoma, and Vanderbilt University.

Degrees were earned, people married, lifelong friendships were established, and for many, the allegiance to both church and college was cemented. These early



faith-development experiences in the church and in college became the cornerstone for a life-long commitment to holiness and service to the church.

### Spreading Roots

#### Ministers and Educators in Service

Direct service to the Nazarene church either through ministry or teaching in a Nazarene college became the life's work for 15 of the participants. Their vocations sent them across the United States and the world. They pastored and taught in towns and cities in Australia, California, Colorado, Florida, Hawaii, Idaho, Kansas, Maine, Massachusetts, Missouri, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, Trinidad, and Washington. In total, these men and women gave more than 600 years of service to the Nazarene church as they preached, taught, built churches, did evangelism, wrote books, and published articles.

#### Laypeople in Service

For the other 15 participants, their vocations were not tied directly to the church. Three were college and university professors, and taught at Baylor University, California State Polytechnic University and Eastern Illinois University. Two participants owned their own business, two were nurses, one taught private music, one

was the postmaster of his community, two were public school teachers, and two worked in offices. However, all indicated that they were extremely involved in the life of their local church as laypeople. One 75-year-old woman explained:

We didn't go on any vacations. We just took care of our family, our kids, and went to church. We were at church and our kids were at church every time the doors were open. My kids were just as at home in the church as they were at the dining room table and in their beds.

They were involved in a wide variety of church activities. They taught Sunday School, were ushers and greeters, served on church boards, sang in the choir, played musical instruments for worship services, participated in evangelism, supported world missions, went to camp meetings and district church meetings, joined Bible studies, worshipped in both Sunday morning and Sunday evening services, attended Wednesday night prayer meetings, participated in revivals, and gave financially. One 73-year-old man reflects on his involvement as a layman in his church:

The activities that we have been involved in are more in the past, because of our age, you might say. I did the Caravan group [a children's program similar to Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts]. I was a Sunday School teacher, and I was an usher. And I was on the church board. My wife had the first kindergarten choir, and she was very involved with that.

Even though he perceives himself not to be as involved as he was in his younger years, this 73-year-old drives a van to a local apartment complex every Sunday where he provides transportation to church for the people living in the complex. He is very involved with his Sunday School class, and is an active member in several of the informal learning groups for senior adults that his church provides.

#### A Common Bond

Nineteen participants remained in the Bethany, Oklahoma, area for the majority of their adulthood years, while 11 participants lived and worked in many other cities and countries. Although the participants experienced a variety of life experiences throughout adulthood, the common bond of church and college kept them connected. For those who moved out of the Bethany area, their paths would cross throughout the years as they reunited at college reunions and at international church meetings, corresponded through letters and Christmas cards, and kept updated through the denominational publications. Those who remained in Bethany went to church together, raised families together, and supported the activities of the college.

At retirement, 10 participants moved back to the Bethany area. All indicated that their motivation to return to the Bethany area was due to family and friends that lived there. Additionally, the desire to be close to the college was also a factor. When asked why he decided to retire in Bethany, one 75-year-old man replied,

Well, I think it's solely the people. I don't care for Oklahoma. It's solely the people. We have so many friends here. I guess most of her [his wife] relatives are here. So that's one of the main reasons we stay. . . .I don't think I have ever gotten California completely out of my blood. I don't think I ever will. Then we have so many wonderful friends. . .that we have known for years that have settled here. The interesting thing is that the kids that were here when I taught at the University come up to me, and of course, they do remember me.

#### A Growing Root System

The participants are a reflection of their historical, educational, and religious roots. Their church was born during a great time of social reform where service to others was stressed. Their holiness tradition with its emphasis on evangelism and a strict code of conduct and their unique college experiences unite them. They understand the importance and value education through the examples of sacrificial giving that was displayed by family and other influential people and through their own goals for education. Years of dedicated service to the church

have resulted in an intense loyalty to both church and college. Through their early and middle adulthood years, the participants earned graduate degrees, raised families, advanced in their careers, and gave service to their church. They were active, involved, and productive. A 74-year-old participant reflected upon her life in a memoir.

God has given to me through the Church of the Nazarene, [my husband] and my family. God has given to my husband and me through the Church of the Nazarene, a place of service with places to live. God has given to [my husband] and me through the Church of the Nazarene, wonderful people to know. . . . God has given to [my husband] and me through the Church of the Nazarene, educational opportunities for us and our four children who, with their spouses, are all alumni of Southern Nazarene University. God has given to me through the Church of the Nazarene, many other blessings too numerous to mention. What do I owe God? Everything. What do I owe the Church of the Nazarene? Everything.

At the stage of senior adulthood, the participants are still active, involved, and productive. While they are no longer concerned on building their careers, they still are focused on service to the church, to the college, and to one another. From their educational roots, they have a deep sense of the need to keep learning. From their religious roots, they have a keen desire to be involved in their community of faith. Perhaps this is best summed up in the opening statement that an 81-year-old participant made

As he began teaching his Sunday School lesson to his class of over 100 senior adults, "We are here to grow and to mature."

Growing, maturing, and learning. These understandings are the result of a vital and healthy root system established through a lifetime of education and service. The offshoot of such a root system is a commitment to continual learning and service through senior adulthood. Consequently, these desires to be involved in their community of faith and to be continuous learners become motivation to participate in structured opportunities for learning and for growing.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE STRUCTURE FOR GROWTH

A tree uses what comes its way to nurture itself. By sinking its roots deeply into the earth, by accepting the rain that flows towards it, by reaching out to the sun, the tree perfects its character and becomes great. . . .Absorb, absorb, absorb. That is the secret of the tree.

- - Deng Ming-Dao

#### Introduction

The largest, longest-living organisms ever to grow on earth are trees (Shigo, 1996). As a living organism, a tree has a highly developed system of parts and processes that helps in the tree's growth and production. The vigor, vitality, and health of a tree will determine whether or not a tree thrives or even survives.

In the forest, trees become tall, grow strong, and have a long life as they grow within groups. Through a complex interdependent system, their connectedness helps to ensure the survival of the forest.

Trees not only connect with other trees by way of root grafts but also by the way of the fungi that are associated with non-woody roots. . . . Trees also connect with many other organisms, very large to very small, in ways that benefit the trees and their associates. Synergistic associations are important parts of the tree system. (Shigo, 1996, p. 2)

From the piney forests to the great redwood forests, these trees simply cannot survive alone. Through their winding

and intertwining root system, they connect and provide support for healthy growth.

Just as trees thrive within groups, so have the participants thrived in the groups they have chosen to be affiliated with. From their well-developed root system that was established through family traditions, college learning experiences, continued formal education, and service to their community of faith, the participants have grown together as lifelong learners. Now as older, mature adults, their affiliations, associations, and service projects continue to provide a structure for learning and growing together. Such is the purpose Academy of Senior Professionals.

The Academy of Senior Professionals (ASP) was born out of the desire of a retired Southern Nazarene University professor to continue to grow and learn intellectually, spiritually, and culturally during retirement and to do so with other retirees on a regular basis. Equally important, he saw retirement as a time to be of continued service to Southern Nazarene University.

The idea [ASP] came when I saw an article in the Oklahoman back probably '89 about the Academy of Senior Professionals in Eckhart College in St. Petersburg, Florida. The idea struck me, that sounds like a good idea. That's a lot of potential for the seniors as well as



there would be a lot of side benefits for the university. So I went down and visited to see what it was like. Later, they held a seminar for seniors. I went down to learn about their organization. . . .Then later I came back and did a little survey to see who would be interested in this area. I worked through [the university's president's] office. He helped with the distribution of survey questionnaires . . . .We started off with a small group of members, and then from there, I asked certain ones if they would be on the ballot, to a particular office. [A woman member] was our first chairman.

From this beginning, the by-laws were written and a membership drive was started. More importantly, a mission and purpose statement was created and a motto was developed. Published in handouts, in brochures, and on their home-page on the Southern Nazarene University Website, these read:

Definition:

1. A COMMUNITY of those from various professional backgrounds who, no longer needing to face the pressure of regular professional activities, would like to join with others in comparable circumstances in the realization of personal and shared goals entailing various forms of intellectual, cultural, spiritual and service activities.
2. An ORGANIZATION composed of individuals of all races, religions, and nationalities who have matured in their profession and/or are of expertise and would like to participate with others of common interests. Those who purposes and goals coincide closely with the following are encouraged to join the Academy.

Purpose:

1. To create an environment of exploration, sharing, and learning that will attract members with a history of distinguished achievement.
2. To provide a climate of continuing intellectual stimulation.

The Motto: Sharing a Continuous Flight

When asked how the mission statement and the motto were conceived, the founder of ASP replied,

It was just kind of an idea, that when you retire, you don't want to sit around and do nothing. You want to be actively involved with your fellow professionals and be of service to others. I just thought, well, we'll continue on with this total process of learning together and sharing with each other. . . .It's not only the knowledge and all; it's the process of learning and continuing on with what you have learned and what you will continue to learn. You don't stop doing that if you're an alive person.

For over 10 years, ASP has provided a structure for senior adult learners to remain alive intellectually, to grow culturally and spiritually, and to connect with one another in an adult education learning environment. Like a healthy and vital forest, their interconnectedness and synergistic relationships provide ingredients necessary for continual intellectual growth. It is another example of the ever developing and dynamic field of Adult Education where adults can learn, thrive, and grow in groups.

## Adult Education

### The Learning Environment

When one talks about a learning environment, often a place or physical structure comes to mind: a classroom, a building, a campus. Traditionally, these formal learning situations occur when teachers and students come together for a singular purpose within an institution's four walls. The teacher becomes the guide or facilitator with the ultimate responsibility to determine what is to be learned and how.

Knowles (1970) determined there are four main categories or types of educational agencies that describe the formal settings where adults can learn within groups. The first category includes institutions and agencies where the education of adults is the central function. Business schools, correspondence schools, and vocational-technical schools are typical of the kinds of institutions and agencies that fall within this category (p. 22). A second category includes institutions or agencies that exist for other purposes than adult education; however, adult education, as a secondary function, is incorporated into the functions and structure of the organization. Public school adult programs, community colleges, colleges and universities, and cooperative extension services provided

through land-grant colleges reflect organizations that provide education to adults as a secondary function (p. 30). The third category of adult education agencies are those organizations that would be considered quasi-educational. Libraries, museums, health and welfare agencies, churches, and occupational associations have an allied or a complimentary function where adult education helps to accomplish the goals and mission of the organization (p. 30). The fourth category of organizations that provide adult education opportunities are organizations that are non-educational. The goals and operations of these agencies have nothing to do with education; however, by providing adult education opportunities to their employees and customers, the overall purpose and mission of the agency can be reached through this subordinate function. Business and industry, labor unions, government agencies, correctional institutions, and the armed forces are organizations that use education as a means to achieve goals that are central to the purposes of the organization (p. 31).

Other opportunities for education for adults within groups exist in a variety ways outside of formal kinds of learning environments. Many adults involve themselves in learning environments that are less structured and more

flexible than formal learning environments. While others may provide the instruction, the adult learner determines the level of commitment and participation. Private music lessons, group art instruction, exercise groups, social action groups, and discussion groups represent these informal, less structured learning environments (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Because adult education can happen in such a wide, if not bewildering, array and fashion, delineating the where of the adult education environment has been not as easy task. Indeed, there have been and continue to be problems in actually determining what constitutes adult education (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982; Knowles, 1970, 1988). Many have tried to tag or label adult education with broad labels such as lifelong learning. Others have tried to narrow adult education down to specific labels such as adult basic education, training and development, religious education, and cooperative education (Knowles, 1970; 1988; 1990; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Furthermore, articulating a definition of adult education is equally challenging, as seen in Houle's (1996) definition of adult education.

The process by which men and women (alone, in groups, or in institutional settings) seek to

improve themselves or their society by increasing their skills, their knowledge, or their sensitiveness; . . . Or it is any process by which individual, groups, or institutions try to help men and women improve in these ways. (p. 41)

Regardless of the challenges to defining the where of adult education, it is a dynamic, diverse, and ever-developing field. Equally challenging, therefore, is to understand the purpose of adult education as adults come together to learn in groups.

### The Purpose

Many have attempted to explain the purpose of adult education through various orientations. Because there are multiple audiences and multiple agencies in the field of adult education (Apps, 1979), how an agency understands the purpose of providing education for adults will determine how the agency will function (Apps, 1979; Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982; Elias & Merriam, 1995; Knowles, 1970, 1988).

Is the purpose for individual development or is the emphasis on the content of the information to be given? Should education help people move forward or to maintain the status quo? Should education have an active role in changing society? The answers to these kinds of questions provides a belief system which encompasses a basic set of assumptions about the view of knowledge, the nature of

learning, the nature of the curriculum, and the role of the teacher.

The philosophical school of thought known as Idealism, espouses that ideas are the only true reality (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982; Elias & Merriam, 1995; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Consequently, the aim of education should be for the search for truth and character development (Elias & Merriam, 1995; Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982). The teachings and philosophies of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, and St. Thomas Aquinas help to guide the basic assumptions and principles of Idealism, which has its focus on intellectual development through dialogue and contemplation. The role of the teacher is seen as a "Master", a guide for immature learners, and the teacher alone judges the importance of the material to be learned. For adult education, the idealism paradigm is reflected in adult education agencies such as the Chautauqua Institution, the Great Books Discussion, Harvard's liberal arts curriculum, and the Elderhostel programs

Scholars coming out of the Pragmatism, or Progressive, school of thought have proposed that the focus or purpose of education should be on the student or the learner. The centrality of the learners' experiences is at the heart of Pragmatism's basic assumptions (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982;

Elias & Merriam, 1995; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Charles Darwin, John Dewey, Rousseau, and Eduard Lindeman saw education as a means to liberate talents and to promote democracy (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982; Dewey, 1916; Elias & Merriam, 1995; Lindeman, 1926). The experimental method of learning by doing, problem-oriented curriculum, the use of concrete objects and experience, and a concern for social impact are central to Pragmatists' teaching methodologies. Vocational training, university and corporate extensions, services to the poor, and parent education programs are examples of adult education opportunities that follow Pragmatist ideals (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982; Elias & Merriam, 1995; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Behaviorist adult education has its beginnings in the scientific movements (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982; Elias & Merriam, 1995). Basic assumptions and principles coming out of the Behaviorist school of thought are that human behavior is a result of prior conditioning, behavior is determined by external forces, and behavior that is reinforced is more likely to be repeated (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982; Elias & Merriam, 1995). Classical conditioning, operant conditioning, and the principle of reinforcement are key concepts that originated from the



Behaviorist orientation. Consequently, Behaviorists such as Ivan Pavlov, B.F. Skinner, E. L. Thorndike, and John Watson explain the purpose of education is to change behavior by arranging the environment to elicit the desired response (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982; Elias & Merriam, 1995; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). For adult education, this is manifested in behavioral objectives, competency-based education, and skill development and training. Consequently, adult education curriculum design and program development has been heavily influenced by Behaviorism (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982; Elias & Merriam, 1995; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Humanistic adult education has evolved from existential philosophy and humanistic psychology (Elias & Merriam, 1995). Freedom, autonomy, trust, active cooperation and participation, and self-directed learning are key concepts that are emphasized in this school of thought (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982; Elias & Merriam, 1995; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Humanists such as Abraham Maslow (1970) and Carl Rogers (1969) understand the learning process as a personal act to fulfill potential and to become self-actualized. The role of the teacher is to guide or facilitate the learning so that the teacher, in essence, becomes a co-learner (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982;

Elias & Merriam, 1995; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Consequently, the purpose of adult education is to facilitate the development of the whole person with the goal for people to be self-actualized so they can live together as fully-functioning human beings. For adult education, Humanistic education is often seen various adult education practices such as group dynamics, group relations training, group processes, sensitivity workshops, encounter groups, and self-directed learning (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982; Elias & Merriam, 1995; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

For other adult education philosophers, the goal of adult education should be to change or to reconstruct society. The basic assumptions of Reconstructionism are that education is not neutral, people from all strata of life are capable of transforming the world, and that education leads to action (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982; Elias & Merriam, 1995; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Radical educators include Paulo Freire (1972) and Myles Horton (Adams, 1975). Although these two educators are from different countries, have different kinds of students, and use different methodologies, they both share a significant number of ideas (Conti, 1977). Central to their motivations are attacking injustice, promoting human rights, improving the quality of life, and raising the

consciousness of people to the personal and societal bounds that keep people from having control of their own lives (Adams, 1975; Conti, 1977; Freire, 1972). However, in order for these goals to be accomplished, people need to become aware of their own personal power, or empowered, to make these changes (Conti & Fellenz, 1986). Consequently, social transformation and personal empowerment are "intertwined and inseparable processes" (Merriam, 1999, p. 324). The result of empowerment is democracy and human dignity. Dialogue, curriculum developed by both teacher and student, and political action hallmarks radical adult education processes (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982; Elias & Merriam, 1995; Merriam & Caffarella, 1991).

Regardless to the philosophical orientation that may be embraced by various adult education agencies, the goal of all is the education of adults. The providers of adult education are deeply concerned with attracting adults to their learning environments. Therefore, understanding who participates, understanding why they choose to participate, and identifying the barriers to participation are vital concerns.

### Participation

While the education of children and adolescence is usually a mandatory process, the education of adults has

historically been on a voluntary basis (Johnstone & Rivera, 1965; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Unless required by job or career obligations, adults usually decide when, where, and what they want to learn. They are not bound by law to go to any one particular adult education agency or to pursue any one particular course of study. Adults pick and choose the learning environments in which they wish to learn. They evaluate and critique agencies according to their needs and goals. Consequently, as adult education agencies vie for enrollment, what motivates adults to participate is of crucial concern (Johnstone & Rivera, 1965; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Houle in his classic work, The Inquiring Mind: A Study of the Adult Who Continues to Learn, (1961) centered his attention on adults who on a regular basis engage in learning projects that are considered to be "educational" or are conducted in formal or informal learning situations. He identified three basic orientations that influence why adults choose to participate in formal learning projects. Some learners are goal oriented (p. 16). These adult learners have clear-cut objectives for participation, and they are usually confident that the learning situation may be a way to solve a problem or pursue an interest (p. 35). Because their participation is based on personal perceived

needs, these learners engage in learning projects that have immediate application to their needs. Since goal-oriented learners participate as they perceive the need, their patterns of participation may be in an ebb and flow manner (p. 36). Once the initial goal is met for the learning project, they may not participate in another learning project until another perceived need arises. Because goal-oriented learners tend to define their learning activities such as reading according to their needs, goal-oriented learners tend not to read widely or have a wide variety of learning experiences.

Others have learning needs that are activity or social-oriented, and their reasons for participation may be unrelated to the goals of the learning project (p.19).

Social contact is important for these learners.

Loneliness, relief from personal problems, finding a compatible social group, being with friends, and carrying on traditional and family culture often are the impetus for participation (p. 19). Through adult learning projects, these adults can connect with other adults and develop a sense of belonging. Others who belong in the activity category are those learners who are in a continual state of taking courses without any apparent plan or goal in mind other than accumulating credits. For these learners, the

activity of taking the classes is more important than reaching a goal or applying the courses to any particular plan of study (p. 21).

The third group of adult learners is motivated by acquiring knowledge (p. 24). These adult learners seek knowledge for knowledge's sake. They have a keen and compelling desire to know. Usually they are avid readers, and learning is seen as fun and enjoyable (p. 27). They are often very aware of their quest for knowledge and may see themselves as different than most people. For some, the quest for knowledge comes with almost a religious zeal (p. 39). These learners are often so preoccupied with their learning projects and compelled to keep on learning that is often hard for them to imagine life without being in continual learning mode. It is life for them (p. 40).

In addition to understanding why adults choose to participate in learning projects, adult educators have also been intent of identifying a profile of a typical adult learner. Johnstone and Rivera (1965) conducted a national survey that explored the educational activities of the adult population in some 12,000 households. Their findings revealed that the typical adult who participates in formal and informal learning situations is better educated, has a higher income, is most likely to be white, and is employed

full-time. Other studies since the 1965 Johnstone and Rivera study have supported their findings and include other variables such as an adult learner is most often in a white-collar occupation, is married, has children, lives in an urbanized area but more likely in a suburban than large city, is found in all parts of the country but more frequently in the West than in other regions (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Work-related requirements are often the most cited reason for impetus for learning (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). However, the educational background of the adult is the most significant predictor of for participation in adult learning activities. Those with more formal education are more likely to continue in educational pursuits (Houle, 1961).

As the population of adults increases in number and grows older in age, more attention is being given to reasons why senior adults participate in learning activities. Lois Lamdin and Mary Fugate (1997) conducted a survey of senior adult learners in an effort to gain understanding of the learning projects of what they call "elderlearners". The learners were identified through mailing lists from various senior adult learning organizations such as Elderhostel, Institutes for Learning in Retirement, and OASIS centers. Over 3,000 Elderlearning

Surveys were sent out, and 860 responses were received. Lamdin and Fugate discovered that the majority of the learners were women, most were married, their ages clustered between 65 and 79, they tended to live with a spouse or partner, the majority of the learners do volunteer work, nearly 80% achieved a level of education at the two-year college level and above, 94% of the respondents were Caucasian, and 87% rated their health as excellent or good. When asked why they choose to participate in educational activities, the answer "joy of learning is the clearly the hands-down winner. People starred it or circled it, put multiple exclamation points after it." (p. 75). Since senior adult learners are no longer in need of educational activities for career or job pursuit or advancement, their learning needs become one of personal enhancement and information for life skill needs. Consequently, senior adult learners tend not to be users of community or institutional learning resources; rather, they rely mostly on learning through self-directed or independent learning projects (Lamdin & Fugate, 1997).

#### Participants and Program Development

When adult learners for various reasons and of various ages do choose to participate in formal or informal learning activities, the adult education administrator and



instructor are challenged to meet the unique needs of the adult learners (Brookfield, 1986; Cross, 1981; Kidd, 1973; Knowles, 1970, 1975, 1988, 1990). As the field of adult education has grown and new audiences are found for new programs, adult educators have been conscious of the fact that adults approach the learning environment differently than children and adolescence (Kidd, 1973; Knowles, 1970, 1975, 1988, 1990). As a result, adult education educators need to understand the characteristics of adult learners and how these characteristics impact the learning-program planning transaction. One of the key leaders in the field of adult education in helping to define the characteristics of adult learners and to provide a distinct educational methodology is Malcolm Knowles.

Knowles is best known for infusing the concept of andragogy into the adult education vernacular and practice. Knowles (1970) defines andragogy as the "art and science of science of helping adults learn" (p. 38). Although Knowles is often credited with coining the term andragogy, it is a word that has been used in Germany and throughout Europe as early as 1833 (Knowles, 1970; Feuer & Geber, 1988). Andragogy is based on the Greek word aner, meaning "man". Therefore, andragogy refers to the art of teaching adults

rather than pedagogy, which is teaching children (Knowles, 1970, 1988, 1990)

Knowles theoretical concept of andragogy is based on five crucial assumptions about the characteristics of adult learners that are different from the assumptions by which traditional pedagogy is based. These assumptions concern self-concept, the importance of experience, the readiness to learn, time perspective, and motivation (Knowles 1970, 1988, 1990).

The self-concept of an adult moves from being a dependent personality toward being a self-directed being. As people move into adulthood, they take on self-directed roles where they make their own decisions and manage their own lives. However, adults often link learning back to traditional, school learning where there was close control by a teacher. This tension between being dependent on a teacher yet being an independent adult can become a barrier to learning. Knowles argues that adults need to be given the responsibility for planning and conducting their own learning.

Adults accumulate a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasingly rich resource for learning. Although children, too, have experiences, adults have a richer foundation and a larger number of experiences to

bring to the learning project. Experience, however, can hinder learning because of fixed habits and patterns of thought. Therefore, a goal of an adult learning situation should be to help adults to analyze their own experiences more objectively.

An adult's readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of everyday life. Consequently, the need to know or teachable moments are often linked to what is expected for an adult to know in the workplace, home, or social organization. Therefore, learning stems from evolving social roles.

Subject-centered, sequential orientations are the usual patterns for learning in childhood. Typically, the expectations of children for applying the learning are not ones of immediacy. However, for adults, their time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application. Accordingly, their orientation towards learning shifts from one of subject-centeredness to one of performance-centeredness. Adults want to apply tomorrow what they learn today.

Although adults may enter a learning situation because of external pressures of a job or social role, Knowles argues that adults are motivated by more powerful motivators that are intrinsic rather extrinsic.

Recognition, better quality of life, greater self-confidence, and self-actualization reflect intrinsic motivators.

Knowles proposes a seven-step program planning model that incorporates the assumptions of andragogy. These steps are building the climate, participative planning, self-diagnosis, formulating objectives, organization by problem areas, identifying learning resources, and evaluation (Knowles, 1970; 1975; 1988; 1990).

The learning climate needs to be conducive both psychologically and physically. An atmosphere of mutual trust, mutual respect, and supportiveness needs to be established. Knowles stresses that a conducive climate is critical in order to build collaboration rather than competition and active participation rather than passive reciprocity. Furthermore, adults need to be physically comfortable. Good lighting, comfortable seating with a seating arrangement in circles or semi-circles, and pleasant aesthetics also have a part in building a conducive climate for learning.

The second element in the program design is participative planning. The learners share the responsibilities for the planning of the learning activity by being directly involved in the planning process of how

the educational goals are going to be reached.

Participative planning allows adults to take an equal part and provides them with ownership of the learning.

Self-diagnosis is the third element in the process.

The learners assess the gaps in competencies they possess and the difference between where they are and where they would like to be. This is a mutual process of negotiation with the instructor as a guide helping the learner understand what is ultimately required with the learner assessing what is needed to get to that point.

The fourth element of the process involves the learner defining the exact learning objectives in order to accomplish the learning goals. Whether the objectives are behavioral or affective will depend on the nature of the learning and the nature of the learner. Most important is the learner input.

Constructing learning designs and plans is the fifth part of the process. The plans should be organized by problem areas, which are identified by the learners. This is often accomplished through learning contracts where each learner describes the learning objectives, resources, and strategies that are going to be used in order to accomplish the learning goal.

The sixth element consists of conducting the learning experience. This involves identifying human and material resources that will help to accomplish the objectives. The teacher is the guide, catalyst, and resource person for the learning project.

The final element in the program planning process is the evaluation of the learning outcomes and the quality of the learning experience. The student and instructor assess whether or not the goals of the learning project were met. Knowles emphasizes that evaluation is mutually done with the instructor evaluating how well program needs were met and with the learner evaluating how well individual needs were met.

#### The Academy of Senior Professionals (ASP)

##### A Structure for Learning

Adult education is a multi-faceted, complex field of education. It encompasses diverse philosophical paradigms, a host of agencies and institutions with a multitude of goals and purposes, a myriad of audiences with multi-dimensional reasons for participation, and unique instructional methodologies. These challenges also make it a very exciting field. New audiences, new agencies, new programs, and new understandings of the adult learner are ever evolving.

One of these new programs that provide a structure for adult education is the Academy of Senior Professionals (ASP) in Bethany, Oklahoma. ASP provides opportunities for learning within groups within the participants' community of faith. Like other adult education agencies, ASP has a definite purpose, ASP members have specific reasons for participation, and ASP leaders are challenged to address both the unique purposes of ASP and to understand and to meet the needs of the members.

#### Sharing A Continuous Flight

From the very inception of the organization, the leaders of ASP wanted to provide unique ways to offer learning opportunities for senior adult learners. At first, their meetings consisted of "round table" discussions concerning service projects that the members were conducting. While these were interesting and beneficial for those who attended, it soon became apparent that the structure limited participation. In an effort to attract more members, it was suggested that a luncheon be combined with the meeting. Reflecting back on the beginnings of ASP, a 79-year-old participant remembered:

Of course, in the beginning days, we would meet in the old, it's now the music department. It's where they used to have the dining hall. The old student union. We met a few times, and we were not having too much success as far

as attendance was concerned. That's when VL, who was the president, came up with the idea of having a luncheon. That's when it took off. When you feed the Nazarenes, they come!

### The Luncheon Meeting

The monthly luncheon meeting has become the foundation stone of ASP with more members attending and participating in this activity than any other activity sponsored by ASP. From 11:15 a. m. to 1:00 p.m. on the second Monday of September through May, nearly 100 adults meet for fellowship and learning at the Webster Commons on the campus of Southern Nazarene University.

The Webster Commons, a three story, brown brick building with a copper mansard roof, is located on the far north side of the 40 acre campus of Southern Nazarene University. The entire second and third floors on the east, west, and south sides of the building are windowed, allowing those outside to see people moving around on those floors, going up stairs, riding in the elevator, eating in the cafeteria, and meeting in the faculty lounge. Directly in front of the main entrance to the Commons on the south side of the building is a large, brick covered plaza with a fountain built from the cornerstones of one of the original colleges that merged to form Southern Nazarene University. Many of the brick pavers in the plaza are inscribed with



names of alumni, families, and organizations that are associated with the university. Completed in 1998, the plaza was named the Centennial Plaza to commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of the university.

Walking up the 11 brick steps into the south front entrance of the Commons, one enters through two sets of double glass doors into the second floor of the building and is greeted by bronze sculpture of a Native American man releasing an eagle for flight. On the base of the statue is a small plaque with scripture verse from the Bible, Isaiah 40:31, "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint".

The second floor is the main floor of the Commons. The main floor is a large rectangular open area with an atrium that goes from the ground floor through the top, third floor. The atrium is situated directly in the middle of the building. Looking down over the railing of the atrium towards the first floor, one sees a court yard with a small fountain in the middle, chairs and tables surrounding the fountain, and a small café that sells hamburgers, other sandwiches, and snacks. Looking up towards the third floor, one can see the tables of the university cafeteria.

Hanging from the top of the atrium in third floor down to the second floor is a large sign announcing an upcoming student event at the university. On the main floor, low-backed overstuffed couches and chairs in light gray and burgundy fabric are scattered around the perimeter of the half glass walls of the atrium. Beside and in front of the chairs and couches are gray formica covered tables with the university newspaper and other information sheets scattered about. On the east-side of the main floor is the entrance to the university bookstore. University logo sweaters, shorts, and caps, pillows, gifts, candles, and other items are displayed in the glass window that spans nearly three-quarters of the entire wall. On the far north end of the east-side of the main floor are of the offices of the Vice President for Spiritual Development. On the south next to main entrance to the building is the Commons Office, and on the far north wall of the main floor are the student mailboxes.

The Commons is the gathering place for the university students, faculty, alumni, and guests. Students dressed in jeans, sweatshirts, ball caps, and carrying backpacks lounge around on the couches, talking, laughing, and reading mail. A vendor sets up a table selling class rings. A group promoting a student mission trip to Mexico

has a display table with pictures and information. Other students sign up to participate in an upcoming talent show. The doors of the bookstore open and close as people browse the merchandise. Faculty, staff, and guests find their way to the bookstore, faculty lounge, or other meeting rooms in the building as they wind their way through groups of students

One of the main areas for large meetings in the Commons is the Heritage Room. Found on the west side of the main floor of the Commons, it is a large room. The Heritage room is approximately 30 feet by 90 feet. There are two floor to ceiling glass windows that run nearly the full length of the east and west walls. One of the glass windows faces the lounge, and the other glass window faces outside to the campus. The other two walls of the room and other borders are painted light mauve. The Heritage Room floor is covered with a colorful patterned carpet of greens, burgundies, pinks, blues, and browns. Several round tables with padded chairs are scattered about the room. A piano is situated in one corner of the room. Pots of large silk trees and green plants in decorative jardinières add to the ambiance. It is in the Heritage Room that the Academy of Senior Professionals meet.

The second Mondays in September through May find this unique group coming to the Commons. Around 10:45 in the morning, the members of ASP being to gather in the Commons Building. It is not hard to distinguish these people from the usual crowd that one would find in the Commons Building at that hour. All of the members are at least 60 years of age, most have white or gray hair, many of the men show balding patterns, and nearly all wear glasses. There appear to nearly an equal number of men and women, and all are Caucasians. The men are usually dressed in a variety of blue, black, and gray sport jackets, slacks, dress shirts, and ties. The women wear pantsuits, dresses, skirts and sweaters, and jewelry of various sorts, and most of the women use some makeup. It is not unusual for the dress of the women to reflect the season or holiday that falls in the month of the ASP meeting, such as a red outfit for Valentine's Day, a green jacket for St. Patrick's Day, and holiday motif sweaters with pumpkins and snowmen for Thanksgiving and Christmas. Many of the men and women wear hearing aid devices. Only a few require the help of a walking aid such as a cane or walker.

A sign outside of the door to the Heritage Room announces the monthly meeting of ASP. As the members enter the Heritage room, directly to the left of the door

is a table where the treasurer sits as he collects \$6.50 from each person for the cost of the meal. He is a friendly fellow in a brown tweed sports jacket, shirt, and tie who greets and jokes with the members as they pay for their meal. To the right of the door is another table that has white pre-printed name tags encased in plastic with long strings attached that the members wear around their necks. As the members pay their luncheon fees and pick up their necklace-like name tags, they greet one another, shake hands, and give hugs. At the southwest corner of the room, a woman with blond hair, glasses, bright blue eyes, and a perky smile plays the piano. A professional teacher of piano, she plays a repertoire of show tunes, holiday music, popular songs from the members' youth, and sacred music. Beside the table of the treasurer on the floor is a black rectangular sound system box where an ASP member stoops down and sets the dials for tape-recording the proceedings of the meeting. Not far from the treasurer's table is another small table where an energetic gray-haired woman with glasses, dressed in silky multi-colored jogging suit and white walking shoes collects ASP membership dues of from current members and those who are joining the membership. As the members arrive and gather, the room comes alive with music, talking, and laughter as nearly 100

senior adult learners visit and mingle with one another. After greeting one another, they find a place to sit at one of the 16 to 17 round tables that are set up in the Heritage Room.

Each white linen covered round table is set for six people with two crystal goblets, a dinner fork, a salad fork, a knife, a spoon, and a colorful linen napkin for each person at the table. The members of the Decorating Committee have decorated each table with seasonal decorations and votive candles as center pieces. Carafes of iced tea and iced water; little bowls with packets of sugar, artificial sweetener, and powdered coffee creamer; and salt and pepper shakers are placed around the tables. Additionally, each table has been given a number on a small piece of paper that will be used to direct the people seated at the tables to the buffet line. There is no designated seating, and it does not appear that the members routinely sit at the same table each luncheon meeting. Tables with couples of husbands and wives, combinations of husband and wives and single members, and a few tables with only single members, usually women, carry on lively discussion.

Across the west wall of the room, in front of the window that overlooks the campus, a "head table", six long

rectangular tables covered with white linen cloth and skirted with white linen skirts, is set up for the President of the ASP, the Program Chairman, the two Membership Chair-people, the guest speaker, and other guests. They sit on one side of the head table with their backs towards the window and facing the room. A small lectern with a microphone is placed in the middle of the head table. On the table are the same kinds of eating utensils, glasses, and condiments as on the round tables. Directly behind the head table, hanging from the top of the middle of the window, is a large, red sign that has an outline of an eagle in flight in white and in large white letters are the words, "The Academy of Senior Professionals at Southern Nazarene University. Sharing a Continuous Flight."

Along the north wall of the room, a buffet is set up. On six to eight linen covered and holiday decorated tables, the university food service places large bowls of green salad, various salad dressings, Jell-O, cottage cheese, and other kinds of salads. Baked chicken, sliced roast beef, breaded chicken breasts, lasagna, rice, scalloped potatoes, and mixed vegetables are typical of the kinds of entrees that are in chromed steam-servers. Clear glass dinner plates and salad plates are placed at one end of the buffet

where the two serving lines that go on each side of the buffet tables begin. On a table adjacent to the buffet are baskets of dinner rolls, plates with individual servings of desserts like cheesecake, chocolate cake, and lemon pie, large silver urns with coffee, and white porcelain coffee cups and saucers.

As near to 11:15 a.m. as possible, the President of ASP, a 72 year-old retired college English professor with a thick shot of white hair, steps up to the lectern at the head table. Dressed in a gray suit, blue shirt, striped tie, and red handkerchief in the jacket pocket, he appears to be comfortable in his role. In a firm, clear voice he calls the meeting to order by asking one of the members to open the meeting with prayer. "This organization has brought us here today, but your love binds us together in special ways...Thank you for these lives who have been dedicated to serving you and others" is offered by a tall, thin man. After the prayer, the Co-membership Chairman, a trim woman with reddish hair wearing a black suit and a scarf around her neck, begins to direct the different tables to the buffet line. In a glass goblet are corresponding numbers to the ones that are placed on the individual round tables. As she draws out a number, the people at that table go the buffet line. During this



process, she keeps up a lively banter as she introduces guests, new members, or recognizes other members of the academy. Often her remarks about the people in attendance are linked back to their college years or other church associations. "You remember the Garver boys at BPC. . . .Did you hear Don sing in church this past Sunday? I hope you didn't miss it, it was wonderful!. . . .We're so happy to have the Nelsons here today. We're hoping they will be joining ASP soon." The members and the guests go through the buffet line and return to their tables. The piano music continues throughout the dining portion of the meeting.

While they eat their meal, they often discuss activities or interests that have been keeping them busy. A quiet, soft spoken lady, one member is a former Nazarene missionary who spent 40 years in India. During those years, she and her husband traveled overland, driving from Germany to India five times. Now retired in Bethany, her interests stem from her travels and Indian experiences. She is working on a project where she is taking her photographic slides of places she has visited in the Middle East, combining these with pictures of Bible stories and making a video to be sent back to India where it will be reproduce in the many languages of India. She discusses how she has searched the Internet for Bible story slides

and how she is perplexed on how to properly clean her own slides. She seems to be "stuck", as she says, "I need help!" However, she is determined to find the resources she needs to complete her project. Sighing, another gentleman, after reading a handout about a book discussion group being offered through ASP, says, "I'd like to go to this, but I just can't hear well enough to be able to join in a group discussion." Two other ladies are discussing genealogy. One lady with light gray-brown hair, high cheek-bones, and clear complexion becomes quite animated as she describes using her four computers and several databases to search for and store her data. "It's exciting to find people, living and dead, and make the connections!" She explains how making these connections is "a real mission field" because she gets to know so many people through her searches. When asked how she learned to use the Internet search engines and databases, she laughed and said, "I don't use manuals. I don't have the time to sit down and figure it out that way." Others talk about enjoying a gospel concert done by a local African-American choir. One man asks another, who is known to be a runner, "Did you get your five miles in today?"

When most of the of the people have finished their meals, the President turns the meeting over to the Program

Chairman, who in turn introduces a guest speaker or other people who may be featured. Speakers have included: the retired director of the Department of Human Resources for the State of Oklahoma who spoke on the social needs in the community; a featured writer in the daily paper for Oklahoma City who urged for intergenerational involvement in families and the community; the city manager for the city of Bethany who addressed the economic status of their local community; a doctor who discussed science and religion, and the president of Southern Nazarene University who gave a speech on the state of the university. Special music has been provided professional musicians, a local opera singer, and the madrigal choir from Southern Nazarene University. On one occasion, one of the members sang a solo. She told a moving story about how she had stopped singing due to troublesome facial spasm, but has chosen to sing anyway. Looking at the President of ASP, she said, "I want to thank you for showing confidence I can still do it." Other guest speakers have presented papers concerning health and nutrition, senior housing, and reflections of personal experiences that are related to historical events. Regardless of the nature or theme of the presentation, the membership is very attentive and often responds with

enthusiastic clapping and even the occasional ecclesiastical approval of "Amen!"

The April meeting of the year is for the annual report of ASP and election of the officers for the next years. Each member is given a printed and bound report that details the activities of the academy during the previous year. Following Robert's Rules of Order the officers of the Academy give their reports. The speakers for the meetings are chosen based on surveys given out to the members to determine areas of interest. In addition, at the end of each year, the members evaluate the speakers.

After the guest speaker or presentation, the President once again presides. Announcements, reports, and other kinds of information are given. Chairpeople of the various learning interest groups report of the activities of the groups. An 80-year-old woman presents her just-published memoirs. Another member announces the opportunity for the members to attend a driving school hosted by The American Association of Retired People that will help to lower the attendees' car insurance costs. Another member, a former English professor, has written a poem and has provided copies for the membership. One of the ASP officers reports on the scholarship fund that the ASP is building for Southern Nazarene University. Guests and new members are

introduced. The members are asked to fill out new contact sheets if their phone numbers, mailing addresses, or email addresses have changed.

Ever present of keeping a firm time schedule, the President closes the meeting at 1:00 p.m. with a poem, a prayer, or a portion of verse that he quotes from memory. At the conclusion, a tall, thin woman with short white hair scurries around taking pictures of guests, new members, and the guest speaker. As the members leave, they give their good-byes to one another and place their name tags back on the table to be used the next month.

The luncheon meeting has proved to be very popular as it consistently averages nearly 100 people in attendance. The atmosphere is upbeat with a feeling that something significant is happening. As one speaker said as he began his presentation, "I really admire this organization. It amazes me to walk into a room with people who are laughing, talking, and enjoying life!" The luncheon/lecture format allows a great number of people to have opportunity to fellowship and to learn. However, even before the luncheon has begun, several small groups of learners have been meeting in different learning interest groups. These are the Research Interest Group, the Memoir Writing Workshop, and the Strategic Planning Group.

## The Research Interest Group

The Research Interest Group (RIG) meets every other month during the months of that ASP meets. It is a small group with a specific function. The purpose of the RIG is to provide an avenue for those members who are interested in doing research on topics of personal interest and presenting papers based on their research. Additionally, the RIG often addresses other issues such as the development of their homepage on the Southern Nazarene University website and providing avenues for more members to participate in doing personal research.

The group meets in a small meeting room, called "The Boardroom", in one of the classroom buildings at Southern Nazarene University. Sitting around a golden oak, oval conference table in blue padded boardroom type chairs, the members conduct their meeting following a prepared agenda that is given to all in attendance. Standing behind a podium at the end of the table, the Chairperson, a retired college librarian, presides over the meeting. The meetings are opened with prayer and followed by an introduction of guests, minutes of the previous RIG are read, Old Business is addressed, New Business is presented, those who have special presentations are allowed time, and then they

motion to adjourn. Although it has a formal structure, discussion is conducted in a relaxed atmosphere.

The research of the members is as varied as the members are. Some of the papers that have been presented include the following topics: "Antioxidant Food Supplements and Health Benefits for Mature Adults"; "Adverse Drug Reactions: An Iatrogenic Potential"; and "Learning from the Polls". Other specific topics that the members are considering for research are: animal fat and health, basic computer use, political debates, digital math, genealogy, history of women in the Bible, history of women in the Nazarene church, photography, privatization of Social Security, and use of scanners. Additionally, they have identified other potential topic areas for research that are more general in nature art, computers, crafts, driving, family, financial and legal, fitness, fun and games, general health issues, history of the United States, home and garden, language, literature, music, philosophy and religion, and travel.

The members who tend to participate in RIG seem to have enjoyed doing research prior to retirement and are comfortable in a learning environment that resembles a university or college setting. In one meeting, there were seven people in attendance: three women and four men; four

have their doctorates in the sciences and humanities; two are retired professional librarians; one has a master's degree in history. During their discussions, they use the language of research. For example, when discussing research, incorporated into their discussion are research terms such as population, sample, validity, and reliability.

The RIG members seem somewhat perplexed on how to get more people involved with the group. Indeed, one of the members did a presentation to the membership at large about the benefits of research, the myths about the research, and how RIG functions. Even though the numbers of participants may not be what the RIG members wish, the RIG provides these participants an avenue to continue in scholarly work, to present that work to peers, and to provide meaningful information for specific interests and needs of the members.

#### Memoir Writing Workshop

The round tables were pushed together so that the people in attendance could all find a place to sit in the circle configuration. Meeting in the faculty lounge in the Commons Building, these members gather each Monday of an ASP meeting at 10:15 a.m. to participate in the Memoir Writing Workshop (MWW). This group first met in March of



1999. As reported in the Annual Report to the Assembly of the Academy of Senior Professionals at Southern Nazarene University, April 13, 2000, the "MWW gives members a chance to share their memoir writing with others and to hear their works discussed in a trusting and friendly atmosphere" (p.3). Like the RIG, the MWW has a specific function; consequently, it, too, tends to be a small group of people who choose to participate. Typically, eight to ten people, usually women with one or two men, meet to share their memoirs.

The MWW is led by a 80-year-old woman with curly light brown and gray hair, bright blue eyes behind large lensed glasses, and a dimpled smile. She is a published writer and a former college English teacher. There is no set agenda other than sharing with each other any memoir that the participants may bring to the meeting. Before the group started sharing their memoirs, the leader of the group presented different handouts she prepared concerning the writing process. In one handout, "Using Verbs to Paint Word Pictures", she wrote:

All of us learned in elementary school that adjectives and adverbs are used to describe. They do. But verbs paint a much clearer picture. For example: I saw a man going down the street. Of course we need some adjectives to describe the man (a long-haired middle aged, 150 lb. white man). . . .And we need other

adjectives to describe the street (East Main Street). But the verbs really paint the picture. I saw a man jogging down the street. The list is endless: hobbling, shuffling, groping, tottering, running, stumbling, limping, riding, biking, staggering, driving, pedaling, strolling, walking, crawling, streaking, sneaking, ambling, racing. . . .You can think of others.

The members discussed the handouts and talked about how their writing can be improved. Developing a thought or thesis, using appropriate details, showing unity and clarity in writing, writing in the first person, punctuation rules, proper sentence construction, and using a variety of sentence structures were addressed as members brought their writing questions and problems to the group. More importantly, the group discussed why it was important to write memoirs. The first and foremost reason that was given was that they want their children to know and remember some of the things that have happened in their lives. One woman told how her father died when she was 16 years old, and she wants her children to know about him. Another member said, "I want to leave some type of legacy." Chuckling, one member said, "My childhood was so, so different. . . .the depression in rural Arkansas. My kids don't know a thing about that!"

Like the research done in RIG, the memoirs presented were varied. Whoever wishes brings a copy of a memoir for

each member and then reads the memoir aloud. Travel, childhood memories, school days, and raising children are common topics. At one MWW, one participant read her memoir, "A Country Christmas". As she read about her experiences about one Christmas during the Depression, there was soft laughter, nodding of heads, "that's great" was whispered, and affirmative murmurs that indicated they understood the experiences in her story. After her reading, they talked about how her memories were similar to their own. "Hearing your essay makes me think of something that was particularly interesting in one of my Christmases," added one participant. They remembered making decorations at school by using Big Chief writing tablets and making chains to hang around the room. They also remembered how wonderful the only-at-Christmas-orange that was always in the stocking tasted. This led to other reminiscences of babies being born in the country with the country doctor, indoor and outdoor plumbing, and baths on Saturday night in the bathtub in the kitchen. All of these, they concluded, make for rich, interesting memoirs. Before dismissal, they critiqued the memoirs for any writing errors or suggestions for clarity or style.

To add support to their efforts, some of the memoirs have been published in ASP's monthly newsletter, "The

Academy Perspective". Not only does this validate their writing style, but it also validates the importance and uniqueness of their experiences.

#### The Strategic Planning Committee

By its very title, the purpose of the Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) would seem to be one of long-range planning. In essence, that is its function. Made up of the members of the elected cabinet, these four men and three women are, as described in the Annual Report to the Assembly of the Academy of Senior Professionals at Southern Nazarene University, April 13, 2000,

Charged with the responsibility to research, develop, suggest short and long-term goals, and make recommendations for implementation of ASP. The SPC will make recommendations in such a way as to capture the imagination, hearts, and minds of its members in support of the ASP Mission and Statement of Goals. (p. A4)

The SPC developed five major goals, with two that they recommended to ASP membership for approval at the April 13, 2000, annual meeting:

1. To increase the communications, both visibility and externally, of the activities of ASP. The projects to meet this goal include upgrading the monthly newsletter, writing news articles for the student newspaper and SNU cable station, and publishing in academic periodicals.
2. To contribute more in finances, time, talent, and knowledge to SNU, to ASP, and to the greater community of senior adult learners outside of ASP.

The committee brainstormed several possibilities to meet this goal. Some of the projects include: promoting the ASP Endowed Scholarship Fund; creating financial assistance for needy ASP members; developing a class in senior sensitivity training to be offered to businesses; purchasing books and journals on senior issues and topics for the SNU library; producing a Senior Follies Talent show that would help to promote ASP and generate revenue for ASP; and sponsoring an Oklahoma City Senior Adult Fair on the Southern Nazarene University campus.

Many of the above mentioned goals have been implemented or completed. New banners and signs have been made for the ASP meeting, the monthly newsletter has been upgraded, a new brochure has been developed, and the endowed scholarship is continually promoted. Perhaps the most ambitious of their goals, the Oklahoma City Senior Adult Fair, is well on its way to fruition. During the January, 2001, meeting of the SPC, the committee included three outside advisors to help with the Senior Adult Fair, which is scheduled to take place in April of 2002. One guest is a middle-aged woman who writes newsletters for senior adults in Oklahoma, another woman works as an advisor to industry in the area of long-term care and insurance, and the third visitor is the head of the Family

Studies and Gerontology degree program at SNU. The vision for the Senior Day is for seniors from across the state of Oklahoma to come to the campus of SNU in order to promote continuous, lifelong learning. Their plans include having (a) seniors going to SNU classes in the morning; (b) a luncheon with a speaker who is nationally known as an expert on senior fitness; and (c) a variety of seminars that cover a multitude of topics of interest to seniors in the afternoon. While the ASP members, the speakers, and other guests to the monthly ASP meetings tend to be those from the Nazarene or local Bethany community, the members are anxious that the Senior Day be more inclusive of different races and religions. Discussion was given to having a panel discussion on philosophy and religion with people representing various world religions. Ideas were brainstormed on how to contact and invite seniors from various cultural communities, such as the African-American community and the Native American community. Perhaps of all the learning projects offered by the ASP, this project ultimately will involve more of the membership than any learning project to date.

#### Other Opportunities for Learning and Growing

In addition to the learning groups that meet on either a monthly or bimonthly schedule, there are many other

learning opportunities for the ASP members. These include contributing to the monthly newsletter, serving on various committees, and producing archival documents for the ASP records.

The monthly newsletter, "The Perspective", is a four page document that is mailed to all ASP members. The Perspective has a very "professional" look to it with graphics and photographs throughout the newsletter. Each newsletter includes an article about the featured luncheon speaker for the next ASP meeting, an editorial from the ASP president, a featured article from one of the creative writers in ASP, a review of a book, and an article from the RIG chairman. Reports from standing committees, information concerning upcoming events of ASP, and pictures with brief biographies of new members or guests are also included. The Perspective is also a forum for ASP members to submit memoirs or vignettes for publication. All pictures, layout, and design of the newsletter are done by ASP members from the Publications Committee. The chairperson of the committee reported in the 2000 Annual Report that "significant improvement in picture quality was achieved by printing on a new digital copier in the SNU Print Shop. Pictures were either scanned into the computer or taken with a digital camera" (p. A8).

While the numbers of ASP members participating in the learning groups of the RIG, MWW, and Strategic Planning is relatively small, the opportunities to blend prior learning and expertise with new learning situations occurs for a greater number of ASP members in the Standing Committees and the Special Committees. The Committee on Bylaws and Organization, the Committee on Membership, the Committee on Programs, the Audio-Tape Recording Committee, Decorations Committee, Library Project Committee, Musical Entertainment, the Publications Board, and the Shuttle Service provide alternative ways for ASP to contribute, to learn, and to grow. Indeed, at one monthly meeting the President of ASP asked all those in attendance who were part of these committees to stand, and nearly half of the people rose to their feet.

People on individual basis are able to contribute to the ongoing need of archival information. One 89-year-old man, who has a doctorate in history, has written "A History of the Academy of Senior Professionals of Southern Nazarene University". Other members tape-record the meetings of ASP, duplicate the tapes, and make available the tapes to any of the members. One lady takes pictures at each ASP meeting, documenting guest speakers, guests, and new members for a different kind of record. These learners use



their knowledge and prior learning experience to contribute and to learn in their contributions to ASP.

### Adult Education in Action

The Academy of Senior Professionals is a well-organized adult learning agency that has a specific purpose, mission, and audience. The leaders provide a variety of learning opportunities for their membership. Members participate for specific reasons. Equally important, ASP incorporates and reflects many established adult education philosophies, principles, and methodologies.

### Purpose

From the beginning, the founders of ASP had a vision for the purpose of the organization to be a place where senior adult learners can continue to learn and grow together. The formal mission and goal statements reflect that vision. As the organization grew in numbers and offerings, it became and is an example of adult education in an informal learning structure. While learning groups and special speakers are planned and scheduled by the leadership, the ASP members decide whether or not to participate, and when they do participate, they decide the level of commitment to the learning. Perhaps the most unique aspect of the organization is that the founders and

leaders are not from any sponsoring adult education agency nor are they professional adult education educators or administrators. They are, in fact, co-learners and co-members.

Philosophically, the Academy of Senior Professionals reflects the Idealism school of thought which supports a liberal arts education. The Idealism paradigm has several characteristics including that education is to be intellectually based and that moral value issues are central to intellectual life. Wisdom is seen as two dimensional: the practical wisdom that comes through direct experience and the theoretical that results from the search for truth about the human condition. Spiritual and religious education is a dimension of the liberal arts tradition. Furthermore, the development of the aesthetic sense is a primary goal. Liberal education has a broad scope that encompasses intellectual, spiritual, religious, and aesthetic development. Critical reading, discussion groups, and contemplation are processes of the Idealism paradigm. Historically, many of the first adult education agencies and activities have embraced Idealism such as Benjamin Franklin's Junto, the Lyceum Movement, the Chautauqua Institute, and the Great Books Discussion groups. The ASP mission statement, "the realization of

personal and shared goals entailing various forms of intellectual, culturally, spiritual, and service" mirrors Idealist assumptions. Furthermore, the ASP meets on the campus of and is affiliated with a liberal arts college with a motto of "Character, Culture, Christ", and many of the members received their education at this institution. Therefore, their educational background experiences lend itself to this paradigm.

### Participation

Like other adult learners, the ASP members have voluntarily decided to participate. They do not have to attend, they are not required to attend to keep their membership, and they are not trying to earn credits or hours towards a required degree of study. The primary reason given for the reason given by the participants to why they choose to participate is for social reasons. Fellowship and being with friends are the primary motivators for people to come to ASP. While the members enjoy and learn from the speakers and the small groups, association with peers is the lure.

It was first fellowship. . .for me it is fellowship. . . .I don't go to participate in the seminars. . . .I like to greet people and meet the people. . . .I like being involved [in the organization]. (78-year-old man)

Because I am interested in intellectual people. I enjoy talking with them. You know, I've spent a lot of time through the years talking to Ph.D. candidates and helping faculty with whatever project they are working on, their research. . . .I just enjoy the fellowship of intellectual people. (68 year-old woman)

Oh, because I was old enough, and they were looking for members [laughter]. I don't know. I think I had some friends who were members . . . .Then I think that it was during the time when I was thinking about retiring. I thought, well, maybe that would be kind of a good organization to join. (76-year-old man)

Somebody invited us, and it sounded like [a good idea]. . . .Everyone going there we knew personally, been in school with or been involved in church with, you know, had known them. So it seemed like a good outlet for interests and fellowship with friends. (75-year-old man)

It would be a chance to eat with friends and the program is always good. (68-year-old woman)

Studies suggest that initially the reasons for participation of older adult learners in informal learning environments may reflect reasons other than social (Abraham, 1998; Arsenault & Anderson, 1998; Brady, 1988; Landin & Fugate, 1997; Long & Zoller-Hodges, 1995; Murk, 1992; Wolf, 1990). This may be due to the fact that these studies investigated senior learners involved in adult learning agencies such as Elderhostel where the curriculum or program is focal. The adults come to those organizations for specific programs or lectures which are predetermined by the learning organization.

Conversely, the membership of ASP tends to be a result of friends inviting other friends to join. Consequently, this may be a reason why the luncheon is so popular and the special interest groups have limited participation. As one 73-year-old man explained his own reasons for limited participation in ASP,

Not in the Academy. I really haven't. For one thing, I think they are primarily organized to keep me busy, and I really am busy. Then I have [another organization] who are trying to keep me busy. I have others who are trying to keep me busy. I have my own motivation, and I am keeping very busy.

Equally important, the members of ASP are joiners. They are part of many other learning organizations in addition to ASP within their community of faith and within the larger community. They are active members of Sunday School classes, Missionary Societies, Association of Retired Ministers, other senior learning organizations in local churches, choirs, orchestras, political organizations, professional organizations, and Daughters of the American Revolution. Consequently, for many, ASP is just one part of the total in their participation in learning within groups.

#### Program Development

In many ways, ASP members have incorporated many adult education principles throughout the ASP organization and

learning groups. Providing a conducive climate for learning, planning learning activities that are relevant to interests and needs of the members, allowing for participative planning and evaluation, and recognizing the wealth of life experiences are incorporated in meaningful ways to enhance the learning experiences of the members.

The climate of the luncheon and the small learning groups is psychologically and physically comfortable. People are very friendly and hospitable. As one woman said after she had toured a local retirement center where several of the ASP members live and visited an ASP meeting, "This is for me!" The luncheon is in a room that is aesthetically pleasing. Additionally, the room is well lighted, the sound system is adequate, the visibility of the head table is good, and the chairs are comfortable. Live music, linen tablecloths, table decorations, and a buffet sets a tone of invitation, expectancy, and significance. Furthermore, the ASP provides shuttle service from the parking lots and retirement centers.

The ASP leaders make a concerted effort to determine the wishes of the ASP members when choosing guest speakers or learning groups. Surveys are conducted during the luncheon meetings to identify topics of interest that might be most relevant to their stage of life. During the last

meeting of each year, the members evaluate the speakers.

This serves a dual purpose: (a) It allows the membership to feel they have a voice in what happens in the luncheon meetings and (b) It helps the leadership in planning activities to know what the members liked and did not like.

Through participating in the small learning groups of RIG and MWW, the members identify and conduct the learning according to their own needs and objectives. Although no formal learning plan is development, as promoted by Malcolm Knowles (1975), members learn and contribute to learning at their own pace. A member can attend RIG or MWW just to listen to the learning experiences of the others without actively participating in research or writing themselves.

The ASP members are encouraged to contribute from their vast resource of experience. For example, people who have experience in writing contribute to the publications, those with public speaking backgrounds help with the luncheon program, and members with administrative knowledge keep membership roles and financial records. Some of the members who have traveled in other countries bring in special ethnic foods for the members to sample. Other ASP members, usually women, use their creativity for the table decorations. Some offer their musical talents. These activities allow the members to continue to contribute in

areas that are important to them while at the same time allowing new learning experiences to occur as they endeavor to accomplish their tasks.

### A Part, Not the Whole

For the participants, being involved in structured learning groups provides another way to continue to grow and learn. These affiliations and associations strengthen their bonds of friendship, challenge them intellectually, introduce them to new cultural experiences, and renew their spiritual commitments. The learning groups are important to them. As one 66-year-old man explained, "I have gone to school several times since I have been out of the full time pastorate, and I don't have that confidence builder in a school class like I have in the ARM [Association of Retired Ministers] or Academy."

These informal learning environments play an important role in their lifelong learning. However, the participants are deeply committed to on-going learning. Consequently, they do not limit themselves to learning that only happens within the confines of a building or institution.

As with a tree, the root system and the trunk are just a part of the total; likewise, for the participants, their historical, religious, and educational root system has provided the structure of informal learning experiences



in their associations and affiliations. However, it does not end there. Indeed, the learners flourish and grow as they branch out to explore learning in more self-directed ways.

## CHAPTER 5

### BRANCHING OUT FOR GROWTH

Lively shaking their branches  
Over hills and in the valleys,  
Wonderfully and majestically they dance.  
Never growing tired or bored.  
Blowing trees.  
Dancing trees.  
Glorious trees.

- Author unknown

#### Introduction

The roots of a tree lie deep and quiet as they anchor the tree to the earth and continually probe for vital nutrients. With its layer upon layer of bark and growth, the trunk and large limbs of the tree provide the structure for the tree. This woody structure is the journal or record of the growth of the tree for when it is hewed, one can determine the age of the tree, times of drought, and times of an abundance of rain.

For all its miles of roots, its height, and its bulk, only a small part of the tree is actually alive. "The very tips of the roots. The leaves. The buds. The seeds. Those living parts of the tree. . .perform amazingly complex functions" (Texas A & M University, <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu>). These living parts of the tree are the visual indicators of the health of the tree. The abundance of leaves, the sweetness of its fruit, and the

quality of the seeds for other generation of trees reveal the vitality of the tree. Throughout the seasons, the living parts of the tree provide a witness of continual growth. Through its budding leaves in the spring, its rich canopy of foliage in the summer, and a riot of color in the autumn, a tree represents life and growth. Even during the winter when the limbs are bare of leaves, deep within the tree, growing continues as life-giving sugars are transported throughout the tree for the buds of spring. The flowering buds and the leaves rustling in the wind provides the color, the sound, and the motion to make a tree, as an unknown author has penned, "Wonderfully and majestically dance."

For the participants from the Academy of Senior Professionals, their formal educational background has provided the structure for growth. As with a tree with a formidable structure of trunk and limbs, the formal learning structures have given the participants a foundation for growth as they have continued to participate in informal learning situations as senior adults. However, as important as the structured learning experiences have been, they are encased in time and regulated to a place. Like a tree that has been hewed and the interior rings of growth counted to the determine age of the tree, so too can

the structured learning experiences be identified and counted. However, how does one count the living parts of the tree? They are too numerous to count; yet, these living parts of leaves and seeds provide the glorious crown of the tree and a promise of the future. For the participants, their own personal learning projects are the buds and leaves of their learning trees. They have branched out and grown through their own self-directed learning activities as they have explored and learned independently.

### Self-Directed Learning

#### Learner Controlled Learning

The terms independent learning and self-directed learning have assumptions of learner autonomy (Candy, 1991; Knowles, 1975; Long 1996; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Indeed, at the center of self-directed learning is learner control. The learner has the responsibility for choosing what to learn and how to go about learning. Self-directed learning is a process in which people take the primary initiative for planning, carrying out, and evaluating their own learning experiences (Candy, 1991; Knowles, 1975, 1984, 1988). An assumption should not be made, however, that self-directed learning means that learning is always done in isolation. Indeed, much self-directed learning occurs within learning groups (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). The

distinguishing mark of self-directed learning is that the learner determines the what, the when, and the how of the learning experience (Knowles, 1975). Self-directed learning depends on who is in charge, and that is always the learner (Candy, 1991; Knowles, 1975; Lowery & Meredith, 1989; Mocker & Spear, 1982).

Self-directed learning represents the kind of learning situation that occurs most often for most adults (Cross, 1981; Lamdin & Fugate, 1997; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Penland, 1977; Tough, 1971). Indeed, an estimated 70% of adult learning is self-directed (Tough, 1971).

Consequently, much attention has been given in the literature of adult education to self-directed learning (Candy, 1991; Long, 1994, 1996; Long & Terrance, 1991).

Researchers and adult education practitioners such as Allen Tough (1971), Patrick Penland (1977), Sharon Confessore and Gary Confessore (1994), Malcolm Knowles (1975), Huey Long (1996), Stephen Brookfield (1993), Paulo Freire (1972), Myles Horton (1990), and Lois Lamdin and Mary Fugate (1997) have provided significant insight into the understanding of self-directed learning.

#### Identifying Self-Directed Learning Projects

In 1971, Alan Tough's The Adult's Learning Projects: A Fresh Approach to Theory and Practice in Adult Learning

was the springboard for the ensuing interest in self-directed learning. In this study, Tough identified what he describes as learning projects.

A learning project--the central focus of this book--is here defined as a series of related episodes, adding up to at least seven hours. In each episode, more than half of the person's total motivation is to gain and retain certain fairly clear knowledge and skills, or to produce some other lasting change in himself. (p. 6)

The population for his study included men and women who were blue collar workers, lower-level white collar workers, elementary school teachers, municipal politicians, social science professors, and upper middle-class women with pre-school children. Based on 66 interviewees, Tough reported that 98% of all the adults conducted at least one learning project a year, with a typical learner engaging in about eight projects with an average of 700-800 hours per year spent in the learning projects. He refers to this as self-education or self-teaching. Tough's findings show that earning credentials or credit has little motivation for the learning projects; however, the use of the knowledge or skill motivates most learners, and practical matters of the home, job, family, and recreation inspires most learning projects. The greatest number of projects were conducted by professors and teachers, while the smallest number were

conducted by the factory workers and politicians. (Tough, 1971)

In a follow-up report in 1978, Tough reviewed the enormous amount of literature that followed his 1971 findings, and he concluded that the results of his 1971 study still were consistent (Mocker & Spear, 1982). The dozens of studies that sprang from Tough's initial study added to the breadth of understanding of self-directed learning (Mocker & Spear, 1982). Indeed, Tough's work in self-directed learning shaped the research on self-directed learning in the field of adult education for many years (Spenser, 2000).

Patrick Penland (1977) surveyed 1,051 adults to determine their kinds of self-directed activities. He found that 76.1% of the respondents identified at least one or more learning projects during the previous year while only 2.9% participated in formal courses through an established learning organization or agency. The average number of self-directed learning projects was 3.3 with the projects lasting less than seven hours in length. The most common topics of interest for the learning projects were those that addressed everyday life and living concerns such as art, child care, English, health, hobbies, math,

religion, and sports. The primary reasons for choosing a self-directed learning project were:

1. Desire to set my own learning pace.
2. Desire to use my own style of learning.
3. I wanted to keep the learning strategy flexible and easy to change.
4. Desire to put my own structure on the learning project.
5. I wanted to learn this right away and couldn't wait until a class might start.
6. I didn't know of any class that taught what I wanted to know.
7. I don't like a formal classroom situation with a teacher.
8. Lack of time to engage in a group learning program. (p.32)

Sharon Confessore and Gary Confessore (1994) conducted a study to determine whether selected demographic characteristics and certain motivational factors influence self-directed learning projects. Their research, which was grounded in Tough's 1971 and 1978 research on learning projects, sought to discover if self-directed learning projects would be differentiated by:

1. Those who report learning projects undertaken for their own reasons.
2. Those who report projects they were required, or strongly encouraged, to undertake, but were are consistent with their own learning objectives
3. Those who report projects they were required to undertake despite their view that the projects were not consistent with their own learning objectives. (p. 201)

The study was based on 283 surveys distributed to public library patrons, participants in an Elderhostel continuing



education course, employees at a federal training facility, and employees of a major food purveyor. Included in their findings are:

1. The number of projects undertaken is comparable to others reported in the literature.
  2. Learners may not perceive learning projects to be related except when the connection is essentially linear.
  3. Most learning projects are perceived to have been self-initiated.
  4. The perception of self as a lifelong learner is strongly dependent upon a combination of factors including confidences in one's basic learning skills in general, confidence in one's basic skills as they apply to specific learning projects, a balance of desire to learn, initiative, resourcefulness, and persistence both in general and specific circumstances.
  5. Openness to learning opportunities or desire to acquire particular skills, information or attitudes, is a response to previous success as a learner, not a precondition for learning.
- (pp. 218-225)

While the studies of Tough, Penland, and Confessore and Confessore were descriptive of self-directed learning projects, more was needed to understand the process for and the product of self-directed learning (Long, 1996).

#### Self-Directed Learning: A Process

Malcolm Knowles (1975) provides a definition of self-directed learning that is seen as a process.

Individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning

outcomes. (p.18)

Knowles firmly believes that the traditional methodology found in most structured learning environments where the teacher is in total control results in people knowing only how to be taught and not how to learn (p. 14). Knowles

provides three foundational reasons for self-directed learning. First, he argues that people who are proactive learners and take the initiative in learning are better learners than those who are reactive, passive learners.

Self-directed learners enter the learning situation with more purpose and greater motivation than "do people who sit at the feet of teachers passively waiting to be taught" (p.

14). Secondly, self-directed learning is more in line with

the natural processes of adult psychological development

that moves from dependence to independence. Thirdly, the

changes in adult educational methodology place a great deal

of responsibility on the shoulders of the learners for the

initiative of their learning. If an adult has never learned

how to be self-directed, then the learning situation

becomes one of frustration and high anxiety. Consequently,

a goal of self-directed learning is to learn how to become

more self-directed (p. 15).

Knowles (1970, 1980) weaves the basic assumptions of self-directed learning through out his concept of

andragogy. By doing so, he proposes that self-direction has immediate implications for adult education and adult learning. Knowles argues that the main purpose of education must be to develop new skills as adult learners begin to view learning differently. At the heart of his argument is that adults must learn from everything they do, and every situation in their community becomes a resource for learning (Knowles, 1975). As a result, he has provided a distinct methodology for adult educators to help adult learners become more self-directed (Knowles, 1975).

Huey Long (1996) posits that self-efficacy, meta-cognitive abilities, and information skills are some of the characteristics involved in the learning process of self-directed learning. Additionally, the following elements are required or need to be present in order for the learning to be considered self-directed:

1. Relatively independent
2. Values self-initiative
3. Positive self-efficacy
4. Meta-cognitively aware
5. Intrinsically motivated
6. Engages in deep processing
7. Prioritizes mental focus. (p.3)

While Long states that is unclear whether or not all these elements have to be present in the self-directed learning process, he does argue that "it does seem reasonable to assume that whenever the majority of the elements is

present. . . it is easier to identify the activity as being self-directed or other directed" (p.3).

The self-directed learning project usually involves the various stages of identifying an idea or impetus for learning, developing a plan, searching for resources, conducting the learning, and the evaluating the learning when completed (Knowles, 1975; Lamdin & Fugate, 1997). These stages may or may not be done systematically, and the learning may expand or may not reach the initial goals (Lamdin & Fugate, 1997). However, the learner continues to be in control of the learning experience until a measure of success is reached. Unless guided by a learning contract (Knowles, 1975), the process of self-directed learning is rarely planned in detail; rather, the learner continues with the learning until it is completed. "The criteria for completion are internal--when the individual has learned enough to solve the problem, to improve skills, to perform satisfactorily, or to satisfy curiosity" (Lamdin & Fugate, 1997, pp. 119-120) the project is considered complete.

#### Self-Directed Learning: The Product

Malcolm Knowles (1975, 1980, 1990) and Huey Long (1996) were instrumental in defining self-directed learning as a process that has meaning for adult education programs and identifying the elements in self-directed learning.

Others in the field question the product or the kinds of learners who invest themselves in self-directed learning. Spirited debate has been given to whether or not self-directed learning happens for all adults (Candy, 1989, 1991). Many theorists argue that "the political context, cultural contingency, and social construction of self-directed learning have generally been ignored" (Brookfield, 1993, p. 1).

Addressing these issues, Stephen Brookfield (1986, 1993) argues that self-directed learning must be not only defined as a process but also as a particular internal change of consciousness. [Self-directed learning]

occurs when learners come to regard knowledge as relative and contextual, to view the value frameworks and moral codes informing their behaviors as cultural constructs, and to use this altered perspective to contemplate ways in which they can transform their personal and social worlds. (Brookfield, 1986, p.47)

At the heart of Brookfield's understanding are the ideas of autonomy and empowerment, which is the understanding and awareness of a range of alternative possibilities (Brookfield, 1993). Brookfield argues that self-directed learning is contextual and based on adults' awareness of personal power to change their personal and social worlds. Consequently, some adults are dependent learners; they are more comfortable in highly regulated settings. Independent

learners are more socially independent, inner-directed, individualistic, and possess a strong sense of self-identity (Brookfield, 1986).

This self-awareness comes through a critical reflection of past learning experiences. Therefore, self-directed learning is characterized by one realizing that internal change and the external management of instructional events are equally important. "The most complete form of self-directed learning occurs when process and reflection are married in an adult's pursuit of meaning" (Brookfield, 1986, p.58).

#### Self-Directed Learning and Empowerment

Two adult educators who have attempted to help adult learners to become more empowered and more self-directed are Paulo Freire (1972) and Myles Horton (Horton, Kohl, & Kohl, 1990). Horton and Freire believe that the result of empowerment is democracy and human dignity (Conti & Fellenz, 1986). Using these as the guiding vision, Horton and Freire each developed their own methods for the most meaningful type of education for their clientele.

Freire (1972) was a Brazilian educator who worked with peasants in Latin America. His ideas were formed out of a context of poverty, illiteracy, and oppression, that resulted from the social-class system. The poor were

oppressed by the upper classes, and as a result, the poor were being denied their basic human rights. Oppression was a result of a symbiotic relationship of the poorer classes believing the myths promoted by the upper classes concerning their basic human rights. This led not only to a class inferiority complex but also helped to maintain the status quo. The traditional educational system is a key institution for keeping the status quo with the poor oppressed and silent.

Freire argues that traditional educators used a banking concept of education. The educator is seen as a benefactor who decides what, where, and how learning will occur. Consequently, the educator makes "deposits" or gifts of information that can be drawn from by the oppressed. Information and learning is controlled totally by a group of the elite and undermines the creative powers of the oppressed and silences their power to voice needs. Therefore, education is never neutral. Either it helps to maintain the status quo, or it is a process for helping people to deal critically with their worlds.

Freire's goal was to raise the consciousness of the oppressed about these societal and educational chains that kept them bound to the status quo. He developed an educational methodology based on problem solving related to

real-life problems. Central to this pedagogy was dialogue between the teachers and students in order to promote critical thinking, creativity, and reflection upon reality. Freire believed that when the oppressed became aware of the elements in their world that caused their situation, they would be able to gain control of their own lives, find solutions for their problems, and become empowered to be agents for social change.

For over 50 years, Myles Horton (Horton et al., 1990) worked with the poor in the southern part of the United States. In 1931, he founded the Highlander Folk School in Grundy County, Tennessee. For many years, Highlander was a place where people came to be trained as labor and community organizers. However, in the 1950's, the focus of resources and talent shifted to the Civil Rights Movement. Horton believed that people find solutions to their own problems; therefore, he realized that the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement must come from within the Black community. The challenge, however, was to empower the people within the context of poverty and discrimination.

While Horton was quick to point out that there is no set methodology at Highlander (Conti & Fellenz, 1986), there are certain unchanging principles that are at the heart of the Highlander spirit. First and foremost is the



unwavering belief that education starts not by telling the people what their problems are, but by learning from the people what they perceived to be their specific, immediate problems. Secondly, people can be trusted to find the solutions to their own problems. Through interaction in music, singing, poetry, and problem-solving dialogues, adult learners develop their own natural abilities to problem-solve with the goal of taking these solutions back to their communities. Furthermore, education is to be seen a process for creating democracy rather than perpetuating traditional educational systems. Like Freire, Horton saw education as a way for people to make sense out of their world and to prepare people for action in order to make their world more just.

#### Self-Directed Learning and The Older Adult

As the population of adults has grown in numbers and has grown older, other researchers have been concerned with the self-directed learning of older adults (Bradley & Fowler, 1988; Brockett, 1987; Lamdin & Fugate, 1997; Long, 1993, 1995, 1996; Murk, 1992; Sears, 1989; Wolf, 1984, 1990, 1991). Older learners are a diverse group and cannot be thought of as a single group (Hiemstra, 1993); consequently, a variety of studies have been conducted. Several studies have investigated the outcomes of self-

directed learning such as quality of life (Brockett; 1987; Long, 1993, 1995, 1996; Sears, 1989). Others have investigated the satisfaction of participating in self-directed informal learning agencies such as the Elderhostel Institutes (Abraham, 1998; Arsenault, Anderson, & Swedburg, 1998; Brady & Fowler, 1988; Long & Zoller-Hodges, 1995; Murk, 1992).

There is, however, limited literature on the independent learning projects of older learners (Lamdin & Fugate, 1997). An extensive research project was conducted by Lois Lamdin and Mary Fugate to address this issue. Through the 860 responses to their "Elderlearning Survey", they found that older adult learners focus their self-directed learning projects on a wide range of interests including computers (17%), arts and crafts (19.6%), genealogy or family history (7%), and search for wisdom and spiritual expressions (7%). Learning to play a musical instrument, investigating financial planning, and helping with volunteer work comprise other areas of self-directed learning. A significant limitation to their understanding was that the results of the "Elderlearning Survey" did not reveal the depth and breath of the self-directed learning projects of the respondents. When they conducted a limited amount of in-depth interviews, Lamdin and Fugate realized

that most adult learners do not recognize what they do in self-directed learning to be actual "learning". Learning that was conducted with a teacher or expert in a formal learning environment was considered as the "real" learning while their self-directed learning was not given as much credibility. Consequently, Lamdin and Fugate concluded that self-directed learning is still greatly under-reported.

### Self-Directed Learning and Older Women Learners

In more recent years, adult educators have discussed adult learning from another perspective (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Gilligan, 1993; Hayes & Flannery, 2000; Heimstra, 1993). Feminist scholars are concerned with the status of women and their learning process (Hayes & Flannery, 2000; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Their inquiry is due to the following reasons (Caffarella, 1996; Hayes & Flannery, 2000; Heimstra, 1993; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999):

1. The conceptualization of adult development theory has been heavily influenced by research that examines the process and stages of identity development (Erikson, 1963) and the development of moral reasoning (Kohlberg, 1981). However, these theories have received criticisms due to the fact that many researchers believe that gender issues and understandings have not been recognized in their worldviews.

2. Feminist scholars argue that developmental patterns for women do not follow a sequential process. Women's patterns of development are diverse, overlapping, and cyclical; consequently, they argue that using developmental theories to predict what women want to learn by their ages or stages in their lives is faulty.
3. A key component for most women is the role that relationships play in their lives. Friends, family, partners, and children are central to their "ever-changing web of interconnectedness" (Caffarella, 1996, p. 1). Therefore, the themes of identity and intimacy are important to women in the learning process.
4. They argue it is important to understand how gender effects the learning process since the number of women, particularly older women, participating in formal and informal learning activities is growing at a tremendous rate.

While the issue of women as learners has been given little attention in the literature, more adult learning researchers are focusing on the issue of older women as learners (Hayes & Flannery, 2000; Hiemstra, 1993). Through analyzing the limited amounts of research done on older women as learners, Roger Hiemstra has found that in self-directed learning projects, older women engage in more learning activities and are more self-directed than men. They are more likely to study on topics that deal with personal and self-fulfillment issues. Furthermore, they tend to use reading and travel as educational resources. Most importantly, older women are competent learners. They

can learn new skills, including computer skills. As women grow older, they become increasingly more self-directed. Furthermore, they can easily blend their past experiences in learning into new situations for learning (Hiemstra, 1993).

### Self-Directed Learning and The Adult Learner

Self-directed learning is one of the major modes for acquiring and assimilating knowledge for adults. As a result, self-directed learning has been the focus of a myriad of research projects within the field of adult education (Candy, 1991; Long, 1991, 1994, 1996). Self-directed learning in the workplace (Foucher, 1996; Guglielmino, 1996; Kleinmann, & Stokl, 1994; Phelan, 1996; Piskurich, 1994; Straka, Welden & Denny, 1994; Wojciechowski, 1996; Zomorrodian, 1999), in education (Barnes, 1999; Baveye, 1996; Bulick, 1996; Hoban & Sersland, 1999; Jenks, Haney, & Clark, 1996; Long & Morris, 1996; Wall, Serland, & Hoban, 1996), and in international contexts (Carre, 1994; Cheong & Long, 1999; Foucher, 1997; Guglielmino, Guglielmino, & Zhao, 1996) are some of the key issues for researchers in self-directed learning.

As adults participate in self-directed learning, other researchers are interested in knowing how they go about completing their learning projects. What are their thought

processes? How do they view themselves as learners? How do they approach and complete their learning projects? These kinds of questions address the fundamental question of how adults learn.

## Learning How To Learn

### The Concept

Closely tied and crucial to the concept of self-directed learning is the idea of learning how to learn (Brookfield, 1991; Smith, 1982, 1990). New attitudes and new skills for solving learning problems are continually needed in an ever-changing world. Furthermore, adults cannot rely on only one way of learning; indeed, there is no such thing as a complete learner (Smith, 1982, 1990). Learning how to learn is a concept that addresses the issue of how adults can be successful learners in a constantly changing world (Smith, 1990).

The concept of learning how to learn encompasses several key ideas. The first of these is the very broad and complex understanding of what learning how to learn means. Learning how to learn is "the ability of adults to . . . become skilled at learning in a range of different situations and through a range of different styles" (Brookfield, 1995). Secondly, learning how to learn is lifelong pursuit (Brookfield, 1995; Candy, 1990). Often

learning how to learn has been regulated to formal classroom situations (Brookfield, 1995; Candy, 1990; Dietz & Moon, 1990). However, learning how to learn is a fundamental in self-directed learning (Cheren, 1990; Tough, 1990). Lastly, learning how to learn is more than acquisition of new skills and new knowledge; rather, learning to learn involves the learner understanding his or her own personal learning strengths, weaknesses, needs, and strategies (Smith, 1982, 1990).

Robert Smith (1982, 1990) has led the way in research in the field of adult education for the understanding of the concept of learning how to learn. Smith (1982) defines learning how to learn as "possessing, or acquiring, the knowledge and skill to learn effectively in whatever learning situation one encounters" (p. 19). He understands learning how to learn to be a process that requires both an acquisition and the development of attitudes, understandings, and skills that are associated with carrying out self-directed learning projects (Smith, 1990). Three overlapping and interrelated components of the Smith's learning how to learn concept are needs, training, and learning style.

The needs of the learner are those things that a learner needs to know and be able to do in order to be successful in the learning project (Smith, 1982). Unlike basic human needs of food, water, and shelter, these needs concern the competencies that are required of the learning project. Smith (1982) identifies three kinds of relevant needs:

1. General Understandings. This kind of knowledge helps provide a foundation for the positive attitude and motivation that learning requires. . . .They [adult learners] need to understand the fact that learning ability does not decline in age, that. . . . That learning involves processes that can be acquired and enhanced. . . and that anxieties and difficulties are to be expected.
2. Basic Skills. People learn much that is valuable by means other than reading, writing, and arithmetic. . . .Communication fundamentals, listening and reading stand out as especially significant for success in learning.
3. Self-knowledge. One can gain valuable insight into personal strengths and weaknesses, as well as personal preferences for the methods of learning and for learning environments. . . .Also important is the perspective of the amount of autonomy and structure one prefers. (pp. 20-22)

Training is a second component of learning how to learn. When one thinks of training, it is often associated with formal learning environments. However, in the learning how to learn process, this component is broader than the more narrow idea of formal learning. Indeed,



training is viewed as any activity that "concerns itself with providing for learning about learning and improving learning proficiency" (Smith, 1982, p. 25). Training has a degree of purpose and organization although it can be done without the learner being consciously aware that one is in the mode of training. Being in a discussion group or searching through manuals to learn a computer application are examples of training in learning how to learn (Smith, 1982).

### Learning Styles and Strategies

The third component is learning styles. Learning styles and learning strategies have been given a great amount of attention in the literature in adult education (Balmert & Dick, 1991; Comadena, Chandler, Escott, & Semlak, 1989; Conti & Kolody, 1998, 1997; Conti & Wellborn, 1989; Dixon, 1985; Fellenz & Conti, 1993; Holtzclaw, 1985; Kolb, 1985, Korhonen & McCall, 1986; Renzull & Smith, 1984; Sweeney, 1988). People approach learning situations in individual, personal ways. "Learning style can be defined as the individual's characteristic ways of processing information, feeling, and behaving in learning situations" (Smith, 1982, p.24). David Kolb (1985) suggests that a learning style is developed and shaped by several factors including personality type or disposition, academic

training, career choice, and current job responsibilities.

People grow and develop in four main areas or dimensions of their lives: affectively (developing sensing-feeling skills); symbolically (developing cognitive or thinking skills); behaviorally (developing acting or behavior skills); and perceptually (developing observing skills) (Kolb, 1985).

Life experiences have a bearing on learning style or preference. "People learn from the immediate, here-and-now experience, as well as from concepts and books" (Kolb, 1985, p. 11). Furthermore, people tend to prefer different settings or environments for learning. "Some prefer to concentrate alone, with others. . . or in a combination thereof" (Beaudry, Dunn, & Klavas, 1989, p. 50).

How a person decides on how to accomplish a learning project or task will have a significant influence on the eventual failure or success of the learning activity (Fellenz & Conti, 1993). Learning styles are cognitive approaches to learning and are not easily or quickly changed. However, learning strategies are the techniques one uses to go about accomplishing specific learning tasks. "The strategies are external behaviors developed by an individual through experience with learning which the learner elects to use in order to accomplish a learning

task" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 2). Learning strategies become a matter of preference and are developed throughout the lifetime. Furthermore, strategies may vary with each individual learning task. "The success of strategies depend on the situation" (Fellenz & Conti, 1993, p.4).

Learning strategies have been conceptualized in the field of Adult Education as involving metacognition, metamotivation, memory, critical thinking, and resource management (Conti & Fellenz, 1993; Conti & Kolody, 1999; Fellenz & Conti, 1989). Metacognition is knowing about and directing one's own thinking and learning processes (Conti & Kolody, 1999; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Planning the learning activity, monitoring the progress, and adjusting the learning by directing and improving one's learning processes are involved in metacognition. Attention to the material to be learned, enjoying or valuing the learning to one's self, and being confident that the task can be completed is a result of metamotivation. Organizing the information learned for storage and retrieval, using external aids to help in memory, and using mental images involves memory. Critical thinking is a reflective thinking process that brings about a process of testing the basic assumptions, generating alternative options, and accepting the outcomes of the learning on a conditional

basis until a better option is discovered. Finally, identifying resources, the critical use of resources, and using humans as resources are a part of resource management.

The concept of learning how to learn provides a way to help adult learners understand themselves better as learners. By analyzing themselves as learners, they become aware of their strengths and weaknesses as a learner.

Participating in training affords them a specific path to follow in order to accomplish the learning. Understanding personal learning styles and learning strategies provides concrete ways of attacking new learning projects so they can be accomplished successfully. Through this process, one of the effects of learning how to learn is self-awareness and self-understanding "in which the individual learner acts at least partially as his own manager of change" (Brundage & MacKeracher, 1980, p. 30, cited in Smith, 1982).

Learning style research that has a focus on adults who are returning to college or in the work environment is widely seen in the literature (Beaudry et al., 1989; Bonham, 1989; Conti & Wellborn, 1989; Dixon, 1985; Even, 1987; Hartzclaw, 1985; Kolb, 1984, 1985; Korhonen & McCall, 1986; McFarland, 1997; Renzull & Smith, 1984). However,

the learning styles and strategies of older learners appears to be limited (Davenport, 1986; Truluck & Courtney, 1999).

### An Outward Exploration

Adult learning theory involves a variety of perspectives and explanations. Malcolm Knowles' concept of andragogy and its implications for self-directed learning (1975) and Robert Smith's (1982, 1990) argument for the concept of learning how to learn weave together to provide a tapestry for understanding self-directed learning activities. All of these concepts help to describe the personal learning projects of the participants from the Academy of Senior Professionals.

### Self-Directed Learning Activities

The participants engage in a wide variety of self-directed learning projects. The projects are diverse, and they range from the simple to complex. Nearly all of the participants participate in one or more activities that seem to be unique to them. For example, one 74-year-old woman is learning how to faux-finish walls, which is a process of applying paint in a way that gives a look of aged plaster, stone, or marble to walls or other surfaces. A married couple is learning how to cook international foods. A 73-year-old woman is cutting a compact disc of

personal musical performances that will be used for a fundraiser for the alumnae association at Southern Nazarene University. One 78-year-old man is putting together a notebook of United States battleship pictures that are found on the Internet. Another 68 year-old-man works in the archives at Southern Nazarene University. One 75-year-old man is writing a novel about his family. An 81-year-old woman is seeking publishers for religious articles she has written. A 75-year-old man travels as an interpreter for Nazarene groups going into Spanish speaking countries. Another 68-year-old woman has taken classes to become a Master Gardener.

However, there are some self-directed learning activities that are common to many of the participants.

These learning activities fall within three categories:

1. Intellectual. The learning activities include reading, writing, and use of a computer.
2. Personal. Arts and crafts, fine arts and music, health and physical activities, genealogy, and travel comprise these learning projects.
3. Service. This is service to their community of faith that includes their local churches and Southern Nazarene University.

### Intellectual

Of all the self-directed learning activities identified by the participants, reading is the one activity that is

enjoyed by all. Of the 30 participants, 26 indicated that they were avid readers. As one 78-year-old woman said, "Of course if I have a hobby, it would be reading. I read. I just have to read." Another 75-year old man explained, "I'm an information gatherer. Anything that interests me, I read!" When asked of one woman whether or not she liked to read, she laughed and said, "I love to read! I always loved to read, and I have been such a good reader. But I have to discipline myself, or I would tend to neglect things that need done like tasks around the house." For one 72-year-old-man, reading is almost like a necessity of life.

I do a lot of reading. . . .I like to read books, I don't care for novels, but I do like historical novels. I like to read philosophy, sociology, religion, history. I have a large library. . . .I have about four books going right now. . . . I usually have three or four books going at a time. Reading good books always brings a great appreciation for truth and good ideas. To me reading, not only do I like to do it, but I need to do it. Sometimes I feel guilty if I don't do my reading.

They read newspapers, news magazines, women's magazines, trade journals, fiction, non-fiction, biographies, autobiographies, religion, philosophy, history, and devotional materials.

Many of the participants have shelves of books in their homes. Often during the interviews, the participants

would point to stacks of books or magazines they were reading. Many times, they would show their home libraries or places where they liked to read. For sources of materials, they utilize the public libraries, their church library, the library in their retirement center, and loan books to one another.

Often husbands and wives read the same books or other reading materials. One husband and wife described their reading activities.

Wife: We both like to read. You can tell that by all the magazines over there. . . .We usually have a book going.

Husband: She's waiting on for me to finish so she can read it. . . .Of course, we like to discuss all kinds of things. I usually tell her what I think of the book, what I like, and what I don't like.

Another couple discussed a book they were reading together.

Husband: Here's the book I am reading right now. It's a third book in a trilogy by Harzog on the Quakers.

Wife: I told him it was going to rattle his cage, but he's going to read it. So, okay.

When asked if it had rattled his cage yet, they laughed and said,

Husband: I haven't gotten that far.

Wife: Well, if it hasn't, it will.

Husband: But we've done quite a bit of reading lately.

Wife: We do.



The kinds of reading materials the participants read varies. However, without exception, all of the participants said that they read religious or devotional materials. The kinds of things they read in this genre come through magazines, Church of the Nazarene denominational publications, and books. One 68-year-old woman said, "One book I'm reading right now is Fresh Faith. I usually have some kind of inspirational, spiritual book going." Another 81-year-old man indicated:

We get Christianity Today, and we both read that. We get Holiness Today, and we both read that. These are contemporary things we keep getting and we pursue quite avidly. Have you ever heard of the World Magazine? [It's like] a Christian news magazine. . .like NewsWeek and Time, only its quite conservative. Evangelistic. It's published by evangelicals. And its definitely a Christian slant on the news.

One 80-year-old woman explained, "I read missionary books, Guideposts, Herald of Holiness, and The Other Sheep."

Joking, she continued, "My husband would never let me read The National Inquirer. He says there's more information in the headlines than in the article. So when we'd travel, I used to buy an Inquirer. Now, that's my one vice. Don't tell [my pastor]!"

Many of the participants read fiction, both popular fiction and Christian fiction. A 74-year-old man explained, "I read a lot of Christian fiction with a lot of

good theology and philosophy. A lot of them are historical." One 79-year-old-woman is a voracious reader. She usually has four or five books that she is reading simultaneously. She says, "I am into fiction. It's not all Christian fiction. I am also into biographies." For some, retirement has given them the opportunity to read fiction.

This is the first time I've had time to read fiction. Now I've always read news magazines and Saturday Evening Post. We took Life Magazine. I read all of John Grisham's books as they come out. I decided I wanted to read all the Horatio Hornblower books, and I've collected them. There's about 11 books in that series. I like Horatio Hornblower books because they are totally fiction but they are based on historical times, events, and places-- just like John Grisham. It's totally fiction, but he puts them in locales we can understand and know. Just like this last one, The Brethren. They [the characters in the book] decided to go to London. Where did they go? They went to the Basil Street Hotel and had tea where we have had tea. And when they are in Memphis, they will go down to the Rendezvous Barbecue place. Well, we've been to the Rendezvous Barbecue place. I got interested in the Robert Service books, and I've collected a few of those. (78-year-old male)

Some of the participants indicated that they have no interest in fiction. They understand the purpose of reading to be for intellectual or spiritual pursuits. One 68-year-old woman said, "I don't read for fun. I read for information." Another 81-year-old man explained,

I find that many of my interests are not in novels at all. . . .I read books that contribute to learning, real learning. The books I like to read are spiritual in nature. [I read] those that make a personal contribution. . . .I very seldom read novels. A lot of people do, and they learn a lot from them: the characters and the plots. I've never been interested in that.

The print media is very important as a learning resource for the participants. Smith (1982) argues that reading is one of the crucial skills needed for successful learners. However, even though reading has been identified as the participants as a key learning tool, other resources are used by the participants as they engage in their learning projects. For most of the participants, utilizing the computer is an important tool.

When Tough (1971) and Penland (1977) conducted their studies on self-directed learning projects, little could they imagine the impact that the home computer would have on self-directed learning (Ghost Bear, 2001; Lamdin & Fugate, 1997; Spenser, 2000). For 27 of the participants, the use of the computer is an important part of their self-directed learning interests. All of the 27 have at least one computer in their homes, and some have more than one computer. For most of the participants, using the computer was a skill learned after retirement.

They utilize the computer in many different ways. Record keeping, word processing, and "surfing" the World Wide Web are common kinds of learning activities using the computer. One 68-year-old woman reported:

I keep my financial records [using her computer]. The credit union had on-line access, and I download my account into Quicken. Then I edit it, then categorize it, print it out. That helps me do my taxes. . . .I have been doing my taxes on Turbo Tax.

Reasons for owning computers and learning how to use them includes financial and household interests, information gathering, and word processing. For one 81-year-old man, getting a lap-top computer solved some of his problems he faced with writing. Due to physical problems, he found that he could not sit comfortably in a chair at a desk to type, either on a typewriter or keyboard. He explains how the new technology helped him in his self-directed learning.

For some time, [my wife and friends] kept telling me I ought to get on computer. I said, "Really, I have no reason to." And frankly, I couldn't see myself sitting at a desk working a computer because typing is one of the most tiring things I did. Well, I was visiting [a friend] at his lake home. He said, "I want you to see what I just bought." He bought a lap top [computer]. I said, "I can use that. In fact, I can use that in my recliner." So, I came home and bought a lap top. The result is, I wrote four book manuscripts on my lap top, sitting in the recliner!

Several of the participants indicated that they keep their financial records on the computer. For one 80-year-old, using the computer has simplified her life.

I have my own computer. [I've had one] five or six years, I got it in '94. But I have a newer one now. I have a Gateway 2000 Pentium. Well, I had five rent houses, and the book work was such a burden. . . .I really did get my business on the computer.

The World Wide Web has opened up a new world of possibilities for information gathering. Many of the participants have learned how to "surf the net", which is the search process for information through the World Wide Web, as they use the computer as a resource tool. Using the computer to find information is the main avenue for finding information for one 76-year-old woman. "My research. . . .If a topic comes up, I go right to the computer. . . .There is a learning process that keeps you abreast of what is going on in the world. . . .The computer helps you do that." For one 75-year-old-man, his interests in the computer came from his own curiosity and personal need to know. "I wanted to explore the new technology. I wanted to know what the new technology was capable of doing for me, what I could do with it, and what I might use it for."

Even though many use the computer for a variety of reasons and for a variety of applications, electronic mail (e-mail) is cited by the participants as being the most common use of their computers.

E-mail is one of the most prevalent forms of business communication and the most popular use of the Internet. In fact, many people view the Internet as an electronic highway that transports e-mail messages. . . .E-mail travels across the Internet to its destination and is deposited in the recipient's electronic mailbox. While similar to other forms of correspondence, including letters and memos, e-mail has the added advantage of being fast and inexpensive. . . .E-mail travels quick, efficiently, and inexpensively to its destination across the city or around the world. . . .People rely on e-mail as an indispensable way of sending messages. (Perry & Schneider, 2000, p. 2.02)

The participants rely on e-mail for correspondence with family, friends, and other acquaintances. Their e-mail correspondence travels locally and around the world.

I spend quite a bit of time at the computer doing email. We keep correspondence with dozens of people. You see, I think that is very important in keeping you mentally alert. For instance, if I have a new idea that comes to me, I bounce it off whole bunch of friends off the Internet, email. I get responses from them. Then we keep track of all the activities we are involved in. (75-year-old male)

I use it primarily for family communication. (68-year-old female)

I have all my family on a mail list, so I send out group e-mails to keep everyone updated. (78-year-old male)

I email quite a little bit [with family and

friends]. And that is kind of fun. And it was fun, too, to learn how to send attachments and send pictures. So I bought a digital camera, and it was fun just to take the pictures and not have to worry about developing them. (76-year-old male)

I do e-mails, and I am secretary of [a missionary committee at church]. So, I have to do the Minutes, and it's convenient for that [by sending attachments]. (68-year-old female)

Keeping in contact with family and friends is very important to the participants. Consequently, the use of e-mail has afforded an effective way to remain close to those who are important to them.

As with most learning projects, access and perceived need are key elements in pursuing learning. For a few of the participants, either they do not have access to a computer or they do not perceive using computer technology to be useful to them. One 80-year-old woman explained:

I don't have a computer. I enrolled in a computer course up at the Vo-Tech school several years ago. But we didn't have a computer, and of course, it's like trying to take piano lessons without having a piano. I do okay on the typewriter.

In addition to reading and using computers, writing is a learning activity of several of the participants. Whether using technology for word processing or using pencil and paper, 19 of the participants actively engage in some kind of writing activity. These writing projects include keeping journals, writing memoirs, writing up minutes from

their organizations, writing feature articles for the Academy of Senior Professionals newsletter, writing articles for publication in journals, and writing religious books and fictional novels.

Keeping journals and memoirs are common writing activities. For one 74-year-old man, journaling is important. "I do journaling. I am now into my 11<sup>th</sup> journal. I don't just journal with facts and figures and prayers and so on. I journal with things that I learn." For other participants, their memoirs provide a way to leave a legacy for their family. One 80-year-old woman said, "I've really had a wonderful life, and I want to get my life story down for my kids." Another 78-year-old man explained:

I felt like there's some things that had happen that either if I didn't tell or write down, the family would never know. Maybe they don't care about it. But I think back and wished I had asked my dad or my mother about this or that because I don't know it. I know a little bit about it, but I never knew that much about it. I reminisce and I write it down. I spend a lot of time thinking about it. I have a whole lot of incidences that I hope to write about.

Another 80-year-old-woman wrote an extensive 224 page memoir, entitled "A Tale of Tears and Triumphs." Her memoirs are short stories from all the seasons of her life. Through this project she leaves an account of her life for her family members.



This [her memoirs] was something I had wanted to do even though we don't have any kids to leave it to. My nephews and niece have really and thoroughly enjoyed it because I have included a lot of their family. A lot of my family history is in there.

Other kinds of writing projects involve brief articles, stories and even books. The themes that the participants write about include childhood memories, World War II experiences, and family situations. One 75-year-old man is writing a novel.

I have sort of been working on a novel. It came to somewhat of a halt after my surgery because I can't sit at the computer too long. My back goes out. It deals with a family in our relationship--a very, very unique family. I probably have it a third of the way finished.  
(74-year-old male)

For some of the participants, like this 81-year-old man, the writing themes are closely connected with faith and religion issues.

I'm trying to write some short essays on the general subject questions that we always wanted to ask. In fact, I was asked to teach a Sunday School class next Sunday but we are going to be away. But the idea the basis of the Sunday school lesson. Such things as: Does God Expect Us to be Perfect? Understanding the Trinity. So on. There are several of these things; I've got three or four of them written.

Another 80-year-old-woman uses her writing skills to help others with their writing. Not only does she lead the

memoir writing workshop at the Academy of Senior

Professionals, but she also edits for others as well.

I'm going to be getting a book from a friend who wants me to edit it for him. A manuscript. He's a Baptist preacher, a real nice fellow, a prolific writer. He really wants me to go through it with a fine-tooth comb, and I do. He has almost five or six chapters ready for me [to edit], and I'm looking forward to that coming in.

Furthermore, the Perspective, the monthly newsletter of the Academy of senior Professionals, provides an avenue for people to write feature article and memoirs for publication. Although 12 of the participants are published writers, only one participant is actively seeking publishers for her writing.

Reading, writing, and computer use are common learning activities that are conducted by the majority of the participants. They participate in these activities based on their own desires and needs. They continue to learn and grow in other learning activities for further personal development and enhancement.

### Personal

All of the participants participate in a variety of self-directed learning experiences in at least one of the following: arts and crafts, fine arts and music, genealogy, health and physical activities, and travel. Of these,

travel, health and physically activities, and fine arts and music are the more common kinds of learning activities.

Many of the participants are seasoned travelers. In addition to traveling across the United States, 17 participants have visited various countries such as Africa, Australia, Canada, the Caribbean, Costa Rica, England, France, Guatemala, India, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Mexico, New Guinea, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Russia, Scotland, South America, Spain, and Trinidad. For five of the participants, their travels are directly related to church "work and witness" trips. For example, since 1990 one 75-year-old man has been on 86 trips to Spanish speaking countries as an interpreter. Other participants travel for vacation purposes. For whatever the reason, travel has become a way for people to learn about other cultures, as explained by one 74-year-old man.

It's just an adventure to meet different people, to see how they live. It has turned out that in the country where we were some way in a home, that became one of our favorite places, that personal contact. . . .I think it [travel] has kept us mentally alert and emotionally sensitive to other peoples. If there were ethnic trends in us, they have pretty well diminished.

Being physically active is important to 20 of the participants. Walking, playing tennis, riding a stationary bicycle, using exercise equipment, playing golf, water

aerobics, and running are some of the ways the members choose to stay physically active. Several of the participants have exercise equipment in their homes. One participant even learned to snow ski after he retired.

My children had been going to Colorado to ski at every spring break for some few years, and they asked me if I and my wife would go and babysit [the granddaughter] while they skied. I said, "Listen. I don't mind to go, but if you think I'm going to go to Colorado and just babysit, you've got another thing coming!" So, I thought well, here is a chance to learn to ski.

As people age, physical ailments can often cause problems and concern. Consequently, learning how to be more physically active helps with physical problems, as explained by one 68 year-old-woman.

I was doing shallow water aerobics. As my joints got worst, I needed the deep water aerobics. So, I changed to that. I schedule everything around that because of my health. That's one thing I did after I retired. After God, church, and family, I put my health first, so I try to schedule all my appointments around water aerobics.

Thirteen participants indicated that the fine arts (visiting museums, going to plays, attending concerts, studying art) and music (musical performance and listening to music) are important learning activities. For one couple, retirement became a time when they could learn about Native American art. Taking advantage of living in Oklahoma, they met various Native American artists, went to

the Red Earth Celebrations in Oklahoma City, and visited several Native American art museums. Due to their interest, they began to collect Native American art. Based on this self-directed learning activity, they are often asked to speak at a fine arts class at Southern Nazarene University.

Playing musical instruments and being in musical performances are a focus for a few of the participants. Eleven of the participants have some kind of musical instrument in their homes such as a piano or organ. Several are active members in their church choirs. One participant, a 74-year-old man, told of his love of singing.

Oh my, that's my real love, I guess. . . .I've been a member of the choir since 1945. . . .I'm still involved in things like, if they want to get together a eight voice men's group, and they'll still let me sing with them. When we started this "Two from Galilee" [a Christmas play], I had a part, you know. I was one of the characters. I didn't do any singing outside of the group, but I was involved in the drama. It was kind of fun--I'll have to admit.

For others, having time to enjoy music through electronic avenues provides new learning experiences, as described by a 73-year-old man. "That's another thing I've done. I've built up my library of CDs and classics. I love to put on

Mozart, and put on CDs and have a background music while I am thinking and writing."

Reading, writing, using the computer, travel, the fine arts, music, and health and physical interests provide ways for the participants to continue to grow and develop.

Often these self-directed learning projects stem from their own needs and curiosity. Most importantly, they are critically conscious (Freire, 1972) of the impact of their learning on them. Furthermore, they realize the benefits of derived from their learning projects. They clearly understand why they choose to participate (Houle, 1961) and the impact of their learning for them personally (Smith, 1982).

Other self-directed learning projects for personal development arise from involvement within their community of faith. Their community of faith continues to impact their self-directed learning as the participants engage in service activities.

### Service

All 30 of the participants indicate that they are faithful members of their churches. Furthermore, all indicated that they participate in many of the activities of Southern Nazarene University such as going to sports events, to music recitals, and to hear special speakers.

However, 26 of the participants are involved in service projects that are directly related to the church and to the university.

Within the church arena, 17 participants engage in learning projects that involve counseling, providing compassionate ministries to the needy, consulting, music performance, preaching, and teaching. Preaching and teaching were occupations of 10 of the male participants before retirement; consequently, these men are often called upon to fill in the pulpit for various churches and to teach Sunday School classes. A 78-year-old man reflects on his preaching as a retired person and the learning involved.

One of the things I am doing is that I am asked to speak at mid-week service once a quarter. I write out all my sermons. I have already decided what I am going to do two months from now. I try to make an outline and even though it may be an old sermon, every one of them I have rewritten, rethought, try to make them relevant. This is a learning experience. I have had in retirement four interim pastorates, all the way from about three months to two months. . . .There's self-satisfaction. Every time I say, "Why in the world did I ever agree to do this?" But after I do it, and after it's over, and like this last time, I got an e-mail from a lady who said, "That's just what I needed." Well, that kind of makes you feel good, like you are still accomplishing. It's probably not because I am not as smart as I once was, but I think I am doing better than I ever did at preaching, in speaking. I think my communicating is better

because the pressure is off. There is no pressure to perform. If they don't like it, they can't fire me. You do want to be liked. You do want them to feel good. It makes me feel like you are not totally over the hill. That you still are needed. Every one wants to be needed.

One 81-year-old man has taught Sunday School for senior adults for 20 years, only missing a few Sundays for vacations and two Sundays when he had cancer surgery. He described the process he goes through as he prepares for his Sunday School lesson that he will give to a class of over 100 senior adults.

Generally speaking, they are very dynamic class. They travel a lot. They're very alert, alive, and kid each other a lot. They are very alive. They are not withdrawn at all. . . .I keep challenging them to grow and mature. . . .I think I do that because I recognize that I have a long way to go yet, and if I have a long way to go yet, so do you, too! I encourage them to continue to mature and grow. I don't know where I ever got it, but I've always had the concept that you never arrive at a given point when you say, "I am not mature, I can quit." I think that goes on until death, unless you just give up and do nothing, you know. I think its possible to keep on developing throughout your life. Many in our class are very active. Calling all the time. I call on my class and have done other calling. Some of them are chaplains at the college here, and they're in their 70's, go every day, calling because they want to keep active and not deteriorate, shrivel up just because of age. I learn a lot from teaching that Sunday School class. I spend an average of a full day every week preparing for the class.



For 13 of the participants, service to missions and compassionate ministries to the needy are focal in their service projects. Their activities include going to foreign countries and helping to build churches and hospitals, working in inner-city ministries of their local church, providing transportation for seniors adults, and counseling. One 80-year-old woman, who volunteers as a counselor, described her training. "We were lay pastors up here at the church for a long time. We took a course for paraprofessional counseling. Of course, we had done quite a bit of counseling before we had taken that course, but we took it." Another 75-year-old man explains why he involves himself in service through missions trips.

It's a human need to matter to people, to matter to someone. Many people that I've known who have personal trouble have got to the place whether they felt they didn't matter to anyone, and they either grew sick and died or they took their lives. That's not good. When you feel that you are contributing to someone else's life, that makes you feel like, well, I'm worthwhile in some way. So that's one of the motivations for me. I got to go to Mexico in July. I had not been to that particular area for three or four years. It was just like taking a trip home, to go see those people and to visit with them and see how their lives were changing. One of my very good friends, his older son had married and moved to Monterey and the second son had gone to live with the couple. The daughter, who was third in line, had gone to Monterey to finish her last year in high school and then went to technical school in order to advance her education. Where they lived

down in that part of Mexico where I went to, there was no opportunity for that, just none. So it was quite interesting to learn things like that. . . . Just to go and learn what was happening with all my friends encouraged me a great deal because their lives have changed so much, and so much for the better.

For 24 of the participants, service to the university is important to them. They volunteer in alumnae activities, they participate in fundraising auctions, and they are special speakers in some of the classes. One 89-year-old man helps to take care of the horses that are part of the horsemanship program at the university. One 72-year-old woman has established several scholarships because she feels, "I need to be giving back." One couple helps out with workshops on multi-cultural awareness for the traditional-aged students at the university. Another 68-year-old man helps with the archives of the university. He explains his motivation.

I have pitched the archives, in fact, very heavily. I have worked [very hard] on this thing. I feel that archives, the history of our church, will be invaluable to the learning and understanding processes of the groups that are coming on, like my daughter and granddaughters.

Whether the service projects are focused on the church or the university, the participants understand the importance of service to the institutions and to them personally. As one 79-year-old woman said with great emotion, "I guess if

there's one thing that impresses me more than ever right now, is that we are here as Christians to be servants."

Reading, writing, using the computer, traveling, doing physical activity, enjoying the fine arts and music, and participating in service activities are part of the many self-directed learning projects that are common to the participants. However, as the participants engage in their self-directed learning projects, each approaches the learning opportunities in unique ways. How they identify and choose their resources and their motivations for conducting the projects are a result of their personal learning strategies.

### Learning Strategies

As proposed by Smith (1982, 1990), the learning styles and strategies of adult learners are key to understanding for adults to learn how to learn. For the 30 participants, the Assessing The Learning Strategy of Adults (ATLAS) provided a way for the participants to identify their own personal learning strategies. The ATLAS provided profiles of three groups of learners: Navigators, Engagers, and Problem Solvers. Each profile includes a description and characteristics of the learner. All 30 participants completed the very easy to do ATLAS Inventory.

All 30 agreed that the profile of their learning strategy reflected the way they approach a learning project. This agrees with the findings of Ghost Bear (2001), James (2000), and Willyard (2000). Responses like "That's pretty much me" or "Yes, I think I do learn that way" confirmed that most had little trouble in understanding their learning by those definitions. Many, however, had some difficulty in articulating a current learning project because of the common failure of most adult learners to identify everyday kinds of learning as "learning" (Lamdin & Fugate, 1997). A response of "I don't know that I am learning anything new" was not unusual. However, after they began to describe how they were spending their time, they were able to identify their own self-directed projects in the terms of ATLAS.

### Navigators

The ATLAS identifies Navigators as the group of learners who are:

Focused learners who chart a course for learning and follow it. They are conscientious, results-oriented high achievers who favor making logical connections, planning and organizing activities, and who rely heavily on the learning strategies of Planning, Attention, Identification and Critical Use of Resources, and Testing Assumptions. (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 9)

Planning is important to Navigators; consequently, schedules and plans are crucial. They like to see "the big picture" so they know what to expect. Deadlines and what the final results should look like help in planning the learning project. Efficiency and using time wisely is important. They prefer a structured living environment where everything has its place. Consequently, they prefer a neat and organized space for their learning projects. They purposefully will create a learning environment that is designed specifically for that purpose. Keeping a regular time schedule for learning is also helpful. They are most comfortable with learning that requires "facts." Opinions of other people do not have that much credibility with them unless the people are perceived to be experts in the field. Therefore, Navigators use many resources such as the library and human resources. They are slow to commit to an idea and want to test their assumptions. (Conti & Kolody, 1999)

Twelve participants identified themselves as being a Navigator. One 68-year-old woman describes her learning as a Navigator.

This pretty much reflects me. Almost anything I do I will gather the information first if I have a question. I do that in two ways. I will consult research materials, both in the library or if applicable on line, and by consulting

with people who have experience or expertise in that area. Then I gather all my information and make a decision based on that. Usually the gathering of the information is the largest part of it because I just want the facts, I suppose. Like I was concerned with long-term care insurance and so I did a lot of reading, magazine articles, on-line information. Then I talked with other people who had long-term care insurance and their satisfaction level with what they had and the process they went through choosing it. Then I made my decision. I am that way in just about everything I do. I'm remodeling upstairs and I get estimates from people who I think may be competent to do the work, and I check Better Business Bureau, talk with people who may have used the contractor, find out if they are insured, licensed. Part of that comes from experience from having people who weren't! So, I kind of go with previous experience as well as with information. Most of my learning at this stage has been on a need to know basis for life living. I have research interests on things that pique my interest, but most of my learning has been more focused.

Another Navigator, an 80-year-old man, described how his Navigator learning strategies came into play when learning how to use the computer. His expert resources included both printed materials and human resources.

See all of this happened since '93 when I taught myself to how to use the computer, and I love it. When I bought the computer, there were the manuals along with it. I bought some computer books, Word for Dummies, and so forth and so on. And then of course, I very much a believer that you need a guru for your computer. You need to have someone you can turn to. I have a friend who has come and help me a few times.

Navigators are compelled learners who need to follow a plan and work the plan (Ghost Bear, 2001, p. 369). It is

the plan that brings logic and order. As one 68-year-old Navigator said, "I have to learn this way. If I didn't, my sermons wouldn't make any sense." Laughing, a wife said of her Navigator husband, "Our children said that it wasn't so much that we went to the Grand Canyon, but that we arrived there at 8:15! We followed Dad's plan."

The participant Navigators are organized learners who often have a home office or specific place, like a home office or special chair, for study and reading. For one Navigator, his office is the specific place for spiritual learning. "It's my closet of prayer, to get alone with God, and really get some input from the Master. It's a get away." One couple, both Navigators, have one large office area where his desk is at one end of the room and her desk is at the other end of the room. One 74-year-old-woman described her Navigator husband's office area.

I wanted an office for him because I knew he needed that space to do exactly what he wanted to do and how he wanted to do it, including the furnishings and accessories. He is organized right down to last paper-clip. If anyone messes with his organization, it bothers him. He is generous with his space as long as it isn't messed up.

Navigators are motivated to learn by making logical connections and planning. Consequently, identifying the appropriate resources is important for Navigators. One 77-

year-old woman found herself needing to learn about a disease that was effecting her daughter. She spent a great deal of time in the medical library, on the Internet, and consulting with doctors. Shaking her head and mimicking Detective Joe Friday of the "Dragnet" television show, she said, "I just want the facts. Just the facts, ma'am, just the facts." Many Navigators use human resources as they gather "just the facts." A 76-year-old woman described how she identifies what she wants to learn and how she used human resources in her learning project.

That is my life [research] and has been my life for many years. So I haven't given up research. That's to me, today, that's the way I learn, to do research. . . . So I continue in research, no matter what comes up, like crafts. First I look at magazines. I do a lot of crafts, or I may have been introduced to something such as ceramics . . . . I become very interested [in the subject] rather than to see whether I'm going to really enjoy it. . . . They [the ATLAS] mention human resources, I think to be with other people and learn from other people or they can learn from you. For us, in ceramics, that's the way we learn. So I would say utilizing human resources. . . . just getting in a corner is not that much fun, you are not helping other people.

Organization, prior experience, and human resources are resources for learning that important to Navigators.

One 78-year-old man engaged in his learning projects by utilizing all of these for gathering the facts and information needed:



I think organization is part of it. . . .I think a lot of it is just common sense born out of experience of other things I had done. I think to do a lot of things you just have to apply your skills [like] dealing with people or knowing how to do things. My idea is if you have to do something, make a phone call, and out that phone call you may learn what you have to do next. Just get started.

The participants who are Navigators are organized, focused learners who like to chart a course for learning. There are other kinds of learners, however, who are less motivated by charting a course for learning. For these learners, they are motivated more by intense feelings that the learning will have personal meaning for them. These are the Engagers.

### Engagers

The ATLAS identifies the group of learners as Engagers who "are passionate learners who love to learn, learn with feeling, and learn best when they are actively engaged in a meaningful manner with the learning task" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 13). Engagers prefer learning activities where they can interact and collaborate with others. They tend to work out of the affective domain. They commit to the learning experience as they perceive the learning to have value to one's self. "If the learning activity is not perceived or expected to be worthwhile or enjoyable experience, the Engager will seek out another activity that

they will find more meaningful" (p. 14). If the learning experience is perceived to be superficial or too tedious with a lot of detail, the Engager will often pursue other learning activities that will result in self-development. Furthermore, Engagers pursue learning that will keep them interested until the task is completed. Because of this, Engagers contemplate before engaging in the learning project because when they do, they tend to fully immerse themselves in the project. The learning task will be very difficult for the Engager to complete if the Engager enters the learning half-heartedly.

More participants, 14, identified themselves as Engagers than any other learning strategy profile. This may be due to the response of one participant, "Well, these days I don't do anything that I don't want to, so it has to have meaning for me!" The participants who identified themselves as Engagers did so without reluctance. One Engager, a 78-year-old woman, explained her learning as an Engager.

Yes, I think it reflects me. . . .A little over a year ago, I decided, well I have time now, I could get involved with ceramics, and so I did up until Christmas time. Since then, I've sort of finished my projects. And it isn't "Been There, Done That". I enjoyed it and loved what I produced. But I haven't had any real intense feeling about going back and getting involved again. I will sometime. . . .I get [on the

Internet) quite a bit if I have a reason to. I don't just "surf", I have to have A place I am going to look up A thing. For instance, I have a great nephew who plays for the University of Colorado, and I had not heard how the game with Texas A&M came out, so I went to the net for information. And bless his heart, he had been named Defensive Player of the Game. . . . Yes, I find it fun for that. I don't have time just to surf.

Often, Engagers become stymied by overly complex or detailed instructions or manuals. One participant complained, "I get frustrated having to read too many manuals, like the VCR and everything." In those cases, Engagers often rely on human resources, as described by one 73-year-old female Engager.

Sometimes I will look over books, but mainly I have to have the desire, a real strong desire, to learn before I would waste my time doing it. I like to have a hands-on and someone, an official person to explain it. That's just easier for me to learn that way. I can dig it out, but its much faster for me to have someone show me.

Engagers also have a difficulty in beginning learning projects if the learner does not make a personal connection that the learning has some kind of meaning to them or to others. One 74-year-old woman belongs to a national service organization where she is in a leadership role. As she realized that she would soon be in charge of her region, she was very reluctant to continue with her leadership.

The main offices are progressive. . . . I didn't want a higher office because you have to plan the speakers for each month and then you are in line for regent. I didn't want that responsibility. Plus, it takes too much time, and I didn't want that to take up that much of my life. In fact, I thought about giving up my leadership responsibilities entirely because I do a lot of service for my church, but I started to feel differently when I was put on the scholarship committee. For me the most meaningful part has been my part in the scholarship committee to help young people in my family and my college. It's given me an open door for things I really like to do.

After she connected the activities and learning with the importance to her family and to her community of faith, she has had a continual commitment to the informal learning organization.

Engagers often respond with deep feelings towards the learning. Many of the women Engagers spoke with strong emotion about how they feel as they are engaged in meaningful learning experiences.

Oh, I love it! I get totally consumed by it.  
(73-year-old female)

Sometimes I get involved, and I go full hog for a while, and then I learn something new.  
(68-year old female)

When I write, I get obsessed with it. It's hard to let it go. (80-year-old female)

The male participants who are Engagers did not express themselves as passionately as the women, but their learning

process as Engagers was no less intense, as described by a 76-year old male participant.

I think I love to learn. I think I learn with some feeling. Especially true of myself, I think, is that I actively engage and do something that has some value. I think that is the best part that fits me. . . .As I learned a little more about the computer, I used the computer more and gave the typewriter away. I was just using it for word processing in those days. Then the more I got into project work, the more I knew I had to learn some other things. So, I got into spreadsheet software. . . .I produced a calendar, and that was kind of fun. Then when they started the ASP, VL was the President, and she was doing a little newsletter. So one day she asked if there was anyone who might be willing to type up the newsletter. I thought this was going to be simple kind of thing because she was just putting out something with just two pages. I thought, this can't be too involved. So I volunteered to do it on the computer. For the while there were no problems. Little by little, they wanted more. They wanted this and a little that. Then the first thing you know I was having to learn to produce newsletters. Then finally last year, I invested in Publisher 2000 software. I've been doing some pictures, but they weren't very good. So I found out there were better ways to do it if you do it by scanning and putting them into the publication. Then the university got a digital printer in the print shop last year, and I found out that I could send my material from my computer directly to the digital printer and get a much better quality and pictures. So it's been interesting, and there's no end. I've decided there is absolutely no end in what you can learn and do with computers. Sometimes I get the manual out. A lot of the time I have the fun, you know, of seeing if I can do it on my own.

Engagers learn with feeling and participate in learning projects that have personal meaning for them. Human resources are key for their learning. When so inspired, Engagers will totally embrace the learning experience and become highly focused on the learning project (Conti & Kolody, 1999). Other learners are more objective and like to test their assumptions. These learners are the Problem Solvers.

### Problem Solvers

The ATLAS identifies Problem Solvers as people who like to:

Test assumptions to evaluate the specifics and generalizability within a learning situation; they generate alternatives to create additional learning options; and they are open to conditional acceptance of learning outcomes while keeping an open mind to other learning possibilities. (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 12)

Problem Solvers like to create alternatives. They do not like only one answer or to be categorized or stereotyped. They are curious and inventive, but because they like to have many options, they tend to have difficulty in making decisions. Consequently, they do better in problem-solving kinds of activities. They rely heavily on to-do lists, daily planners, and schedules.

Of the 30 participants, only 4 identified themselves as Problem Solvers. While the Navigators and Engagers

often quickly agreed that the learning strategy profile fit them, the Problem Solvers hesitated and were very slow to commit to the profile. One 74-year-old man read the entire ATLAS inventory, reviewed all the profiles, and then said, rather hesitantly, "Well, yes, I guess this one does fit me best." Another Problem Solver, a 72-year-old man, reluctantly agreed as he picked the various responses in the inventory, but he did so with great hesitation. "I guess this one, I'm not sure. . . .I really don't know. It's partly both, you know."

Just as they were hesitant to identify themselves as Problem Solvers, they were just as hesitant to identify their learning in those terms. However, in their discussions, many characteristics of Problem Solvers were apparent, as was seen with one 80-year-old woman as she described her learning to lose weight.

I've just lost 70 pounds, and I am not about to put it back on! I was diagnosed with congestive heart failure, and the doctor told me if I would 50 to 60 pounds I might not have to take those heart pills. I told him, "We gave our dog heart pills, and he died!" I know all there is to know about losing weight. I don't go on any dumb diet. My husband didn't [like the food she prepared]. I told him that wasn't anything in the Bible or in my marriage license that says we have to eat the same thing! We didn't eat the same thing, and we had fun!

Often Problem Solvers are creative and like to solve problems. Such is the case for one Problem Solver, a 72-year-old man, as he described his background in remodeling houses. "I look at a place. I look at it carefully. What needs to be done? Is it feasible? Is it economically reasonable to do it? So when I looked that house over, I looked over the whole thing. . . .Then when we decide to buy it, we just do it."

Because Problem Solvers want options, they often take a long time to make a decision. When the 80-year-old woman decided to move a retirement center, it was a lengthy process.

It takes forever to make up my mind. . . .two years [to move]. . . .It was the very best decision I've ever made. When I thought about getting rid of things, I would cry my eyes out. But really it was exhilarating! It was exhilarating! It was a burden lifted from getting out from all of that stuff. I put the pencil to the paper, and I can live here cheaper than I can live in a house that's been paid for for 20 years. I did a lot of investigation. I looked at other residence places. . . .I decided I didn't want to move that far from Bethany. It's the best decision I've ever made.

However, as good as the decision was for her, it was conditional. She still has her home, and she keeps her car there.

Whether a participant is identified as an Navigator, Engager, or Problem Solver, understanding personal learning



strategies helps people to understand more fully their self-directed learning (Conti & Kolody, 1999; Smith, 1982). Consequently, learning strategy research continues to be an important issue in adult education research (Ghost Bear, 2001; James, 2000; Spenser, 2000; Willard, 2000).

### Self-Directed Learning and Gender

Older learners can learn and be effective learners (Hiemstra, 1993). They vary in abilities, interests, and self-directed learning projects (Lamdin & Fugate, 1997). Consequently, their uniqueness needs to be recognized. "One thing quite clear is that individual differences among older learners exist. Older adults cannot be examined or thought of as a single group" (Hiemstra, 1993). As researchers examine this uniqueness, they question whether or not gender impacts the learning process of older learners (Caffarella, 1996; Hayes & Flannery, 2000; Hiemstra, 1993; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

For the participants, there are many similarities and some differences between the men and women learners. The main similarities are that all participants are active learners and participate in many self-directed learning projects, they read extensively, their learning projects that involve spiritual or religious themes are common, and they are very involved in service projects for their

community of faith. Both women and men like to travel, and they like to participate in physical activities although women tend to do more walking as exercise rather than to use exercise equipment or to play a sport such as tennis. There are, however, some differences between women and men in the learning activities they choose:

1. Writing. The women participants tend to write on personal issues such as family or childhood memories. Furthermore, they are often motivated to write their memoirs or remembrances for their families. The men participants tend to write on issues of religion, history, philosophy, and family history for reasons other than relationships. Additionally, the women participants are more likely than the men to share their writing with others such as in the Memoir Writing Group.
2. Arts and crafts. While several of the men indicated they enjoy fine arts and music, only two men indicated that they involve themselves in craft projects such as woodworking. Nearly half of the women enjoy a variety of arts and crafts that includes sewing, ceramics, quilting, and painting.
3. Service. Women are not expressly excluded from having leadership roles in their community of faith; however, these roles are limited. Consequently, opportunities for speaking or teaching adults for the women participants are few. For the women whose husbands were in the ministry or teaching roles, they view themselves as "partners", often referring to "their ministry". They do not appear to be frustrated with this situation; however, one woman did remind her husband, who asks people to pray in their Sunday School, "I tell him, you know, women know how to pray in public, too!" The Academy of Senior Professionals provides an avenue of for women to take leadership roles and to teach or lead learning groups. The first president of ASP was a woman, several women serve on the board, and two of the learning groups are led by women.

4. Learning strategies. There does not appear to be one learning strategy that is gender specific although the men participants tend to be Navigators (8) and Problem Solvers (2) rather than Engagers (4), and more women participants are Engagers (10) rather than Navigators (5) and Problem Solvers (1). However, the women participants tend to use human resources more than men. This is consistent with the importance of connectedness to women's way of knowing. Collaborative learning through synthesizing their own experiences with others, being empathic, and using a cooperative communication style are important for meaningful learning experiences for women (Belenky et al, 1986; Caffarella, 1996; Hayes & Flannery, 2000)

#### Self-Directed Learning in Action

The participants are an example of self-directed learning in action. All of the participants are active, productive learners who engage in a variety of self-directed learning experiences and projects based on their own motivations. Their learning projects are a combination of tasks that are unique to their own needs and interests; additionally, they engage in a variety of learning projects that are common to all the participants. Some of their projects are complex and involve a long time for completion. Other projects are short-term and are completed rather quickly. Foremost, however, is the learner control. Each participant decides what, when, where, and how to conduct their learning projects.

Furthermore, the participants use a wide variety of strategies and resources for completing their tasks. They utilize books, magazines, manuals, computer searches, and human resources as part of their learning resources. They determine what they want to learn, how to learn it, and when it has been successfully accomplished. Thus, they are self-directed learners who have mastered the process of learning how to learn.

Equally important is the influence of their community of faith on their self-directed learning projects. From the kinds of books they choose to read to the service projects in which they invest themselves, their community of faith continues to inspire a desire to keep on learning and being productive members within their community.

#### Learning Independently:

##### The Living, Growth Parts of the Tree

The seasons of the year are often reflected by the buds, flowers, and leaves of the tree. As the buds form on the bare branches, one knows that winter is ending, that spring is approaching, and that there is a hope of warmer, sunny days ahead. The flowers of the tree provide a beauty and a fragrance of hope for fruit and productivity. The abundance of leaves in the summer provide cool shade and a rustling melody. Even in the autumn when the leaves of

gold and red begin to fall, there is an expectation of both harvest and rebirth as the cycle begins again. These living parts of the tree are the visual indicators of its health and growth.

Like a tree with its abundance of healthy, living parts, the self-directed learning projects of adults are difficult to quantify. Adult education researchers have attempted to identify and categorize self-directed learning. However, just as there are many different kinds of species of trees with a variety of leaf types, fruits, and seeds, so is self-directed learning difficult to conceptualize within one profile or description. Often self-directed learning projects result in a concrete product: a memoir, a compact disc, or a photo-journal. These learning projects are easily identifiable and can be evaluated as to whether or not the learning task has been successfully completed. However, some learning projects lend themselves to be described in other terms. For many participants, their self-directed learning projects are less concrete. These learning projects have resulted in a change in behavior or attitude. For these participants, their learning projects have been an inward journey of reflection and an application of new ideas and thoughts.

## CHAPTER 6

### FOREVER GREEN

He will be like a tree planted by the water  
that sends out its roots by the stream.  
It does not fear when heat comes;  
its leaves are always green.  
It has no worries in a year of drought  
and never fails to bear fruit.

Jeremiah 7:6

### Introduction

A tree is a living organism with a complex system of parts. In order for a tree to grow, become established, and be productive, all parts of the tree must be cared for throughout the life of the tree.

If a large portion of the roots is killed, a corresponding portion of the leaves and branches will die. If a tree is defoliated repeatedly, some of its roots will die. The finest roots of a tree are connected to the leaves by an elaborate plumbing system of larger transport roots, trunk, branches, and twigs. (Texas A & M University, <http://www.aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu>)

A balance must be maintained with the natural elements.

Roots can grow only where the resources of life are available. Even when the tree has been properly planted, maintenance must be done to insure that the tree continues to provide flowers, leaves, and seeds for pleasure and for future growth. Consequently, certain cultural practices must occur in order to ensure the health of the tree.

Mulching, watering, preventing soil compaction, and fertilizing are vital to the health of a tree.

Furthermore, a tree needs to be pruned. Where branches or limbs grow, decisions must be made about cutting these back or even removing them entirely. This takes time and careful, thoughtful planning.

The objective of training and pruning a tree is to develop a strong framework that exposes a large amount of the leaf surface to optimum light conditions. These practices facilitate production of the greatest yield of fruit of desirable size and quality while maintaining the tree in an efficient structure for many years. . . .The pruning of trees. . . aids in the development of strong flower buds and highly colored fruit. (Funt, Ferree, & Hill, <http://www.hort.purdue.edu/>)

Through the years, the participants have grown and matured as learners as they, like trees, have given care to their intellectual, spiritual, and cultural growth. They have watered and fed their learning trees through their experiences in structured formal and informal learning situations. Their independent learning projects encourage continual growth as they explore for new life-giving resources for learning and new opportunities to grow and to mature. Now as established learners, they do not neglect their learning. As senior adults, they have time to be reflective and to think on their lives as learners. They contemplate their spiritual growth, they evaluate the

importance of continual learning, they determine the continued level of involvement in their community of faith, and they attempt to clarify the purposes of their community of faith. This inward journey of reflective learning helps them to prune out the parts of their learning trees that are not productive and to encourage new growth so that the fruit of their learning remains sweet and so that their leaves are forever green.

### An Inward Journey

#### Social Learning

"No man is an island, no man stands alone." Penned in 1624, these thoughts of John Donne embrace the notion that human beings are a social species who desire and thrive in environments with other human beings. Self-directed learning provides a way for human beings to connect with their world. "Learning, even self-directed learning, rarely occurs in splendid isolation from the world in which the learner lives. . . .It is intimately related to that world and affected by it" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p.5). Consequently, many theorists view learning as the result of the interaction and the observation of others within a social context. This is referred to as the social/situational orientation to learning (Bandura, 1977;



Lave & Wenger, 1991; Merriam & Caffarella, 1991; Smith, 2000).

Social learning theory "posits that people learn from observing other people. By definition, such observations take place in a social setting" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 258). Furthermore, social learning theory is "the view of psychologists who emphasize that behavior is learned through experiences with the environment and that cognitive factors influence learning" (Simons, Kalichman, & Santrock, 1994, p. 43).

Albert Bandura (1977) emphasizes the importance of observing and modeling the behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others. Furthermore, he argues that modeling and cognitive behaviors are reciprocal in that each effects the other (Bandura, 1977; Berk, 1998; Simons et al., 1994; Weiten & Lloyd, 1997). As one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, this information serves as a guide for action in the future. Coupled with modeling of behaviors, Bandura places a strong emphasis on how people think about themselves and other people. This social-cognitive interaction helps people to develop personal standards for behavior and a sense of self-efficacy, which is the belief that one can master a situation and produce positive outcomes (Bandura, 1977;

Simons et al., 1994). Although closely tied to behaviorism, Bandura believed that learning is a complex process that is effected by behavior, the environment, and the internal perceptions of actions and events.

Consequently, he argued that people tend to model the behaviors of those whom they admire, those with whom they can closely identify, and the behaviors that are valued by their group or community (<http://www.cedarcrest.edu>).

Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991) argue that most learning theory ignores the social nature of the human learner. Learning is more than the just receiving and internalizing facts and information (Santo, 1998). They propose a view of learning where learning is a result of participating within a community of practice. "A community of practice is an aggregation of people who, through joint engagement have some enterprise, come to develop and share ways of doing things, ways of talking, values--in short, practices" (Greeno, Eckert, Stucky, Sachs, & Wenger, 1999, p. 2). This is the process of legitimate peripheral participation.

Learners inevitably participate in communities of practitioners and that the mastery of knowledge and skill requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the socio-cultural practices of the community. "Legitimate peripheral participation" provides a way to speak about the relations between newcomers and old-timers, and about activities,

identities, artifacts, and communities of knowledge and practice. It concerns the process by which newcomers become part of a community of practice. A person's intentions to learn are engaged and the mean of learning is configured through the process of becoming a full participant in a socio-cultural practice. This social process includes, indeed it subsumes, the learning of knowledgeable skills. (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29)

Based on five case studies of five social communities (Yucateca Mayan midwives in Mexico, Via and Gola tailors in Liberia, West Africa, U.S. Navy quartermasters in an amphibious helicopter-transport ship, butchers in supermarkets, and non-drinking alcoholics in Alcoholics Anonymous), Lave and Wenger (1991) determined that learners are motivated by wanting to become full participants within those communities. Initially when learners are introduced to a community of practice, they participate at the periphery of the community. As they begin to identify with their community, they move from the periphery towards the center of activity and towards mastery of skills, language, and knowledge of the community. They gain an increasing sense of identity as master practitioners as they not only learn the skills and knowledge of the community, but as they also alter the way they see themselves within the community. Therefore, learning becomes a process of the transformation of identity.

Social learning is a relationship between people and the environment. Consequently, the purpose of learning is participating fully in communities of practice, identifying resources in that community, and utilizing the resources. The results of social learning are socialization, social participation, and conversation (Smith, 2000.). While some propose that learning is a result of interaction with the environment (Bandura, 1977; Lave & Wenger, 1991), others view learning as a result of a change in perspective or understanding of self.

#### Perspective Transformation

The phenomenon of adult learning is complex and difficult to capture in one definition. When Malcolm Knowles first presented his concept of andragogy, it was argued whether or not it could be seen as a theory of adult learning or a set of assumptions (Davenport & Davenport, 1985; Merriam, 1999). Self-directed learning has also been debated concerning its relevance to all adults in all contexts (Brookfield, 1986). While there is no one concept to explain adult learning, Jack Mezirow's perspective transformation theory of adult learning is gaining wider recognition as a way to explain how adults learn (Taylor, 1997).

Mezirow is concerned with emancipatory education (Mezirow, 1990). In the 1970's, Mezirow was actively engaged as an adult educator in community development and adult literacy programs. Based on the influences of Paulo Freire, he began to look at the learning process differently as he embraced the concept of consciousness raising. This coincided with Mezirow's observation of the transformation that occurred in his wife when she returned to college as an adult to complete her degree. From these pivotal experiences, Mezirow began to explore the transformative dimensions of adult learning (Mezirow, 1991). "Transformative learning is the process of construing and appropriating a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experiences as a guide to action" (Mezirow, 1994, pp. 223-224).

To better understand the nature of transformative learning, the concept of paradigm shift is useful. Thomas Kuhn (1970) made the term popular in his attempts to understand the revolution of scientific knowledge and method. He observed that while much of science is a slow, gradual elaboration of a paradigm, key breakthroughs do not follow this pattern. At rare points, individuals make intuitive leaps and piece together the basics of a thought or paradigm. O'Connor and Wolfe (1991) illustrated this in

terms relevant to adults. The individual's paradigm is the system of assumptions, perceptions, expectations, feelings, beliefs, and values that are organized to understand a wide range of situations and events. "Paradigms are intangible and internal, but permeate everything concrete and external. They emerge out of the recurrent experiences of life and the parallel needs for psychological coherence and a manageable self-concept" (O'Connor & Wolf, 1991, p. 326). If change is to take place in a person's life, basic paradigms must be examined and challenged. This shifting process is at the very heart of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991).

Furthermore, the work of Jurgen Habermas also influenced the development of transformative learning (Connelly, 1996). His domains of learning, instrumental learning and communicative learning, provides an understanding that learning has different purposes.

Instrumental learning [is] learning to control and manipulate the environment or other people, as in task-oriented problem solving to improve performance. . . .Communicative learning [is] what others mean when they communicate with you. This often involves feelings, intentions, values, and moral issues. (Mezirow, 2000, p. 8)

Most learning involves both of these domains. Through these, people assess their assumptions and meanings behind words, truth, appropriateness, intent, and coherence

(Mezirow, 2000). Habermas also proposes a third element in his domain; this is emancipatory learning. While Habermas and Freire are similar in their arguments for emancipatory learning, there are some differences. "The resulting transformation in perspective or personal paradigm is what Freire refers to as 'conscientization'; and Habermas as emancipatory action" (Mezirow, 1981, p. 7). Mezirow "redefines this as the transformation process that pertains in both instrumental and communicative domains" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 10).

Perspective transformation "is the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 167). Mezirow identified a multi-phased process in perspective transformation with critical reflection and with taking an action central to the theory. Perspective transformation begins with a disorienting dilemma or incident followed by self-examining feelings, critically reflecting on basic sociological and psychological assumptions, recognizing shared experiences, exploring options for new roles, planning a course of action, acquiring new knowledge and skills, trying out new roles, building competence and self-confidence, and an reintegrating into one's life a new

perspective (Mezirow, 1991). There is debate whether or not these stages are sequential or if all need to be present in order for transformative learning to occur (Taylor, 2000). However, proponents of perspective transformation argue that the transformative learning results in a sense of empowerment, a clearer understanding of how social and psychological relationships shape beliefs and feelings, and a more efficient and effective means of identifying resources and strategies for learning (Mezirow, 1991, 2000).

Experience is a key issue for adult learning because the depth and breath of experience is what truly separates adult learners from children or adolescence (Knowles, 1980). Indeed, recognizing the importance of adult experiences has long been a foundational aspect of understanding adult learning (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Mezirow's theory fundamentally is about how adults interpret and make meaning from their life experiences (Mezirow, 1990). He is interested in helping adults understand the basic assumptions that influence the way they perceive, think, decide, feel, and act on their experiences. Mezirow (1991) argues that prior learning experiences often inhibit or restrict the ways of knowing for an adult.



A crucial dimension of adult learning involves the process of justifying or validating communicated ideas and presuppositions of prior learning. Uncritically assimilated presuppositions may distort our ways of knowing. . . . our ways of believing. . . . our ways of feeling. . . . Transformative learning involves reflective assessment of premises, a process predicated upon still another logic, one of movement through cognitive structures by identifying and judging presuppositions. (p. 5)

Some of the key ideas within the theoretical structure of perspective transformation are those related to meaning perspectives and critical self-reflection. Meaning perspectives are the structures of assumptions which an individual interprets experience through cognitive, sociological, and psychological avenues and results in a habitual set of expectations that is used to interpret and to evaluate the meaning of new experiences. Critical self-reflection is evaluating and assessing these basic assumptions. Mezirow stresses the importance of critical self-reflection because an individual's meaning perspectives may result in distorted assumptions. This process of learning through critical self-reflection "results in reformulation of a meaning perspective to allow a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative understanding of one's experience" (Mezirow, 1991, p.5). Transformation occurs when the learning is applied to acting on the insights. "Taking an action is an integral

dimension of transformative learning" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 161).

Mezirow's theory of perspective transformation (1991) offers a view of learning that suggests learning is a change in perspective leading to action. The process of transformation is one of transforming "the structures of meaning" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 44). Put another way, it is learning "that leads to some type of fundamental change in the learners' sense of themselves, their worldviews, their understanding of their pasts, and their orientation to the future" (Hayes & Flannery, 2000, p. 140).

This type of learning can take place as a result of a significant, identifiable critical incident, or it can take place more gradually and subtly over time (Hayes & Flannery, 2000; Mezirow, 1990; Taylor, 1997). It is, however, a process of critical reflection (Brookfield, 1986; Mezirow, 1991, 2000). "Transformative learning refers to transforming a problematic frame of reference to make it more dependable in our adult life by generating options and interpretations that are more justified. We become more critically reflective of those beliefs that become problematic" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 20).

For several of the participants, older adulthood has been the time to critically reflect on their life and to

come to some new understandings. The following are accounts of different learners who have experienced a change in perspective.

#### A New Understanding in Self-Concept

Who am I? What are my strengths? What are my weaknesses? What can I accomplish? Where do I fit in the world? These are basic identity questions. People have tried to explain identity development through a variety of perspectives such as psychoanalysis (Freud, 1974) and developmental theory (Erikson, 1963; Marcia, 1966). Erikson (1963) suggests that it is in adulthood that one begins to evaluate and synthesize childhood experiences. For some older adults, senior adulthood can be a time when they can come to terms with painful experiences of childhood that have a bearing on identity and self-concept. One such person is "Arthur", a 68-year-old participant. He is a tall, sandy-haired man with a broad smile. Always ready with a hearty handshake and a pat on the back, he is spending more of his days within his community faith now that he has retired. When Arthur was a young boy, he experienced a traumatic event that impacted the rest of his life. Although he was successful in his career and has loving family relationships, his poor self-concept that was a result of these extremely painful childhood experiences

continued to haunt him. It was as he retired and he began to participate in the informal learning activities and self-directed learning projects within in his community of faith that he began to see himself differently.

Oh, just like the reason you called me in here, for this interview. . . because what you have done, you have made me feel like I am worth something. These [traumatic experiences] have left me feeling like a nobody, an idiot. Across the years I have fought this battle. I became a nothing. Then to come up here in later in my life, come up here to associate with the Retired Ministers, they have helped me tremendously. The biggest help to me was when they picked me to join the Academy of Senior Professionals. Me?! I a little nobody! You have got to be kidding! I am not worth anything. But they wanted me in there, and they gave me the impression that they wanted my input. They thought I was important enough for some input. That's the reason why I love the ASP so much. This college, and the ASP they give me the opportunity to help the college through scholarships and etceteras. It has been a fantastic. It brought me in contact with [highly educated people in the community]. This learning process, I think God had a reason for this. I think he was looking at me more than the other guys. Because I had fought this battle down through the years, I was nothing. I was a nobody. I had a poor self-image, poor self-confidence, poor self-worth. All of a sudden, I come up here and I am associating with these brilliant people. God put me here for my benefit. [Through his self-directed learning projects] I have more confidence than I have ever had in my life. . . . The way it built my confidence, not that I just came in association with these brilliant people, it's the fact that these brilliant people turn around and got some of my viewpoints. . . . They seemed to bring me up to their level, and that makes me feel good. If it hadn't been for ASP and ARM [Association of Retired Ministers], I'd

still have that thought that I'm not worth anything.

Through the process of analyzing previous assumptions about himself, associating with people whom he admires, and applying new knowledge learned, Arthur has learned a new way of thinking. His perspective of his own abilities and self-worth is different.

I am just now getting to the point where I let that horrible past go, by doing this I don't have time ever to worry about that. The more I take here [through the Academy of Senior Professionals], I don't have time to worry about that back there . . . .It helps me look for tomorrow. . . .When I get to be 84-85 years old, I want to keep on learning.

"Helen" is another participant who finds that her change in perspective developed as an adult. She is a tall, thin woman with dark hair that is just beginning to show the signs of graying. Because of a degenerative illness, she sometimes walks with the aid of a cane. Helen experienced many difficulties in her life. Being divorced, being a single mother, and working full-time were challenges to her self-concept. At 68 years of age, she now can reflect back on her path and see how her perspective transformation process was a slow but sure one.

It [the feeling of competence and confidence] just gradually grew. I felt very inadequate. I had very low self-esteem at the end of my marriage, when it was over. My husband said I was a good wife and a good mother, but I wasn't appealing. [He said] I wasn't necessarily a

good cook and that I couldn't think logically. So I spent a lot of time with a counselor. He literally had to piece me back together, piece by piece. I didn't know if I could make logical decisions. I was just destroyed. He literally pieced me back together. He laid the groundwork. Then when I got my masters and got my job at [a local university]. that had a lot to do with it, too. There, if there was a problem [at work], I would study it to see what the root cause was. Then I would write a memo or report to the director, who was always very supportive of me. I was able to bring about quite a few changes. That gave me more confidence. My colleagues respected me for what I could do and what I knew. I had never had that before, other than at home with my parents because I was loved unconditionally at home. I think it was the mutual respect with my colleagues that gave me the self-knowledge that I was indeed more competent than I had been given credit for. So, other than physical limitations, it [now] is the best time of my life. . . .Whether it is with losing your husband or having your child disappoint you or make a wrong decision or bad judgment, I've been through all that. I've learned so much about relationships and myself, where my strengths are, where my weaknesses are. I don't agonize over what people think anymore. I feel more confident. I feel more competent. I have all this experience and knowledge that I've gained through the years. I am just a happy, rich, full-filled person. I think I have a pretty positive attitude.

Through years of building up her confidence through structure learning situations and more self-directed learning situations of counseling and learning about self-concept development, Helen is able to approach senior adulthood comfortable in her abilities. Consequently, she is able to engage in self-directed learning projects with

creativity, confidence, and anticipation of successfully completing her projects.

Well, I'm always searching out the inspirational. . . .For example, I'm doing a landscape plan for the front of my "jungle" [her yard]. I had a lady [a landscaper] to come and tell her what I wanted. I was reading in John [a book in the Bible] one summer, and I like to sit out early in the morning in a chair I have outside. I was reading about all these things relating to nature: trees, flowers, water, the wind. So the combination of what I was reading and my love of plants, I think I got an inspiration from God. He gave me this vision: Wouldn't it really be neat when I am able to do something with the yard to have plants and trees and areas that are symbolic of Jesus Christ? In these areas have these little rough hewn, maybe wood-burned signs with a scripture on it, just little areas of meditation so that anybody walking in there would know about Jesus Christ. The more I thought about that. . . and explained it to this lady. . . .She did some research and came up with some scriptures and Biblical plants that would work here and drew me up a plan. So I have a landscape plan for that. We'll have different areas of meditation with the plants, the water, whatever. I am going to have a little three level pond with different levels of water fall. . . put it right in front of my window. I have bird feeders up, and I have birds that come all the time. I have a bird bath, and I get a lot of pleasure out of that. It is so peaceful. You can't come there without feeling at peace. To me, it's God's sanctuary. I dream about that a lot. It gives me a dream and vision of what I want later.

For Arthur and Helen, their learning that has resulted from perspective transformation that has changed the way they view themselves. They are both more confident and

more comfortable with themselves. Consequently, senior adulthood is a time for further exploration in learning and growing.

#### A New Understanding of the Seasons of Life

There are many challenges for older adults. These include adjustments due to the aging process. Consequently, making decisions about health, living arrangements, levels of independence, and driving become issues for many aging people. "Dorothy", a 78-year-old woman, was faced with these challenges. She is a gray-haired woman with high energy and lives with her husband in a modest but cozy home in the Bethany, Oklahoma, area. She is a person who has always been highly involved with her family, her community of faith, and her friends. Dorothy and her husband spent their winters for many years in South Texas in a mobile-home park, enjoying the weather, friends, and learning projects involved with that community. However, as she and her husband aged, they were faced with new challenges. For Dorothy, life circumstances were changing. Her perspective transformation was a result of a "paradigm shift".

I found South Texas very stimulating. We had many more close friends and neighbors than we do around here because we were in a park. Our activities were provided for us, and so on. We knew everybody when they came in. We would have a breakfast once a year for our people on our street. My husband would do the biscuits,



and I would do the gravy and scrambled eggs. Do things like that. I was involved in water exercises, and we had floor exercises. I did line dancing for years down there. It was so much fun. I taught conversational Spanish. I was involved in a Bible study and started a Bible study in our park. So you see, it was just a lot of really wonderful stuff. But two years ago it came time. Well, what happened, we had a close friend and neighbor that we would always meet for breakfast every Sunday morning. This was the first Sunday we were down there [two years ago]. They had moved from a home where they had lived for 65 years, and had moved 20 miles away into a condo or townhouse. So I said, "Mark, how's it going? How is the adjustment going?" He looked at me just square in the eyes, and he said, "Dorothy, we live our lives in chapters. And it was time for that chapter to end." The light just came on! My husband had been resistant to going down there [to South Texas]. It was just like that. It's been a wonderful, long, beautiful chapter. It's time to close it and start another one. Within two weeks we were home. He [her husband] did not want to stay [in South Texas]. He was resistant, [because] he's into a little dementia . . . So we are home, and I could leave the park and drive out without a tear. It was wonderful.

When Dorothy returned home, she did not lose her desire to learn or to be involved in her community.

Indeed, she saw it as a new opportunity for learning and service.

I am quite active in my Sunday School class, missionary society, that kind of thing. I was in choir and faculty dames. I have become active in ASP, I'm on the board for the Putnam City Benevolence Association, and I go as I can to the Retired Teachers' Association. When I came back, I said, "Well, I hadn't been able to accept official responsibilities and I ought to be as active as I feel I can." All of a

sudden I was involved in six different things! Not president of any of them, but official involvement. . . .I am trying to very realistic about what is going on in my life. . . .I had a flare up with a knee when we went to Indiana. Awful, awful arthritis, and the girls [her daughters] just got me a wheelchair. I wheelchaired it through the airport, and I wheelchaired it out there. We ate at Amish restaurants. . . .I am eating at Amish restaurants and operating from a wheel chair! Had a wonderful time. It was in Ohio. The largest Amish community in the world. It was just fascinating. Beautiful, beautiful countryside. Beautiful inns, beautiful facilities. Lovely people. It was just really exciting.

Changing living conditions, health problems, and new learning opportunities continue to be a part of Dorothy's life. As Dorothy has learned how to live differently, she also has come to understand the importance of lifelong learning to her well being.

Well, I just can't be alive and not be a learner! I don't go into learning in-depth, but I can't imagine not being challenged by a crossword puzzle or other things like that. Or paying attention to new things as they come along. I just think that it's the stimulation. That is the thing. It's kind of a use it or lose it kind of thing. Oh, I'm not saying I have to learn something new today or I'm going to go into dementia tomorrow, I don't mean that, but you have to reach out and accept life with vitality and eagerness. If your body is beginning to give out on you, you just reach out to those things that are stimulating to you.

For Dorothy, senior adulthood is a time to remain active, both with her community and in her own self-

directed learning. Her perspective on the season of life resulted in taking action that has led to new learning and new growth.

Many senior adults face one of the biggest challenges of life adjustment when they encounter a death of a spouse. For some of the participants, the death of a spouse involved learning how to live differently. These new life skills range from learning how to cook to learning how to fill the car up with gas. For one senior adult, "Lewis", the death of his spouse resulted in a move to a retirement center and in the writing of a book. A spry man of 89, Lewis is often seen walking briskly on the campus of Southern Nazarene University. He has a variety of interests that include lawn work to genealogy. He discusses a major book he wrote after the death of his wife.

When I lost [my wife], [my son] thought I ought to be put to work. I had been through a lot of months that weren't easy, you know. He was wiser than I thought he was. I told him he's done better than I expected him to [laughter]. But, it was a life saver for me. He put me in an office next to his. He was asked by the Trustees to do this Centennial history, and he didn't have time to do. I grew up with the institution and all. My father started at Peniel in 1905 and 06, that was the last year of the first president, A.M. Hill. So, I've known something about Hill. I wrote a life story of Hill. I had done a lot of research in the early history of the university from having done

that book. So I had a pretty good start on the early part of the century. So he put me doing that. My first use of a computer was there. . . . I did about all the research. [My son] proof-read it and modified it. I wanted him to have credit for it for the prime author. It took me two full years to do that. It was wonderful that I had that to do. Good for me, and I hope that it didn't hurt the university much [laughter]. I had been to Kansas City doing the Hill study in the archives of the general church, and I had been to Peniel. Peniel Church of the Nazarene has a good many early records of the beginning of the work down there. I had been to Hamlin, Texas, where another main roots were from. I used the archives here more than any place else. I used the computer Internet some for that. I guess I traveled some doing the history, but most of the travel I had done for history sources, I had done for the Hill book. So most of the work, I did was in the office or in the archives in the library.

Through the experience of writing the book, Lewis gained new confidence and strength to tackle other major life issues such as moving to a retirement center. He proudly shows visitors his two bedroom apartment that has a combination of new furnishings and older, family pieces. The neat-as-a-pin apartment affords him the opportunity to continue with his research as he made an office space in one of the rooms for his computer and his books. With a twinkle in his eye, he boasts that his apartment is the closest to the retirement center's dining room. Through his life experiences, Lewis has come to an understanding about his potential and about how he wants to live life.

Nearly all those people [in his Sunday School class] are 20 years younger than I am or 15. But I feel more at home with younger folks than I do with old people. I don't use the word old for myself. Mature, mature [laughter]. My brain may be ancient, but my will is to be mature and not old. It's kind of a joke really. I tell people recently, the older I get the less I want to use the word "old". I want to use the word "maturity" to describe myself. . . .The ideal is to add the years with the same perspective that you had when you were younger and to drive yourself, encourage yourself to stay alive, not only physically, but mentally, spiritually, and intellectually. That's what maturing means to me. Being physical, as long as you keep moving one way, it helps it to help you move every part of your total being. It's all one piece. It ought to be about the same, to be a balanced person.

Through his reflection, Lewis is encouraged to keep on growing, maturing, and learning, even at the age of 89.

His humor and his drive to keep current provides a purpose and direction for his life.

Mezirow (2000) suggests that perspective transformation can come through a variety of avenues.

"Art, music, and dance are alternative languages.

Intuition, imagination, and dreams are other ways of making meaning. Inspiration, empathy, and transcendence are

central to self-knowledge and to drawing attention to the affective quality and poetry of human experience" (p. 6).

"Elizabeth", an 85-year-old woman, finds poetry as a way to express her thoughts about growing older, her seasons of life, and her self-knowledge. A retired English professor,

she finds writing to be a creative way to articulate her understandings and experiences. Elizabeth also sees life in a representation of a tree as she expresses her thoughts in the poem, "Lessons From The Leaves":

They're floating down,  
Brilliantly-hued;  
God-painted--flaming reds,  
Golden yellows, burnt oranges--  
And saying,  
"Farewell, Summer; welcome, Autumn."  
God's leaf message proclaiming  
Beauty in nature's seasons.

So may it be with my seasons.  
I have known summer joys.  
Bright, beaming, beautiful;  
And autumn hurts,  
Dull, dimming, dismal.  
Beauty in them?  
His answer:  
"I have made everything beautiful  
In its time."  
God of all times, "Thank you for  
The beauty of my glad summers,  
Help me see beauty too in my sad autumns,  
And yes, more than that  
To thank You for them."

Through her poetry, Elizabeth is able to clarify her understanding of her season of life and to understand that even in her "autumn season" of life, it, too, has joys and beauty.

Dorothy, Lewis, and Elizabeth have had a change in perspective or a clarification of their understandings concerning their season of life due to the life circumstances that come with aging. Even during these

difficult times, they continue to be creative, to be active, and to look for ways to express themselves. For other senior adults, retirement affords them the time to reflect on a life-time of learning, to evaluate their worldviews and belief systems, and to more fully understand their place in their community of faith and practice.

#### A New Understanding of the Spiritual

For most of the participants, the Nazarene community of faith has been and is focal in their lives. Their families, their college experiences, their affiliations, and their friendships flow out of this community. It is a community of faith, but it is also a community of practice. Consequently, many self-directed learning projects have a focus that is a result of their involvement in their community of faith. For "John", retirement has given him time for reflection on his basic assumptions concerning his community and his Christian beliefs. Before retirement, John was a Nazarene minister, missionary, and a professor of religion and philosophy in a Nazarene university. His perspective transformation is an on-going one as he analyzes his worldview.

I am still learning; I am still learning.  
[Through my journaling] I have learned about the gospel, that it is all of grace. It is all of grace. I feel like I am learning the gospel all over again. That's why I am on the

edge of my pew every Sunday morning when [his pastor] is up there preaching because that is confirming what I am learning. I've learned a lot more about prevenient grace, how much it is stressed, not only in the New Testament but even in the Old Testament. I've gotten away from this exclusive view of grace, that the Nazarenes are the only ones who have it and understand it, to the inclusive view of grace which includes all people, of all times, of all races. I think it has made me more deeply, deeply committed to God to what he does in human lives, what he does in my own life. I've also learned that much of what he does in us is not by way of emotional experiences and even conscious awareness. The tapestry of our life, which he is developing, comes through the unconscious things. He's always there, like a parent. You are always involved in the mentoring of your son, whether he's aware of it or not. . . .I'm always the student; I'm always the student. I've also learned that God is nearest to me when I am feeling the most unworthy. I've always had a hard time with people in the Nazarene church who get up before others, get so enthusiastic and so excited talking about "I can tell you the time, I can tell you place [of salvation]." It's never worked for me that way. . . .The nearest I am to God when I am aware of the fact that I am totally nothing without him.

Through his reflection, John has begun to rethink his participation in his community of faith. Although he has been a Nazarene for many years and has been a part of the ministry and educational services of the church, he has felt, in many ways, different. His social learning and understanding is in the process of being transformed as he has analyzed his pre-conceived ideas about himself and his practicing community of faith.



I always used to wish I was somebody else. Growing up in the Depression, my folks divorcing when I was young. I always wished I could be somebody else. Even when I became an adult, I was always tormented by the wasted years in my early, mid-late teens. I was always looking at other people, praying, "Oh, God. Let me be like them. Help me to be like them." Then it was when I discovered that it's in those moments when I feel my inadequacy, I am actually at that point when I can trust in Him and in his grace. . . . [I discovered this] not in a moment or time, but it just began to evolve. This change has come lately in my life. I don't date it back 15 or 20 years ago. It began when I finally retired and began to have this time alone, extended time alone with the Lord, with the scripture, with my book of Common Prayer, sometimes with my John Wesley hymn book. It suddenly began to dawn on me that these people are there; these people that I thought, "Oh, if I could only be like them", they're there for me already. They are part of the kingdom of God; they are part of the body of Christ. They are serving me and others as mentors, and I am serving others as a mentor. The point is this, I can be totally myself, and I can fully acknowledge and accept my wasted years because it doesn't count; it doesn't matter. The same for them. For all their pedigrees. Take "S", that brilliant mind, that background of his. I could never duplicate that. I am too far down to the end of the road for that. But, for all that "S" has, it doesn't count. He is saved by grace through faith, and that faith is even a gift of God. My lack of a pedigree, as it were, doesn't matter. Doesn't matter.

John is understanding more clearly where he fits in his community of practice and faith. It is an enlightening journey of learning that has resulted in him endeavoring to learn more and to understand that, "I am always the student."

Many participants like John have spent many years within their community of faith. However, some of the participants have life experiences that have impacted their perceptions of themselves as learners, Christians, and members of their community of faith. "Anne" grew up in Norway, a daughter of an American mother and an Norwegian father. Her family's church was the Metropolitan Church Association. This holiness church developed during the same time as the Church of the Nazarene. Even though her background was in a holiness environment, Anne experienced a different childhood and growing up than did most of the participants. Her father was a traveling missionary and minister throughout Norway and the islands of Norway. Often the family traveled with the father, living on a boat and in a tent. They would put up a little organ on the dock, start playing, the people would come, and they would welcome them with open arms. Then the German occupation came. Anne remembers:

America starts thinking of the war from December '41. . . .Of course we knew about the war when it started in September of 1939, never realizing we would be involved. You know, it's like thinking you don't have to lock your doors because you are an honest person. No one was prepared. Overnight, the 9<sup>th</sup> of April, 1940, the Germans occupied Norway. Overnight. It was just like that.

Through the war years, Anne went to a private teaching hospital to become a registered nurse. Her family experienced many hardships and dangers as they endeavored to continue with missionary pursuits in an occupied country. In 1948, she came to the United States. Through a series of events with other family members, she finally arrived in the Bethany, Oklahoma, area where she established her home and raised her children. During her adulthood years, she worked as a nurse, raised her children, and was divorced. At the age of 43, she decided to return to college and earn a degree. She remarried in middle adulthood, and her husband passed away shortly after their marriage. She continued with her learning through history classes at Southern Nazarene University. She has been a member of the local Nazarene church since the 1960's.

Because of her life experiences, Anne has a different viewpoint of her participation in the Nazarene community of faith. Even though she has been a faithful member of the local Nazarene church and raised her children in the church, she like John sees herself differently and perceives the community of practice for the church to be much broader than the local community of faith.

I am not interested in the Nazarene thing as

much. I get very, well, I don't say it much. I expressed it to my brother. But when they say, "We need to pray for all these Nazarenes who are having all these problems with all these problems with floods and all that." We need to pray for everybody, but especially the Christians. I don't care if they are Baptists or Methodists or Catholics or whatever. I get way hung up on that, you know, what church do you belong to? We had a young man come to the missionary society. Lovely, lovely young man from Mexico. Really pulled himself up by his bootstraps. They asked him, "When did you become a Nazarene?" Ooooh! I just wanted to get up and say, "Don't say that! Say, when did you become a Christian?" I think probably my background has made the difference. I think the people who grew up in Bethany or have only been in the Nazarene church, only been to a Nazarene school. . . . it becomes a very narrow world. Am I surprising you? I know the path is narrow, but we make it too narrow. I do belong to the Nazarene church. But I am a Christian first and foremost.

Through her self-directed learning experiences, Anne not only has come to rethink her participation in her community of faith, but she has gained new insight into how she understands life and her own purpose in life. Her change in perspective has been a result of a slow soak in history and philosophical inquiry.

Age is a number. I am 78. I was 78 in July. When you are younger and you look at that you think, Gosh! She is doing well for her age! What do you mean? What am I supposed to be like? I think age is just a span of time . . . .I wake up every morning and say, "Thank you, Lord!" Maybe it's because of some of the things I have been through. I get in the shower, and I think, "Oh, just think! Hot water!" We were so deprived during the War. I never take hot water for granted. Life is a gift. Good health is

a gift. . . Good family is a gift. . . Your ancestry is a gift. . . My philosophy has evolved. Let's put it this way. I think when you are younger, things are much more black and white. I watched a program on PBS about the Vietnam prisoners of war, and I cried. What these men went through! They asked them about the difference in the way they look at problems after being five, six, seven years as prisoners. This one man said, "There are no problems as long as the room I am in has a door with a knob on the inside." Freedom! I was so moved by that. I think as you get older and there is some life experience. . . History taught me something. One of my favorite books is A Distant Mirror by Barbara Tuckman. I remember once, some years ago, I was at the university, talking with an historian. I told him that that book was such a comfort to me. I wish I had read it when I was young before the German occupation. He asked me, "Why?" Because it taught me: this too shall pass. Every bad war, the horrible things that happen, passes. If you survive, you go on. I am a history buff. The more history I have read, the more philosophical I have become. There is a new history book out, written by a man in his 90's: From Dawn to Decadence. It's about the last 500 years. The first chapter, big section of it, is all about the church. Luther and all the difference ones, and the influence it [the church] had all through history and how things change. All of that, you don't change over night from reading a book. But gradually you change your philosophy, and you realize how important it is to make the best of every day. Don't sweat the small stuff. Don't get hung up on small stuff. Be a good neighbor. Be a good friend. That's my philosophy.

The glimpses of the learning occurring through the specific perspective transformations for Arthur, Helen, Dorothy, Lewis, Elizabeth, John, and Anne are unique to them. However, other kinds of perspective transformation have occurred for many of the participants through a

a variety of self-directed learning experiences. Indeed, the participants' perspectives on learning have transformed as they have come to understand the importance of self-directed learning as a lifetime pursuit.

### A Life-Time Of Growing

Whether through their informal learning associations such as the Academy of Senior Professionals or through their own independent learning projects, the participants continue to pursue learning in order to grow and to mature. The meaning that this learning has for them is multi-layered. However, woven throughout their understanding of the importance of self-directed learning as older adults is the firm belief that learning is to be sought after, that learning is important to their spiritual understandings, and that continuous lifelong, self-directed learning is vital to intellectual, physical, and spiritual life and well-being.

### Learning is Seeking

Central to the concept of learning independently is the idea of active learning (Knowles, 1975). The learner is responsible for identifying the learning projects, determining how the learning projects will be conducted, and evaluating when the project is completed (Candy, 1991; Knowles, 1975; Long, 1996). This implies a learner who

seeks knowledge and who does not expect knowledge to arrive via someone else. Consequently, the active learner uses a variety of resources to conduct learning projects (Smith, 1982).

The participants are active learners who engage in a wide variety of self-directed learning opportunities both through informal avenues and through independent learning projects, and they use many different resources. Through the years of being active learners, the participants have come to understand that they are responsible for their learning. Often this responsibility is described as a curiosity, a thirst for learning, and a realization of how much there is still to learn.

I think you have to have a thirst for knowledge.  
I am not satisfied with what I know.  
(73-year old man)

The more you learn, the more you realize that there's still a lot to learn. That you really don't know very much. I've heard that said, but I think that's true. It's only as you learn that you realize that there is still so much more that you haven't begun to touch. You realize that at this age. (79-year-old woman)

You have to be interested in the world around you.  
(67 year-old woman)

[Lifelong learning is] maintaining an attitude of learning. You know, you don't come to the point when you think you have arrived. If you have, you're probably slipping back. . . .It's a continuous process. (74 year-old man)

One participant, a 89-year-old man, clearly understands the concept of active learning. He engages in many different kinds of learning activities. He writes history articles for the Academy of Senior Professionals, he enjoys genealogy, and he helps to take care of a stable of horses owned by Southern Nazarene University. He seeks out learning opportunities. He reflects on what it means to be a lifelong learner.

You have to have a little bit of intellectual curiosity that keeps stimulating yourself. I don't think it's automatic. You have to keep on working at it. You have to deliberately decide that you want to keep on. And as you do, one thing leads to another, keeps stimulating. Learning stimulates learning. It keeps you alive. Keep on living. That's the way it is with my interest in watching young people. It kind of prolongs my long-drawn youth to watch how kids react and compare them to past generations. I've known a lot of generations of kids. Learning stimulates learning.

He continues to seek new learning situations and opportunities. This 89-year-old learner plans to celebrate his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday by going on a literary lecture tour of England with a group from Southern Nazarene University.

### Learning is Spiritual

The participants are people who have a strong heritage within a community of faith. Their childhood and adolescence experiences of going to Sunday School, church services, and youth activities encouraged them to pursuit



higher education at a Nazarene college. As they went through early adulthood and middle adulthood, they continued to participate in many of the informal learning activities that they had done as children. Indeed, even as senior adults, they still go to Sunday School, missionary societies, and other informal learning situations within their community of faith. They are challenged to preach, teach, mentor, counsel, and learn within this community. Consequently, their self-directed learning projects are often closely linked to their continuing process of learning what it means to be a Christian. For many of the participants, they understand that a long life is a God-given gift; therefore, they are compelled to be in continuous spiritual learning in order to be of further service to their community of faith. As one 73-year-old participant simply said, "The purpose of learning is to serve God better." Others support this pragmatic concept of learning in order to serve.

I think we are accountable to God for the time he gives us, and as long as we have that knowledge and unless physically we cannot do anything, I don't think we should sit down and do nothing. I just think we have got to keep working and learning to further the kingdom as long as we have breath.  
(73-year-old woman)

Learning means that you don't spend days where you have no purpose. We all need purpose.

The person without purpose is just existing. Biblically that's not a good idea. I think its very parallel or it coincides with Biblical teachings what the Psalmist David was a person who learned all his life, the apostle Paul is a great example of a lifelong learner, and he used circumstances in which to learn. Jesus, himself, gave examples of being a learner in that he learned things, then he taught people. So this has influenced me a great deal. Always being ready to teach, if someone asks, or to learn if there is an opportunity. (75-year-old man)

God has placed us here for a purpose, and that is primarily to help others. If we sit there on the job and just think, "Well, I'm over the hill", sit down and don't do anything or think we cannot do anything, we are going dry up and blow away and miss many opportunities we could have otherwise. (80-year-old woman)

The participants spend many hours in informal learning situations in church and continually read and study spiritual and religious materials. Consequently, for many of the participants, their understanding of lifelong learning is expressed philosophically.

The Christian of all people has reason to love life and make it meaningful and enduring. So that ought to be the ultimate in learning and keeping on learning, to have a Christian motivation behind it, supporting it. (89-year-old man)

You look as God as the Creator as the source of all knowledge. You are in that total process of finding out about the Creator and the creation. It's all about the world and the process of learning about the world. (74-year-old man)

You utilize the abilities the Lord, the Creator, has given to you. I think if you waste the ability to learn, you hibernate, you vegetate. . . .We are sojourners here. We are

here temporarily. Some of us are here longer than others. If you are in good health and your mind stays bright, you are blessed. Don't take it for granted. (77-year-old woman)

Learning new spiritual insights is a continual quest, as expressed by one 68-year-old woman, "You are never mature, you are always learning something. I am amazed at times as something dawns on me that I hadn't recognized before, it just skipped by me." One 73-year-old man describes his lifelong learning for the meaning of truth and spiritual understanding.

Lifelong learning is a calling. I think truth is a calling to us. I like what my favorite philosopher, Paul Ricoeur said. He said, "Truth is a lighted place where we can continue to learn and to grow." I use that because that is really where I am. I think, too, it takes an attitude of realizing that this is our Father's world, and truth can come to us many, many places. Beauty and holiness can be communicated to us in many, many places. There's only one source of that beauty and that holiness, and that is, of course, God, who is everywhere.

### Learning is Life

For these participants who are lifelong learners, engaging in new learning projects and seeking new things to learn is just as natural to them as any other function of their life. When one 75-year-old woman was asked about the importance of lifelong learning, she seemed surprised at the question, and said, "Well, it's just life. I think to

me it is just part of living. I get ideas from people. I pick up new ideas every once in a while and think, why didn't I think of that?" One 77-year old woman said, "It's just beyond me not to learn. I can't learn to be an astronaut at my age, but I can learn about anything else. Age has nothing to do anything with." Another 75-year-old man enthusiastically agrees.

I continue to learn, and everything you do contributes to the learning process of life so you can continually improve all your mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical factors. . . . We [he and his wife] are always looking for new ideas and learning situations. I love to learn. It's just as vigorous in me as when I was [in full-time teaching]. It has never dimmed. I am just sorry I don't have another 40 years to give [to his learning pursuits].

Lifelong learning is a positive way to affect the negative features that can be associated with growing older (Trethewey, 1997). Often the aging process wears down the body and distracts from the things people enjoy doing (Rowe & Kahn, 1998). Some older adults pursuit physical activities and exercise as a way to beat the aging process (Trethewey, 1997). While many of the participants also recognize the importance of physical exercise, it is the "mental exercise" which stimulates mental alertness that is fully embraced by the participants. The participants understand that continuous learning in some way contributes

to living longer by keeping the mind alive. In essence, they firmly believe that quality living and active learning are inseparable links.

Once something stops growing, it begins to die. Learning new things is growing, it's forming new synapsis, it's information stored in your brain. Once learning stops, the brain starts to die. (67-year-old man)

I am not about to stop learning. There was a story about a [church leader], and he was . . . 84 years old. He had his books out, and he was studying. Someone walked in on him, and they said, "What are you doing?" He said, "I'm learning the computer." He was going to class to learn computers. He was 84 years old! They said, "Why are you doing that? You're 84 years old." He said, "Because I haven't stopped learning yet. That's why I'm doing it." That's the way I feel. If we stop learning, we are done for. (68-year-old man)

I just enjoy things that are new and different, tend to make you extend yourself. I guess it's maybe even be partly selfish, you know. Some where I have heard that people who keep their minds active tend to live longer. But I don't think that's the reason I do it. I think I do it just because it's a challenge, and it's nice to be able to see that you can still master something. (76-year-old man)

If you are not, you are going to die, mentally at least. I really think you would fade away. I can't imagine not continuing to try to learn, being interested in something all the time. Some people aren't. I really think you are going to die. Mentally and maybe physically. I think it is vital. (76 year-old woman)

This pursuit of lifelong learning through their self-directed learning activities has resulted in a quality of

life that keeps them busy. As explained by one 81-year-old man, "I don't know where people have this concept of retirees doing nothing. We haven't found that yet. We are busy!" In order to keep all their activities straight, most of the participants rely on keeping calendars.

Laughing, one 74-year-old man describing his wife's and his calendar system. "We have four calendars. . . .If we didn't check our calendars, we would be in a bad fix!" The participants were so busy that it was a challenge to find time between informal learning groups, traveling, and other kinds of appointments in order to complete the interviewing process.

The activity level of the participants has resulted in them rarely being bored, "Learning means you are never bored. It means that you don't spend days where you have no purpose" (75-year-old man). As one 78 year-old-woman stated,

I get to talking to somebody, and I'll say, I'm never bored. I mean, there is always something to do. Once in a while it is a little overwhelming, but then again it's just great to be able to do. We hear those invitations for seniors who don't have anything to do. "Come and do this and come and do that." We say, "Oh! You don't mean us!" You know, we aren't sitting around waiting for someone to tell us what to do.

Being active, which means not being bored, is critical in the well-being of older adults. One 80-year-old woman

explains why it is important for senior adults to continue to grow and mature.

You are not getting stale just because you are getting old. Learning means an opportunity to learn things to help other people as well as myself. It keeps you from drying up and dying in your shell. So many people will give up when they reach retirement age. They think they can't do anything anymore. When I see somebody . . . who has potential and just decides he doesn't want to do anything or she doesn't want to do anything because "I'm too old now" or "I'm just going to sit down now and take it easy for the rest of the time", then I feel like those people are missing so much by not using the abilities God has given them through the years and the experience that we have.

With a broad grin, she describes what her doctor writes on her chart:

He [the doctor] writes on there, on his report, every time: awake, alert, and oriented times three. So that is why I am so thrilled. Oh, I know I have my senior moments, but I can think. I have so much to be thankful for and I need to do what God has left me here to do. . . .I have had a wonderful life and I still have!

### A Long Growing Season

A tree is planted; the roots are established; the trunk and limbs grow in strength; and the leaves, seeds, and buds multiply as they provide the proof of life. Throughout the seasons of the life of the tree, the roots grow, and bulk is added to the trunk. Most importantly, the living parts of the tree, the seeds, the buds, and the leaves, provide a way for one to analyze the health of a

tree. Through the years, the tree grows as it is fed and nurtured. It is watered, the roots are protected, and careful pruning is done to encourage more growth and sweeter fruit. Growing a healthy, strong, productive tree does not happen quickly. It is a long process.

So, too, has the learning process for the participants been a long one. They have participated in formal learning through college and post graduate opportunities. Service to their community of faith was woven throughout their early adulthood, middle adulthood, and even into senior adulthood years. They have involved themselves in informal learning situations like the Academy of Senior Professionals. They engage in a wide variety of independent learning projects that involve reading, writing, using the computer, traveling, physical activities, music, the fine arts, and service projects. The combination of all of these learning activities has resulted in a strong, vital, and forever green learning tree. Most importantly, they realize that not only are they continually growing and maturing, but they also can continue to do so with a realistic optimism. As one 73-year-old man enthusiastically said about the meaning of his own learning and his self-directed learning projects:

I hope I can continue to grow and to learn. A



doctor told me to keep yourself mentally active,  
and I've tried to do that. I think it works.  
I'm looking forward. I'm looking forward. I  
hear people talking about the good old days.  
Hey, I lived in those so-called good old days,  
and I don't want to go back to them. I want to  
keep on going forward. Oh, it keeps me alive!  
It keeps me alive! I drove by [a nursing home]  
today and I thought, "Not yet! Not yet!" It  
keeps me alive!

## CHAPTER 7

### THE HARVEST AND THE LEGACY OF GROWTH

Develop a passion for learning. If you do,  
you will never grow old.

-- Anthony J. DeAngelo

#### Summary of the Study

Since John Dewey and Eduard Lindeman first argued that learning should be understood as a lifelong process, there has been an explosion of adult education agencies that provide learning opportunities with a myriad of purposes. As the field of adult education has grown, so have the challenges to understand adult education methodology and adult learning. There are new challenges for this complex field as the largest segment of the population of adults in the United States is rapidly becoming senior adults.

The current population of senior adults have a different profile than did their parents or grandparents. They are living longer, and they are better educated. Consequently, many older adults view retirement differently. Many senior adults see retirement as a time to continue to learn and to grow. There are several adult education agencies that have recognized the needs of this clientele. The Edlerhostel Institute, the Chautauqua Institute, and vocational and technical institutions are

representative of the type of agencies that provide many kinds of learning opportunities for senior adults. As a result, there is much that has been written about these organizations, the kinds of programs that are offered, why learners decide to participate, and the satisfaction of the learning to the learners.

However, there is little known about self-directed senior adults who form their own learning organizations for their own self-directed learning needs. One such group is the Academy of Senior Professionals (ASP) in Bethany, Oklahoma. For over 10 years, more than 100 senior adult learners have met together in order to grow intellectually, culturally, and spiritually. Furthermore, they conduct a wide variety of self-directed learning projects outside of ASP.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to describe the perceptions of the learning patterns of the senior adult learners in the Academy of Senior Professionals (ASP) in Bethany, Oklahoma. The study used the following research questions: (a) what do the learning projects of ASP look like; (b) how do ASP members understand themselves as learners; (c) how do ASP members acquire the knowledge and skill to learn effectively in specific learning situations; (d) what role does learning play in the lives of ASP

members; (f) what are the life learning experiences that brought the members into ASP, and (g) how does the community of faith of ASP members influence their learning.

This case study used a naturalistic design in order to collect and analyze qualitative data in order to describe the learning perceptions and projects of the senior adult learners from the ASP. Data was gathered through interviewing 30 members of ASP, results from ATLAS, observations of the activities of ASP, and reviewing documents produced by the members of ASP. The population of the study was limited to members of ASP, and the participants were identified through a purposeful sample.

#### Summary of Findings

The findings of this study were presented as a metaphor of an ever-growing, productive tree. The learning projects and responses concerning the self-directed learning activities of the participants were viewed in relation to a tree's system of parts: The Roots of Growth, A Structure For Growth, Branching Out For Growth, and Forever Green. Each part of the tree's system is related to the participants' self-directed learning as they continue to grow, to learn, and to mature.

## The Roots of Growth

The roots of growth for most of the participants were established in their community of faith, the Church of the Nazarene. Many of the participants have been a part of the Church of the Nazarene since childhood. The Church of the Nazarene as a national and an international denomination is relatively new; it is less than 100 years of age. It was founded on the deep belief in holiness, evangelism, and service to the poor and needy. As the church grew, the focus of the Church of the Nazarene continued to be on holiness and evangelism; however, in the early 1930's, it shifted from an emphasis on social problems to a stronger emphasis on service to the church and to the mission of the church. In addition to emphasizing evangelism, missions, and a rigid code of conduct and dress, the Church of the Nazarene stressed the importance of educating their young people within their own fine arts colleges. Consequently, several four-year, fine arts colleges were established in various parts of the United States.

One of these colleges is Bethany Peniel College (now known as Southern Nazarene University) in Bethany, Oklahoma, a suburb of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. It was at this college and in the Nazarene community that developed in Bethany, Oklahoma, that the participants began to

connect with one another. All but one of the participants, either as students or as professors, were involved with Bethany Peniel College. Many of the participants met their spouses there, and many established lifelong friendships as a result of their affiliation with Bethany Peniel College. Because of the importance that was placed on education by the church, by their families, and by other significant people in their lives, all the participants have some college hours and most earned bachelor degrees. Furthermore, many of the participants went on to earn masters and doctoral degrees.

Several of the participants chose careers within the Church of the Nazarene as preachers, missionaries, and college professors. The other participants chose diverse careers in public school education, higher education, business, and civil service. All but two of the participants who had careers outside of the Church of the Nazarene were actively involved in service as lay people to the Church of the Nazarene through early and middle adulthood. Now as senior adults, they are connected again as senior adult learners in the Academy of Senior Professionals, which meets on the campus of Bethany Peniel College (Southern Nazarene University).

Their root system has been established through family tradition, influenced by religious practice, enhanced by their college years, and nurtured through lifetime commitments to their community of faith. Therefore, many of their self-directed learning interests as senior adult learners are a result of this root system.

#### A Structure For Growth

After college, the participants continued to have many different kinds of learning experiences that came from structured, formal learning environments. Many earned advanced degrees, and many engaged in learning through various continuing educational opportunities. Now as senior adults, they come full circle as they return to the campus of Bethany Peniel College (Southern Nazarene University) in order to participate in an informal but structured learning environment, the Academy of Senior Professionals (ASP).

In 1989, ASP was born out of a desire of one of the members to continue to learn and to grow intellectually, culturally, and spiritually while in retirement. Banding together, several retired self-directed older adult learners met together on the campus of Southern Nazarene University for the purposes of intellectual discussion and service projects to Southern Nazarene University. Their

numbers, however, were few. Therefore, in an effort to attract more retirees to their organization, they began to have luncheon-lecture meetings. On the second Monday of each month from September through May, more than a 100 senior adult learners have met to have a buffet luncheon and listen to a guest speaker.

As their organization grew, different learning interest groups were formed. These are the Research Interest Group (RIG), the Memoir Writing Workshop (MWW), and the Strategic Planning Committee (SPC). Each learning interest group has a specific function. The RIG provides opportunities for members to continue in research, writing, and presentation of scholarly papers. The members attending MWW share their written memoirs in a friendly and supportive atmosphere. The SPC is the avenue for long-range planning and goal setting for various learning opportunities such as a Genealogy Workshop and the Oklahoma Senior Adult Fair Project. Additionally, there are various standing committees that allow the members to integrate their prior learning experiences and knowledge into new learning opportunities within ASP. Furthermore, ASP produces a monthly newsletter that gives the members an avenue to have their writing published. Although the numbers in each of the learning interest groups and



standing committees are small, together the numbers represent nearly half of the membership. However, the main attraction of ASP is the luncheon-lecture.

The membership reflects a typical profile of senior adult learners who choose to participate in informal learning activities; yet, it is somewhat unique. The members are all Caucasians and are highly educated, which is typical of older adult learners who participate in learning groups (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Although more women generally tend to participate than men (Lamdin & Fugate, 1997), in ASP these numbers are nearly equal. This may be due to the fact that large numbers of members are husbands and wives. Also, the primary reason members give for participation in ASP is for social reasons. Although they enjoy the speakers, the chance to be with their friends and acquaintances is their first voiced motivation for attending. Other studies suggest that the first reason senior adults give for participation is for learning while social reasons is the second reason for participation (Lamdin & Fugate, 1997).

ASP incorporates many adult education principles (Knowles, 1975; 1980) within a liberal adult education or Idealism paradigm (Elias & Merriam, 1995). The leaders of ASP provide a conducive atmosphere, both physically and

psychologically, for learning. The membership has opportunity to give input into the kinds of learning experiences and special speakers of ASP, and the leadership of ASP recognizes and utilizes the vast reservoir of experience of the ASP members. The most important aspect of ASP is the self-direction of the organization. ASP is totally controlled by the membership. They decide what will be done in the organization, each member chooses the level of personal participation, and all have opportunity to evaluate the progress and future direction of ASP.

The Academy of Senior Professionals is just one of the informal structured learning activities of the members. The members engage in a variety of learning experiences through informal groups outside of ASP. They are actively involved in Sunday School classes, missionary societies, choral groups, community service groups, and other informal learning groups within their community of faith. Consequently, ASP is one of their many informal learning experiences.

#### Branching Out For Growth

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the ASP members is the self-directed learning that occurs outside an informally structured learning environment. All of the participants actively engage in a wide variety of self-

undirected learning projects. While all have learning interests and projects that are unique to them, there are some learning projects that are common to most of the participants. These learning projects fall within three categories: intellectual, personal, and service.

Within the intellectual category are reading, writing, and computer usage. All of the participants indicated that they are readers with 26 reporting that they are avid readers. They read a variety of magazines, newspapers, and journals. Furthermore, they read both fiction and non-fiction. However, all of the members indicate that religious or spiritual kind of literature is a significant part of their reading and study.

Most of the participants engage in some kind of writing project. These include journals, memoirs, minutes from organizations, novels, religious articles, and books. The themes of their writing projects include a variety of topics from childhood memories to philosophy and religion.

Another learning activity of most of the participants is using technology through their home computers. Of the 30 participants, 27 have a home computer. They use their computers for many different kinds of applications: record keeping, word processing, and information gathering from the World Wide Web. However, the most common use of the

computer is for electronic mail (e-mail). In addition to sending letters, announcements, and memos through e-mail, many of the participants have learned how to send attachments, download pictures, and print the pictures.

All of the participants engage in learning projects that enhance personal development in at least one of the following: arts and crafts, fine arts and music, genealogy, health and physical activities, and travel. Of these, travel, health and physical activities, and the fine arts and music are most common. Many of the members are seasoned world travelers, and learning experiences from this travel have made them more aware of different cultures and customs. The participants enjoy various physical activities such as walking, running, and playing sports. Furthermore, they attend musical concerts, both gospel and non-sacred, and enjoy art and art museums.

Service to their community of faith has been an integral part of their lives. Consequently, the desire to be of service to their church remains central. All of the participants are active members in their church and go to many of the activities sponsored by Southern Nazarene University. Twenty of the participants give continual service through counseling, compassionate ministries to the needy, consulting, musical performance, preaching, and

teaching. A few of the participants are active members of service organizations outside of their community of faith.

The participants approach their self-directed learning projects in different ways and use a variety of resources for their learning. Using ATLAS as a means to identify personal learning strategies, the participants were able to identify themselves through the descriptive ATLAS profiles as Navigators, Engagers, and Problem Solvers. The 12 participants who are Navigators rely heavily on planning, being organized, having a particular place to study or read, and relying on facts for their learning. The 14 participants who are Engagers learn best when they are actively engage in learning that has meaning and value to one's self. These participants are passionate learners, and often they get consumed with their learning; however, their projects may be short lived. The four participants who are Problem Solvers like options and like to create alternatives. They rely heavily on seeking out all the information needed; consequently, they may take a long time to make a decision.

There were some similarities and some differences in learning projects and learning strategies between the male and female participants. All are active learners, they read extensively, and all have learning projects that

involve spiritual or religious themes. Furthermore, both men and women like to travel and participate in physical activities although the women tend to walk rather than to use physical exercise equipment or play sports. The main differences were women tend to write on personal issues while men tend to write on themes that are less personal; more women than men engage in arts and crafts; more men than women teach and preach within their community of faith for service projects; and more women than men tend to use human resources for their learning projects.

#### Forever Green

Through their self-directed learning activities in the Academy of Senior Professionals, in other informal learning group experiences, and in their personal learning projects, many of the participants have had a change in perspective. For many of the participants this inward journey of critical reflection has resulted in action that has led to further learning and to further service. For some, their perspective transformation has resulted in a new understanding of their self-concept and self-development. Others have learned new insights concerning challenges that come with their stage of life. A new understanding of spiritual issues and their participation in their community of faith has, for some, resulted in a change in worldview.

These changes in perspective have come through paradigm shifts and through more gradual, subtle understandings over a period of time.

The participants recognize and value the importance of lifelong learning. They understand that learning is to be pursued. This implies learning that requires action rather than passivity. Furthermore, they tie lifelong learning to their spiritual nature and Christian responsibilities. Often they articulated that their role and responsibility as a Christian is to continually learn. Lastly, they understand that lifelong learning in some way contributes to living longer and with a better quality of life.

The problem for this study was conceptualized around the concepts related to three main areas. Those areas are adult education, self-directed learning, and adult learning. Conclusions and recommendations were drawn related to each of those three main areas.

### Adult Education

#### Adult Education and the Older Learner

Self-directed older adult learners can effectively form their own informal learning environments.

The Academy of Senior Professionals (ASP) exemplifies many andragogical principles. As proposed by Knowles (1975, 1980, 1990), the members of ASP reflect the five

crucial assumptions of adult learners that concern self-concept, the importance of experience, the readiness to learn, time perspective, and motivation. The members, through their own needs and interests, independently formed ASP. They want to make their own decisions and to manage the learning according to their own needs. Consequently, the self-concepts of this group are ones of being independent rather than dependent. Furthermore, the members decide what they want to learn based on the need to know and their own season of life. Consequently, they want to use the knowledge learned today for application for tomorrow. Additionally, the members are intrinsically motivated to learn. They are, as Johnston and Riveria (1965) proposed, volunteers for learning.

The ASP members have incorporated within the structure of their learning organization several key adult education principles (Knowles, 1975; Kidd, 1973). The most striking of these principles are the conducive atmosphere for learning, the blending of prior learning experience into the activities of ASP, and the learner control of the learning activities. While many of the founders of ASP and the current leadership are former educators in higher education, their academic fields were not in adult education. Consequently, they were eager for this study to



be conducted so they could learn more about their organization and themselves as learners through an adult education analysis. They requested that updates on the data analysis be made available to the membership through their monthly newsletter. Furthermore, the Research Interest Group (RIG) quickly agreed to do a member check for the purposes of trustworthiness of the data analysis. This openness and willingness to be partners in research supports Knowles' argument that the evaluation of learning outcomes and the quality of the learning experience are the mutual and cooperative efforts of both program evaluation with learning evaluation from the learners (Knowles, 1975). Ultimately, however, the ASP members are in control of determining the quality and the personal meaning of the learning experiences through the activities provided through ASP.

The success of ASP demonstrates that older adult learners can be trusted to be creative enough and skilled enough to identify, to address, and to solve their own learning needs (Freire, 1972; Horton et al., 1990). Older adults begin their senior adulthood years not as novices about the world and how the world functions; rather, they are armed with a wealth of knowledge and experience. As

one 78-year-old participant explained his own reservoir of experience:

I think it [experience] evolved. It started, I think, back with your formal education. As a pastor, every church is where I learned some of it. It was just an accumulation. I've often said, as it relates to a church, every church is a result of every pastor they have ever had, and every pastor is an accumulation of all the churches ever pastored. So every church I pastored, I felt like I left something of me there. Every church I pastored, when I went on, I picked up something from them, what they were. Out of these experiences, I learned new skills. They built on one another. You accumulate skills. I wished I would of known as much when I started pastoring as when I quit. You get a new experience, you just build on the past.

In a society that values youth and being young, the aging person is often not recognized for the abundance of experience, knowledge, and skills that were described by this participant. Furthermore, not only are older people not recognized for their experience, they are often not valued as people. These negative and destructive attitudes are referred to as ageism.

Ageism can be seen as a systematic stereotyping of and discrimination against people because they are old, just as racism and sexism accomplish this with skin color and gender. Old people are categorized as senile, rigid in thought and manner, old-fashion in morality and skills. . . .Ageism allows the younger generation to see older people as different from themselves; thus, they subtly cease to identify with their elders as human beings. (Butler, 1993, p. 75)

Ageism results in negative images of older people as a burden on society.

Just as Freire (1972) and Horton (1990) empowered people on the fringe of the society to reject the stereotypes and myths concerning their abilities and potentials, so, too, do older adults need to be empowered to fight the myths of ageism. They need to be given the opportunity to utilize their vast reservoir of experience, to continue to learn in areas of interest, and to connect with other senior adults for purposes of dialogue and community. Just as the disenfranchised African-Americans in the United States became empowered through educational experiences through the Highlander Folk School (Horton et al., 1990), senior adults may need an organization to aid them in their quest for empowerment. Senior adults have the talent, the desire, the ability, and the knowledge to form self-directed learning groups; however, a formal organization that supports and encourages their efforts as they address and solve their own learning needs can play an important role in their empowerment.

Recommendation for the  
Academy of Senior Professionals

For more than 10 years, the Academy of Senior Professionals has shown itself to be a successful self-

directed learning organization. The members of ASP have the experience and the confidence to continue to provide a quality learning experience. There are opportunities for ASP to become even a stronger learning organization. ASP should provide more opportunity for blending the self-directed learning that occurs outside of ASP into the learning experiences of ASP. For example, a "let-me-show you" table of pictures, art work, and books people are reading could be set for exhibition at the luncheon meetings, slide shows of travel pictures could be shown while people are mingling before the luncheon, and more members could be the special speakers or present creative works through music, poetry, or art.

Furthermore, ASP should be more inclusive of other people outside of the Nazarene community. The members of ASP have experienced a wide variety of learning experiences; consequently, many have a broad worldview. Indeed, diversity is one of the goals of the organization as reflected by its mission statement and future goals as stated by the Strategic Planning Committee. The Oklahoma Senior Day Fair may prove to be a tremendous outreach tool; however, there are other less complicated ways to get a more diverse membership. For example, ASP could send its new brochures to other churches and retirement agencies,

have an ASP Sunday where members go to various churches and retirement centers to contact seniors, and consider advertising in local newspapers that focus on senior adults.

Lastly, ASP should become the blueprint for other senior adults who want to start similar organizations. ASP can utilize the experience of their members to set up a committee to contact other senior adults in other Nazarene or Christian College Collation communities in order to spread the ASP message.

The Academy of Senior Professionals is a powerful example of how self-directed learning organizations can empower older adults to continue to learn and to grow. Therefore, ASP could provide opportunities for further study. The issue of participation and barriers to participation are key to adult education research. Therefore, further study should be considered to determine (a) why some ASP members participate in the small group settings and others do not; (b) why some ASP members participate on a regular basis and others only sporadically; and (c) whether or not there are barriers to participation in ASP. Furthermore, the question of similarities and differences between ASP and other self-

directed informal learning organizations should be considered.

### Adult Education and Christian Higher Education

Christian higher education can provide older adult learners with learning opportunities to stay mentally alert and to connect with their community of faith.

A trend gaining popularity for retirement is for senior adults to relocate to towns and cities with colleges and universities (Dychtwald, 1990). "A lot of older people don't want to play bingo and shuffleboard. They want more compelling activities" (Dychtwald, 1990, p. 156). These senior adults want to be close to the learning opportunities that a college can provide, and they want to be able to connect with older adults who have the same interests and values. Therefore, colleges and universities have the opportunity to encourage and to provide a place for senior adult learners for self-directed learning activities.

Several of the participants purposefully chose to retire to the Bethany, Oklahoma, area due to their community of faith that included Southern Nazarene University. These participants desired to connect with like-minded people with similar interests, values, and experiences. As one participant remarked, "I never thought

I would be reconnected with these people. My heart is at SNU." ASP became one of the avenues for the participants to achieve their retirement goals.

Although the members founded ASP and are in control of all the functions of ASP, it was the encouragement of administrators at Southern Nazarene University and their willingness to provide a physical place for ASP to meet that originally enabled the self-directed learners to build their learning organization (Gresham, 1998). Furthermore, Southern Nazarene University encouraged the organization by giving all ASP members parking stickers for their cars; identification cards so they can attend athletic activities, concerts, and other activities of the college for free; free use of the library; and discounts at the university bookstore. With the support and encouragement of the university, the Academy of Senior Professionals, which is entirely member controlled, has thrived.

The Church of the Nazarene as an international denomination is a growing organization. With this growth comes new challenges for cultivating the community of faith for Nazarenes. Scholars within the Church of the Nazarene are attempting to address this issue (Benefiel, 2000; Crow & Lively, 2000; Crow & Houseal, 2000; Hawthorne, 2000). The increasing diversity amongst the members of the Church

of the Nazarene (Crow & Houseal, 2000), the use of technology to connect with other Christians and groups (Crow & Lively, 2000), and articulating the church's core values (Benefiel, 2000) are seen as impacting the sense of community. One way that the people within the Church of the Nazarene can keep connected is through their system of higher education institutions, as demonstrated through the example of ASP and Southern Nazarene University.

As the population of adults ages, a new opportunity will be presented for the colleges and universities affiliated with the Church of the Nazarene. These universities and colleges can continue to be the church in action through education by empowering the church's growing numbers of older members to continue to learn, to grow, and to mature. Indeed, the whole system of Christian colleges as represented by more than 100 colleges and universities in the Christian College Collation can be influential in empowering older adult learners to continue to learn and to grow.

#### Recommendations for Christian Higher Education

A new opportunity exists for Christian colleges and universities. The success of ASP shows that a Christian college can help to empower older adults to solve their own learning needs. Therefore, Christian colleges and



universities should encourage and provide opportunities for dialogue with senior adults in their local communities to start self-directed learning organizations. Furthermore, Christian colleges and universities should utilize the wealth of experience and knowledge of the older adult learners within their traditional framework. The experience and knowledge of these learners can lend itself well to guest lecturing in the classroom, consulting on administration, providing clerical assistance, and participating in alumnae activities and fund raising. In relation to this, further study needs to address the dynamics of the partnership of a structured organization and a self-directed learning organization.

### Self-Directed Learning

#### Self-Directed Learning and Learning Projects

Context influences self-directed learning projects.

The participants engage in many self-directed learning projects. This supports the findings in the literature that show adults invest time and energy in a wide variety of learning projects through self-directed means (Candy, 1991; Contessore & Contessore, 199; Lamdin & Fugate, 1997; Penland, 1977; Tough, 1971). However, there are some striking differences between the learning projects of the

participants of this study and the learning projects of adults as reported through previous studies.

Lamdin and Fugate's 1997 Elderlearning Survey is one of the most extensive works to date on the self-directed learning projects for older learners. Their findings show that music, art, dance, arts-related crafts, travel, literature, drama, and the humanities were identified by nearly half of all the participants as areas that describe their significant learning projects. Philosophy, religion, and self-actualization kinds of learning projects were identified by 33% of the participants' as significant learning projects, and 24% of the participants indicated that writing, journalism, and journal keeping were significant learning projects.

The self-directed learning projects of the participants of this study show a different picture. All of the participants actively engage in learning projects that are philosophy and religion related. Furthermore, nearly 64% of the participants engage in writing projects. The participants of this study are similar in demographic profile to the participants in the Lamdin and Fugate study. As with the participants in the Elderlearning Survey, the participants of this study (a) are all Caucasian (94% of the Elderlearning participants are Caucasian); (b) most are

married; (c) range in age from 65 to late 80s; (d) for the most part are middle income; and (e) more than 80% have some college hours or a degree. Given these similarities, why are there differences in the focus of their learning projects?

Nearly all of the participants of this study are a part of a homogenous group that has a common religious heritage and a common formal educational heritage. Almost half of the participants were engaged at some level in full-time service to the Church of the Nazarene for their careers. Furthermore, the activity of service and continual learning through informal learning opportunities afforded through their community of faith during their early and middle adulthood years helped to guide their focus of interest in religion and philosophy. These significant influences have impacted the self-directed learning projects of the participants as older adults. They clearly link much of their learning interests and many of their learning projects to the very broad philosophical concept of Christian responsibility. Therefore, the context of their experiences has had a bearing on self-directed learning projects. Although the participants do engage in other kinds of self-directed learning projects as indicated

by the Elderlearning Survey, the emphasis is different due to the context of their lives.

### Self-Directed Learning and Learning Resources

Developing strong reading skills is central to self-directed learning and to the learning how to learn process; consequently, it prepares people for the unknown future.

The participants are great readers. They love to read. They read a multitude of printed materials including newspapers, journals, news magazines, pamphlets, church publications, and books. The topics they read are just as various as their sources. They enjoy biographies, autobiographies, popular fiction, Christian fiction, history, politics, philosophy, religion, and health and nutrition. Their reliance on reading as a primary learning resource reflects the findings of other studies of older adult learners (Lamdin & Fugate, 1997; Ngandu, 1980).

Lamdin and Fugate (1997) report that 34% of the participants in the Elderlearning Survey indicated that television is a main source of learning while only one participant in this study identified television as a means to learn. Therefore, while other kinds of media are used by the older learners for learning, the print medium remains central.

The emphasis on reading for older adults that are indicated in the results of the surveys done through informal learning groups such as the Elderhostel Institutes may be a result of the higher levels of education of people who typically choose to participate (Clark & Heller, 1997; Lamdin & Fugate, 1997; Merriam & Cafferella, 1999; Ngandu, 1980). A report, "Literacy of Older Adults", which was conducted by the U.S. Education Department's National Center for Education Statistics (1997), indicates that the reading literacy levels of older adults demonstrated limited prose skills. "Seventy-one percent of older adults, or 28 million individuals, demonstrated limited prose skills, performing in the two lowest levels of prose literacy defined in the survey. . . .Regardless of age group, literacy proficiencies tend to increase as level of education increases" (Schroeder, 1997, p. 76). This is supported by further studies of reading abilities and levels of education within a poor inner city African-American community (Albert & Teressi, 1999).

However, for older adults who have had the opportunity for higher levels of education and continue to learn and to grow during senior adulthood, reading becomes an important tool for continuous learning (Lamdin & Fugate, 1997; Schroeder, 1997). Consequently, many older learners are

skilled readers (Zabruckey & Moore, 1999). Research shows that engaging in a diversity of reading practices is indicative of reading maturity and has important consequences in terms of literacy abilities (Smith, 1996). The participants not only were raised with an emphasis on reading, but their formal background comes out of the Idealism paradigm where reading, critical thinking, reflection, and the search for truth are key concepts. Indeed, many of the participants specifically link reading to becoming mature as learners.

I just see that if you have a mind, you need to be developing it at all times. You need to be reading. You need to be replenishing the well springs of the mind and the heart. . . .You will never know everything, understand everything. Reading good books always brings a great appreciation for truth and good ideas. To me reading, not only do I like to do it, but I need to do it. . . . I used to tell my students, you don't learn how to give a speech with 10 minutes of preparation. . . .The ideas you have for public speaking come from a life time of study, contemplation of what you have read, and reflection. I had a whole unit on the great speakers of history and what were their reading habits. Everyone of them was a prolific reader, everyone of them without exception. (72-year-old man)

In today's culture of instant gratification, fast food, and sound bites, it is remarkable that many in this generation remain steadfast in their belief in the importance of the written word. By continuing to be readers, they are able to apply and to hone their reading skills. This has

allowed them to be lifelong learners and to stay mentally alert.

### Self-directed Learning and Technology

Technology is impacting self-directed learning for those who have access.

A majority of the participants utilize technology through computer usage in their self-directed learning projects. Many of the participants are proficient in finding pertinent information through different websites on the Internet. They use various kinds of software for word processing and household record keeping. Most importantly, they find the availability of electronic mail (e-mail) an efficient and effective way to keep connected with family and friends. Having direct and immediate access to computer technologies has allowed most of the participants to become computer literate and to utilize the technology in their self-directed learning projects. As a result, many of the participants have high computer efficacy.

There are, however, other populations who are not as fortunate as most of the participants. If one were to believe the advertisements and media concerning computer usage, one would think that everyone of all ages from all countries, all races, and all socio-economic levels, were actively engaged in maneuvering through the World Wide Web,

buying merchandise through e-commerce, and developing meaningful relationships through chat rooms. For a part of the population, that picture is true. If one is White, is well educated, is living in an urban area, and has at least a middle income, there is a strong possibility of being part of the global network and global economy (Cody, Dunn, Hoppin, & Wendt, 1999; Ghost Bear, 2001; MacNeil, 2001; Spencer, 2000). However, if one does not fit that profile, there is also the possibility of falling into what is being called the Digital Divide (Ghost Bear, 2001; MacNeil, 2001).

The most significant factors that increase the computer haves from the computer have nots in the Digital Divide are race, education, and income (Ghost Bear, 2001; MacNeil, 2001). A 2000 report from the U. S. Department of Education reported that while access to the Internet grew dramatically from 1998 to 2000 and access to under-served rural households increased 75% during that period, access to African-American households and Hispanic households actually decreased. Furthermore, only one in five of homes with less than \$15,000 yearly income have a computer. Lastly, those with higher levels of education are more likely to own a home computer (cited in MacNeil, 2001). The elderly, who often fit in many of the above categories,



represent another large group of computer have nots (Cody et al., 1999).

There are some who question whether or not the Digital Divide exists purely from economic and socio-economic disparities. They argue that some choose not to have a computer due a lack of perceived need of having access to a computer (Russell, 1998). Indeed, those participants who did not have a computer remarked that they did not see the sense of owning one. Consequently, the debate on the Digital Divide will be a continuous one because of the speed of growth and of change within the information technology industry and its impact on commerce and education.

Regardless to the reasons of computer ownership, access remains key for self-directed learning projects. "Successful use of new technologies. . . can best be achieved if individuals have access to computers and hardware, have access to the Internet, and are trained to use the technologies" (Cody et al., 1999, p. 270). Most importantly, computer literacy for older adult learners results in "more positive attitudes toward aging, higher levels of perceived social support, and higher levels of connectivity" (p.269). The extent that most of the

participants utilize their computers supports these findings.

### Recommendations for Self-Directed Learning

Self-directed learning will continue to be important to the field of adult learning. From the initial studies of Tough (1971) to the more recent studies such as that by Lamdin & Fugate (1997), self-directed learning has been found to be an important construct in adult learning. This study, as well, has implications for further considerations and study for self-directed learning for older adults.

For program development, adult education agencies need to continue to stress adult literacy programs. Adult literacy studies overwhelming show the importance of reading skills. Adult education agencies should provide more opportunities for religious and spiritual learning activities for older adult learners. Consideration should be given to offering seminars, workshops, and discussion groups that would engage older adult learners in an exploration of their spirituality. Also, colleges and universities can provide access and training for older adults in computer usage. These institutions should consider donating outdated but usable computer hardware to organizations serving seniors, providing training, and allowing seniors access to computer labs and Internet

connections. Many of these activities could be conducted for service projects by clubs and other student organizations.

As the population of adults ages and the adults born since 1946 become senior adults, new opportunities will be available to understand self-directed learning for older adults. Just as the current population of senior adults view retirement as time for further learning and growing, so, too, will the coming generation of senior adults view retirement as a time to continue to learn, to grow, and to mature. Therefore, it is critical that adult educators continue to explore self-directed learning and senior adults. Since context appears to have a bearing on self-directed learning projects, further study is warranted that has a focus on other types of contextual learning such as race, ethnicity, social class, and political action groups. The question of the centrality of the print medium for other groups of self-directed older adult learners such as Native Americans, African-Americans, or older learners with disabilities needs to be explored. With the infusion of technology into daily lives, the issue of technology helping older adults or using older adults should be considered. Closely connected with this problem is determining how older adults use technology and how older

adults use the World Wide Web for information, buying, and connecting with other people.

## Adult Learning

### Learning How To Learn

Many older adult have become lifelong learners by effectively learning how to learn.

The participants are skilled learners. Their extensive formal background has provided a strong foundation in reading and critical thinking and a curiosity about life. Furthermore, they are self-directed learners. They can identify learning that is best achieved in groups and learning that is best achieved on an independent basis.

Smith (1982) proposes two basic critical skills are needed for effective learning how to learn. These are active listening and active reading. Both of these skills require the learner to be fully engaged in analyzing and interpreting both the spoken and written word. Through their learning interest groups at ASP and their other informal learning groups within their community of faith, the participants are continually challenged to interpret meaning and to weigh the relevance of the messages to their own lives. Through their readings, they have developed active reading skills that help them to identify central themes of the written materials, the supporting main ideas,

and the value of the piece according to their own purposes and needs. Indeed, one of the standard featured articles in the ASP monthly newsletter is a book review written by one of the members. Often the participants engage in book discussions with one another, and it is not unusual for them to recommend books to one another. As one 73 year-old man said, "People are always trying to pass off books to me, and I say, 'Look. I've got a whole list of books I'm reading'".

The participants do not fully rely on only one method or one way of learning. Neither do they use only one avenue to gather the information they may need. Rather, they use a variety of learning resources. They utilize the written word, technology, hands-on experience, and human resources. Through these learning processes, the participants have learned new skills such as how to use a "mouse" for the computer, learning to maneuver through the windows applications on the computer, utilizing word processing skills, doing Internet searches, conducting genealogy research, and producing arts and crafts. Furthermore, they have honed other skills such as writing and artistic abilities.

Equally important, the participants understand themselves as learners. They recognize that their need to

know is one of immediate application and that many of their learning interests are evolving to reflect issues that impact their everyday living needs and concerns (Knowles, 1975). This is reflected in the learning topics of interest that are identified by the members of ASP. These include retirement centers, health and nutrition, and Social Security issues. Also, they recognize that physical problems can be a challenge to their learning. Dimming eyesight, poor hearing, and muscles that tire quickly require them to adjust to different methods of learning. One 80-year-old man found that the use of a lap-top computer in an easy chair eased the discomfort he found sitting at a desk. Another 80-year-old woman who cannot read books as much as she would like due to poor eyesight has increased her writing production. Most importantly, the participants continue to be curious about life and are deeply committed to continuous learning.

Consequently, the participants reflect the basic characteristics of learners who successfully learn how to learn. These characteristics include deciding when and where to learn, enhancing necessary skills, being open to change, selecting the mode of learning, and applying flexibility (Smith, 1982). Ageism often results in a picture of older adults who are too rigid or too unwilling

to learn new things or be open to new opportunities. For self-directed older adult learners such as these participants, who purposefully and diligently pursue new learning opportunities, that biased picture does not hold true.

#### Recommendations for Learning How To Learn

Much of the literature concerning learning how to learn has its focus on the learning processes in formal educational experiences for all ages and the ongoing continuing educational experiences of adults through professional development and training (Smith, 1982, 1983, 1990). Little attention, however, is given to older adults learning how to learn. There is much to gain from studying skilled older adult learners who continue to learn how to learn in senior adulthood. A critical question is whether or not there is a connection between a thirst for learning and learning how to learn as reflected in the Idealism paradigm with its emphasis on critical thinking and reflection. Older adult learners rely heavily on the print medium, and as a result, many older adult learners are skilled readers. Smith (1982) identifies active reading as one of the crucial skills in learning to learn. Therefore, the issue of whether or not the new technology moves us

away from in-depth reading and thus diminishes a vital skill for learning how to learn is important.

### Learning Strategies and ATLAS

The ATLAS is an effective tool to help older adults identify their learning strategies.

The participants have spent many years in formal learning situations. Indeed, many of the participants have chosen professions where they structured learning environments and taught in formal learning situations.

Therefore for the participants like many older adults, it is relatively easy to identify these kinds of experiences as "learning." The structure of the learning environment with a teacher, a syllabus, and a specific evaluating system gives the learning a definition and a parameter.

However, there are other kinds of adult learning that has validity as well. This learning happens on an every-day basis and is not limited to a time or physical structure.

This learning is referred to as real-life or real-world learning (Fellenz & Conti, 1989). Real-life or real-world learning results in practical or everyday knowledge. For older adult learners who do not tend to engage in formal learning situations as senior adults (Lamdin & Fugate, 1997), it is important for their own learning efficacy to recognize the validity of their everyday, life-skill,



living-task learning. However, often older adults have difficulty in recognizing every day learning as "real learning" (Fellenz & Conti, 1989, Knowles, 1975; Lamdin & Fugate, 1997; Lindeman, 1926).

One way to help older adults to recognize their real-life learning is to identify their personal learning strategies. A knowledge of learning strategies provides meaning for understanding of how one goes about completing a learning project (Conti & Kolody, 1999). Furthermore, learning strategies influences self-directed learning projects. By understanding and identifying personal learning strategies, older adults learners can be empowered to fully embrace their every-day, self-directed learning projects as credible learning experiences (Conti & Kolody, 1999; Fellenz & Conti, 1989).

ATLAS proved to be an effective tool for the participants to identify their learning strategies. The ease of administration and the clearly defined descriptions of each of the profiles enabled almost of all of the participants to quickly affirm that their identified learning strategies did reflect the learning strategy profile. Most importantly, almost all of the participants were able to articulate their everyday learning projects in terms as defined by ATLAS. Use of the computer, changing

the blades on the lawn mower, making decisions about moving to retirement centers, and planning trips are examples of the kinds of everyday, real-life learning experiences that the participants used when describing learning projects that reflected their personal learning strategies. By reflecting on these projects in terms of their identified learning strategies from ATLAS, the participants were able to better understand their own learning processes.

#### Recommendations for ATLAS

ATLAS is a relatively new instrument in the field of adult learning. However, it is gaining popularity for its validity, reliability, and ease of administration (Conti & Kolody, 1999; Ghost Bear, 2001; James, 2000; Spencer, 2000; Williard, 2000). For older adult learners, the authors of ATLAS should consider the following. The term "new" in the first question often was troublesome for older adults.

Therefore, a review of the language for the initial question for older adult learners is warranted.

Additionally, the colors of some of the cards were difficult for older adults to distinguish. The authors should consider using numbers or letters for card identification rather than colors. For the Academy of Senior Professionals, the leaders should consider one of their monthly meetings for learning about learning

strategies. The easy administered ATLAS could help the members to understand more fully the importance of their everyday learning and how their personal learning strategies impacts their learning projects.

Further study aimed at understanding learning strategies for older adults is warranted as well. One question that should be addressed is whether or not the language of the initial question of the ATLAS inventory hinders the responses of older adult learners. Another issue is whether or not personal learning strategies influence the transition of the working adult into retirement. A related question is how learning strategies influence participation in informal learning groups for older learners.

#### Gender and Adult Learning

Gender effects the self-directed learning of older adult learners.

This study was presented with several unique factors that are not often found in other studies concerning adult learning of older adults. One of these factors was the self-directed nature of the learning organization, the Academy of Senior Professionals. Indeed, there are only a few comparable self-directed senior adult learning organizations like ASP. Another unique aspect of ASP was

that members are represented nearly equally by men and women. Typically, in learning organizations for older adults, there are more women than men who tend to participate (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Lamdin & Fugate, 1997). Women represent one of the largest groups participating in adult learning opportunities (Hayes & Flannery, 2000). Consequently, due to the availability of both genders for this study, a unique glimpse was afforded in understanding how gender effects learning for older adults. There was found to be learning similarities and learning differences between older adult women participants and the older adult men participants.

The learning patterns of the self-directed learning projects of the women participants support the limited literature on the issue of gender and older adult learners that indicate that the centrality of relationships and identity and intimacy issues are important for learning for women (Caffarella, 1996; Gilligan, 1982; Hayes & Flannery, 2000). For example, the women participants tend to write on issues that deal more with family, home, friends, and community, and they tend to use human resources more than the men participants. Furthermore, more women participants more than men participants tend to share their writings in a small group setting. This supports the literature that

indicates that collaborative learning in a supportive learning environment is important for women learners (Caffarella, 1996). The women participants tend to speak more in comfortable learning environments that are less formal. Their verbal and nonverbal communication style sets an atmosphere that is supportive of and encouraging of their learning efforts.

The self-directed learning patterns of the men participants do not support some of the findings in the literature concerning gender and adult learners (Hiemstra, 1993). Hiemstra (1993) found that older women engaged in more learning activities, were more self-directed, and appeared to have greater life satisfaction than men.

Furthermore, he found that more women than men were likely to use reading and travel as educational resources.

Hiemstra's findings in these issues did not represent the male participants of this study, for in these issues there did not appear to be differences. The men participants, like the women participants, use many of the same kinds of resources for learning. Most importantly, both men and women participants clearly articulated the importance of lifelong learning to their own intellectual and spiritual well being.

The differences and similarities of the genders in the learning patterns within the Academy of Senior Professionals are more difficult to define. At initial glance, it would appear that the men dominate the structure because the president and program chairman, both who have central responsibilities for the luncheon/lecture meeting, are both men. However, this is a relatively new development. Although the original founder of ASP was a man, the first ASP president was a woman. Furthermore, women have nearly an equal representation as committee leaders, committee participants, and featured writers for the monthly ASP newsletter. However, there were two distinct gender related influences. First, the women participants set the tone for the monthly lecture meeting. The women decorate the tables, a woman plays the piano, and another woman, the co-membership chairman, serves as a hospitality hostess as she directs the members to the buffet. Secondly, only men were guest speakers at the meeting. There were two meetings where women presented musical performances, but there were no women speakers.

Although there were some differences between the male and female participants in the self-directed learning projects in and outside of ASP, the similarities of their learning patterns have the most meaning. All of the

participants are lifelong learners, who have a variety of learning interests, and who have successfully learned how to learn in order to stay mentally alert.

#### Recommendations for Adult Learning and Gender

The members of the Academy of Senior Professionals are a capable and an intellectual group with skills in research and writing. This unique self-directed learning organization is an ideal place to investigate the issue of gender and learning for older adults. Therefore, the members of ASP should consider conducting a self-study related to this issue. The literature base concerning older adults and especially older women as learners is limited (Hayes & Flannery, 2000). Therefore, ASP has the potential to further advance the knowledge base in this area.

Likewise, other research concerning gender and learning is needed. One question is whether or not pre-retirement activities and responsibilities influence self-directed learning for women as older adults. Another issue is why some older adult women choose to participate in small group learning and others do not. Closely connected to this issue is determining whether or not the language of an informal learning group hinders or helps the learning of older women.

## Adult Learning and Social Learning

Communities of faith are communities of learning and practice; consequently, communities of faith have implications for adult education and adult learning.

A community can be broadly defined as a group of people who are linked together through a system of commonalities that can include common experiences, common beliefs, common relationships, common leadership, and a common organizational structure (Crow & Lively, 2000). Consequently, there are many kinds of communities. A community of faith is people who have joined together based on a common faith-based system of beliefs. Within their communities of faith, they learn what it means to be a full-functioning member of their community. Therefore, it becomes a community of practice. A community of practice as a learning organization,

The concept of community of practice is an intrinsic condition for the existence of knowledge, not least because it provides the interpretive support necessary for making sense of its heritage. Thus, participation in the cultural practice in which any knowledge exists in an epistemological principle of learning. (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 98)

Most of the participants have been involved in their community of faith for many years. They have given countless hours of service to their community through teaching, preaching, serving on church boards,



participating in musical activities, and a host of other kinds of activities that are a vital part of the life of their community. Equally important, they have spent countless hours in informal learning situations through Sunday School, sermons and lectures, Bible studies, and special church meetings with invited guest speakers.

Their community of faith exists for specific purposes. These core values include worship, evangelism, compassionate ministries, and building of community. Their community of faith has a distinct culture. It has its own vernacular, its own artifacts, its own customs, and its own stories. Mentioning Uncle Buddy (a Nazarene evangelist), entire sanctification (a central theological construct to holiness), general assembly (an international meeting of the general church membership), the Nazarene grapevine (the informal but effective method of communication), mixed bathing (one of the restrictions in the rigid standards of conduct), and the Herald (a monthly church publication) to the participants would most likely lead to smiles, nods, and even laughter.

Equally important, their community of faith includes a deep commitment to education. The budget of each local church includes a percentage that is designated for the Nazarene college or university in their educational zone.

With this collective support for more than 100 years, the colleges and universities of the Church of the Nazarene have continued to survive and thrive.

Within a community of practice there are cycles of learning that lead towards mastery (Lave & Wenger, 1991). However, within a community of faith, these cycles maybe more difficult to define. Indeed, the process of become a Christian is a long transformation; "it requires life-long learning, observation, and service" (Alexander, 1998, p. 33).

#### Recommendations for Social Learning

The community of faith of the participants is but one of a host of many other such communities of faith and purpose. Consequently, for adult education and adult learning, understanding how adults learn within those communities is important. Learning how people in their community of faith perceive the community to be a community of practice is a key issue. Related to this is understanding how someone becomes a "Master" in a community of faith and if the people who are perceived to be "Masters" in their community of faith perceive themselves the same way. Additional questions should center on whether or not there are differences in the practices and learning of a small community of faith (a small church) as

opposed to a larger community of faith (a large church or a city with several similar churches) as well in social action groups or movements that have a basis within the community of faith, such as the Rainbow Coalition or the Civil Rights movement.

### Adult Learning and Perspective Transformation

Perspective transformation continues to be a part of the learning process for self-directed older adult learners through critical reflection of life experiences.

Many of the participants through their readings, journaling, and reflection of life events have experienced what Mezirow (1990, 1991, 2000) has defined as perspective transformation. The participants' changes in their understandings of their self-concepts, stage of life, and worldviews supports the works of Mezirow (1990, 1991, 2000) and Brookfield (1995b) that perspective transformation is a result of critical reflection. Furthermore, the participants' understandings reflect the basic premise of perspective transformation that a change in perspective can alter basic assumptions and can also confirm or clarify basic assumptions (Mezirow, 1990, 1991, 2000).

There were, however, characteristics of the participants' perspective transform that do not necessarily support some of the assumptions of Mezirow's argument. The

first phase and catalyst of Mezirow's perspective transformation is a disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 1990). This is an acute internal or external crisis that is the springboard for perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1990). For some of the participants, a specific critical incident did trigger perspective transformation. The death of a spouse, the need to change living arrangements, and retirement caused some of the participants to make an action for change. For others, however, the changes in perspective were more subtle and more gradual due to an awakening rather than a response to a specific event. It must be noted, however, that the process of perspective transformation was not new to the participants at the occurrence of the specific disorienting dilemma. The participants' critical reflections were a continuation of a lifetime of transformative learning.

Furthermore, Mezirow argues that the result of perspective transformation leads to some kind of action. This was true for some of the participants. They made changes in the living arrangements, they learned new skills, and they expressed themselves through writing and other creative works. However, for some, their understandings led to an intrinsic new view of themselves within their community of faith or their theological

assumptions. This learning did not necessarily result in acting differently within that community; rather, it was a clarification of the meaning of their participation and activity. Likewise, a change in theological understandings may or may not impact their outward activity. It is an inward manifestation of spirituality and relationship with their Creator.

Perhaps for older adults the most meaningful aspect of perspective transformation is the development of wisdom through critical reflection. Erikson (1963) viewed senior adulthood as a period when the individual reflects back on life with its problems, joys, triumphs, and disappointments, and the person integrates these memories and experiences into meaningful understandings and beliefs about their self and their world. This wisdom is:

The fruit of life that has found a basis for self-acceptance and for confirming one's life as worthwhile. It does not mean perfection; it does not mean the absence of regrets. It does mean having found a way to make one's life count in caring for--and hopefully enhancing--the ongoing flow of life. (Fowler, 1984, p. 49)

Wisdom does not happen automatically with age. Age does not make a sage (Leder, 2000). "Elder wisdom does not follow automatically from long life. We have all known those who have grown not more enlightened, but more inflexible with years. For age to produce a sage, a

process of spiritual seasoning is needed" (p. 39). This spiritual seasoning for the participants is a result of an understanding for ongoing critical reflection. One of the participants, an 80-year-old man, describes the on-going process of critical reflection this way:

I had a student who was with me or more less at the beginning of my teaching. She said, "You know what I remember most about your class?", and I was trying to think of what phenomenal thing I had said. She said, "I remember your shelf in the corner." I used to tell them they had to build a shelf in the corner, and when they ran across anything they couldn't understand or fit into life, they would put it on the shelf in the corner. One of the great experiences of life was to take it down off the shelf and fit it into life.

When asked if he still had anything on his shelf in the corner, he laughed and said, "Oh, yes! Things like why do bad things happen, and so forth." Critical reflection through memoirs, journals, autobiographies, discussion groups, traveling, fine arts, and reading has enabled many of the participants to answer some of their questions on their shelves in the corner and become sages.

#### Recommendations for Perspective Transformation

Mezirow's concept of perspective transformation is becoming a key understanding of how adults learn (Taylor, 1997). Therefore, like self-directed learning, perspective transformation will continue to be a focus of research in

adult learning. Further considerations should include questioning whether perspective transformation is a new process or whether it has existed with other names and definitions. Closely related to this is understanding perspective transformation as reflected in religious, social, and political embraces or conversions. Also, identifying the possible relationship in the learning processes between learning how to learn and perspective transformation should be considered.

#### A Tree Grows in Bethany

A tree does grow in Bethany. Its roots have long been established in the rich, fertile soil of its community of faith. The structure of the tree has been made strong through years of growth through formal and informal learning situations. The seeds, leaves, and buds are abundant, just as the self-directed learning projects are abundant. Careful nurturing, watering, feeding, and pruning through critical reflection of their learning and their involvement in their community of faith results in a tree that remains green and vital. The productivity of the growing and aging of this learning tree has provided a harvest and a legacy.

## The Harvest of Growing, Learning, and Aging

Just as it takes many successful growing seasons to establish a healthy tree, so, too, does a successful learning tree require many growing seasons of learning. The Adult Higher Education Alliance (2000) has identified four learning behaviors as goals for all adult learners. These include that adults learners should become self-directed learners, collaborative learners, self-aware learners, and lifelong learners. These, they argue, are necessary for learning for adults. Clearly, the ASP members are examples of these goals. Ultimately these learning patterns and behaviors, articulated by the Adult Higher Education Alliance and reflected by the participants, contribute to successful aging.

The term successful aging seems paradoxical (Glover, 1998). Aging may bring to mind decline, disability, loss, and ultimately death. However, like a tree that continues to age but also to grow and to mature, gerontologists argue that there are some factors that enable people to successfully age as vital, productive, creative, and independent individuals (Berkman, 2000; Fisher & Specht, 1999; Ford, Huag, Strange, Gaines, Meeks & Murrell, 2000; Noelker, & Jones, 2000; Glover, 1998; Leder, 2000; Rowe &



Kahn, 1998; Samuelson, 1999). One of the critical factors for successful aging is education and lifelong learning.

Education was the strongest predictor of sustained mental function. People with more years of schooling are more likely to maintain high cognitive function. The continuing impact of education. . . . Education in early life may have a direct beneficial effect on brain circuitry, which in turn enables the maintenance of cognitive function in old age. . . . Education may set a pattern of intellectual activities--reading, chess, crossword puzzles, and the like --and this lifelong exercise of cognitive function serves to maintain it.

(Rowe & Kahn, 1998, p. 133)

The participants clearly understand the importance of lifelong learning to their own personal health and well being. The emphasis that the participants place on lifelong learning supports the argument that a solid educational background and lifelong learning contributes to successful aging.

More importantly, the participants have shown that lifelong learning results in zestful aging. Zestful aging is aging that is done with a keen relish and enjoyment of life. Through an active curiosity about life and deliberately seeking out new learning experiences, older adult learners can continue to enjoy life with a richness of purpose and productivity. Hence, they become zestful-agers. Zestful-agers have a critical awareness of their stage of life; indeed, zestful aging does not mean that

zestful-agers do not face emotional, physical, and spiritual challenges and crisis. However, zestful-agers find ways to address these problems. Trethewey (1997) found that zestful living was reflected in older adult women who participate in lifelong fitness through water aerobics.

[They] displayed a great enjoyment of life. Their mannerisms and enthusiasm. . .reflected this. They enjoy traveling, learning new things, being active in the community, socializing at the senior citizens' center or at the exercise classes, and just getting out and staying active. (p. 99-100)

Zestful aging results in a courage and a realistic optimism about the potential to keep on learning and to keep on growing. Zestful-agers are deeply committed to staying current and to looking forward. Zestful-agers are not intimidated by their stage of life; rather, they embrace life with a vitality and an eagerness. Equally important, the successful and zestful-ager leaves a legacy for others to follow. This is a legacy that reveals a picture and a pattern of what a learning tree should be.

#### The Legacy of Learning, Growing, and Aging

It was one o'clock in the morning. Even for that time of day, the streets were unusually quiet. The sudden ice and snow storm made the roads slippery, and it was difficult driving. The four people traveling in the van

through the dark, cold streets sat in silence and were lost in their own thoughts of shock and disbelief. They had just left the hospital, and now they were returning home. How could this have happened? How could he be dead? He was so active, so vital. It seemed an impossibility.

Indeed, in the days to come, his shocked friends and neighbors, too, could not believe that he had died. "Why," they said, "We just talked with him at the Academy of Senior Professionals on Monday, just two days ago. He was joking and laughing that great laugh of his." Some remembered being at a Sunday School party with him on that very same Monday evening. Others said, "We saw him at the Association of Retired Ministers on Tuesday, just yesterday. He prayed the final prayer, and it was like he prayed heaven down." Up until the day he died, he was actively involved with his community of faith.

As his family gathered, they began to build a picture of his last few days. Being a Navigator, he had a room in his house designated as his home office. In his office was a desk, a computer, a typewriter, bookcases, a television, a VCR, and a couch. On his desk was the latest newsletter from ASP, e-mails that he had printed off, notes from his pastor's previous Sunday sermon that he was going to mail to his daughter-in-law, and printed materials that he had

downloaded from different websites that he was going to send to his sister for her enjoyment. There was a to-do list that included calling a friend to find out how to do new applications with his word processing software. His desk calendar indicated that he was due to serve as a docent at the Governor's mansion on an upcoming Saturday. Also, he had penciled in that he would be preaching at a local church within the next few weeks. His bookshelves were crammed full of Bibles, theology books, historical novels, popular fiction, and Bethany Peniel College annuals. On his wall was his newly signed 2001 Native American Artist calendar. Each year he went to a local Native American art gallery to buy a calendar and have the artists sign their particular months. Beside his couch in his office was a black three-ring binder that contained memoirs that he had been writing. He had written several vignettes about his experiences in World War II and his early life as a Nazarene pastor. Inside the cover of the notebook was a list of topics and life experiences that he was planning on writing. Beside his memoir notebook was a manila file folder titled, "Canada Trip 2001." He was beginning to plan for a summer vacation, and he was identifying places along the route to visit, places where he had never been or things he had never seen.

On his last day, he helped to trim the Christmas tree, made hot chocolate for his grandchildren who were playing in the snow in his backyard, and he had his favorite meal, spaghetti. Then in the evening as was his routine he lay down on the couch in his office to watch his favorite television programs on The History Channel. In his office, surrounded by his self-directed learning projects, he quietly and peacefully died.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1822) wrote, "A creation of a thousand forests is in one acorn". The acorn from the tree is the tree's legacy for future generations. It is the promise that growing will continue. This older learner leaves a legacy for other learning forests as well.

Stay curious.

Keep active.

Education is to be valued.

Learning is to be pursued.

The community of faith is vital.

Faith is central.

He was 78 years at his passing. He was one of the participants of this study. He was a zestful-ager. He was forever green.

His name was George Cargill.

I called him Dad. . .

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APPENDIX

GLOSSARY

ASSESSING THE LEARNING STRATEGIES OF ADULTS (ATLAS)

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

FORM:

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD



## GLOSSARY

Aging: The gradual decline in bodily functions, cognitive functioning, and increased incidence of disease or infirmity.

Bethany Peniel College: One of eight four year fine-arts colleges affiliated with the Church of the Nazarene. It is located in Bethany, Oklahoma, and it is now known as Southern Nazarene University.

Church of the Nazarene: A national and international Christian denomination founded at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Its roots come from the Methodist denomination and from the holiness revival movement of the late 1900s.

Community of faith: A common term used to describe a group of people who join together based on common faith commitments.

Critical reflection: A process by which the adult learns to become aware of and to evaluate [personal] experience (Brookfield, 1988).

Learning: "A change of state of the human being that is remembered and that makes possible a corresponding change in the individual's behavior in a given type of situation . . . . [It] is brought about by one or more experiences that are either the same as or that somehow represent the

situation in which the newly acquired behavior is exhibited" (Gagne, 1984, p. 377).

Learning Patterns: A combination of qualities, acts, or tendencies forming a characteristic arrangement for learning.

Learning Projects: Deliberate learning episodes such as gaining certain skills or knowledge, gaining self-insight, performing a new sport or hobby, playing a musical instrument, becoming physically fit, and increasing reading and speaking abilities. "The implementation stage for each of these examples would probably involves a series of episodes. . .in which the person's major intention was to gain and retain certain knowledge, skill, or other mental and physical changes" (Tough, 1982, p.64).

Learning Strategies: The external behaviors developed by an individual through experience with learning which the learner "elects to use in order to accomplish a learning task" (Fellenz & Conti, 1989, p. 7).

Lifelong Learning: A lifelong process of discovering what is not known (Knowles, 1970).

Holiness: A theological precept born out of the teachings of John Wesley. Central is the belief that in addition to the forgiveness of sins (salvation), one must experience a purifying of the heart (sanctification) (Smith, 1962).

Nazarene: A person who is a member or attends the services and the activities provided by the Church of the Nazarene.

## ASSESSING THE LEARNING STRATEGIES OF ADULTS (ATLAS)

### The Assessing The Learning Strategies of Adults

(ATLAS) was used as a mechanism for talking about the ways ASP members go about attacking new learning projects. This easy to administer inventory quickly identified the respondents' learning strategy profiles. ATLAS is an instrument that provides profiles and information concerning personal learning strategies.

The ATLAS uses a flow-chart design. Items are printed on 5.5" x 11" pages of colored card stock. Sentence stems, which are in the top box on the page, lead to options in other boxes that complete the stem. Connecting arrows direct the respondent to the options. Each option leads the respondent to proceed to another colored page or to the concluding profile page that provides information about the respondent's correct group placement as a Navigator, Problem Solver, or Engager. Each profile has a description of the learning strategy characteristics and suggestions for conducting learning activities that complement the learning strategy profile. The following are descriptions and characteristics for the three learning strategy profiles:

1. Navigators are focused learners who chart a course for learning and follow it. Subgroup 1 likes to use human resources while Subgroup 2 is more

concerned with the organization of the material into meaningful patterns. The characteristics of Navigators are they focus on the learning process that is external to them by relying heavily on planning and monitoring the learning task, on identifying resources, on the critical use of resources.

2. Problem Solvers are learners who rely heavily on all the strategies in the area of critical thinking. Subgroup 1 likes to plan for the best way to proceed with the learning task while Subgroup 2 is more concerned with assuring that they use the most appropriate resources for the learning task. Problem Solvers like to test assumptions, generate alternatives, practice conditional acceptance, and use many external aids and resources.
3. Engagers are passionate learners who love to learn, learn with feeling, and learn best when actively engaged in a meaningful manner. Subgroup 1 likes to use human resources while Subgroup 2 favors reflecting upon the results of the learning. Engagers must have an internal sense of the importance of the learning to them personally before getting involved in the learning. Once confident of the learning, likes to maintain a focus on the material to be studied. (Conti & Kolody, 1999, pp. 4-5)

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

To understand how each person learns and to gain information about their learning projects and learning attitudes, participants were asked the following types of questions in a conversational format:

1. Describe what you are learning or one of your learning interests in terms [ATLAS] we just talked about.
2. What is your background in the Nazarene church?
3. What motivated you to go to college?
4. Tell me about ASP.
5. Describe the activities you have been a part of in ASP.
6. How do you like to spend your time?
7. What are you currently reading or working on now?
8. What is something you have learned since retirement?
9. What does it mean to be a lifelong learner?

**Oklahoma State University  
Institutional Review Board**

**Protocol Expires: 6/19/01**

**Date:** Monday, June 19, 2000

**IRB Application No:** ED00271

**Proposal Title:** A DESCRIPTION OF THE LEARNING PATTERNS OF THE ACADEMY OF SENIOR PROFESSIONALS IN BETHANY, OKLAHOMA: A CASE STUDY

**Principal Investigator(s):**

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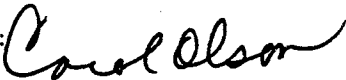
Gary Conti  
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**Reviewed and Processed as:** Exempt

**Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s):** Approved

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**Signature:**



**Carol Olson, Director of University Research Compliance**

**Monday, June 19, 2000**

**Date**

Approvals are valid for one calendar year, after which time a request for continuation must be submitted. Any modifications to the research project approved by the IRB must be submitted for approval with the advisor's signature. The IRB office MUST be notified in writing when a project is complete. Approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB. Expedited and exempt projects may be reviewed by the full Institutional Review Board.

2

VITA

SUE ANNE LIVELY

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Thesis: LEARNING, GROWING, AND AGING: LIFELONG LEARNERS  
IN THE ACADEMY OF SENIOR PROFESSIONALS IN  
BETHANY, OKLAHOMA

Major Field: Occupational and Adult Education

Biographical:

Education: Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education and Master of Arts degree in Education from Southern Nazarene University in 1973 and 1978 respectively. Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree with a major in Adult Education at Oklahoma State University in May, 2001.

Experience: Public school teacher in Texas and Oklahoma for five years; Faculty member at Southern Nazarene University for 21 years with current responsibilities in the School of Adult Studies.

Professional Membership: Council on Adult and Experiential Learning; Christian College Collation; Christian Adult Higher Education Association.