

INDEPENDENT ADULT LEARNING

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Leicester.

This research examines the nature and extent of independent adult learning. A sample of twenty-five independent learners was assembled, all of whom had achieved local or national recognition for their achievements in their respective fields of interest. Their expertise had been developed without the benefit of class attendance or participation in any other form of planned instruction.

These adults were judged to have assumed the overall responsibility for their learning. They developed evaluative procedures as these seemed appropriate, they planned intermediate and terminal learning goals, and they devised patterns of problem-solving. They were adept at using existing information sources to their advantage and created learning networks of fellow enthusiasts for the exchange of information and advice. They also showed considerable entrepreneurial and promotional skills in prompting non-enthusiasts to develop an interest in learning.

The independent learners' experiences were compared with those of a sample of ten correspondence students. It was hoped that by contrasting the correspondence students' perceptions of the institutionalised, prescriptive framework within which they worked with the independent learners' attempts to explore their fields of knowledge, the distinctive features of the latter would be thrown into even sharper relief. Although the correspondence students were separated from their tutor and fellow students, such physical separation did not imply cognitive independence. The material to be studied and the rate of its assimilation, as well as the evaluation of progress, were all the responsibility of the correspondence institution.

The method used to investigate these activities was that of the informal, semi-structured interview. These conversations were tape-recorded and then transcribed and the subjects concerned were invited to confirm the accuracy of the transcripts.

The study concludes with some suggestions as to the way in which independent adult learning might be supported by adult education agencies.

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INDEPENDENT ADULT LEARNING

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PREFACE

In a recently published review of the state of British adult education the authors remark that "most adult learning goes on outside the classroom and always will. It is such a mundane and familiar activity that it is easy to overlook how deliberately and constantly many millions of adults are seeking to learn something new" (Rogers and Groombridge 1976;58). A similar view is expressed by a Canadian researcher into adult self-teaching projects in North America, Ghana, Jamaica and New Zealand. His comparative studies prompt him to estimate that the typical adult devotes five hundred hours annually to his learning efforts and that 73 per, cent. of these are self-planned (Tough 1977;1). Despite these recognitions of the importance of non-institutionalised learning, however, adult education research tends to concern itself with the minority of adults who do actually participate in formal adult education activity, or it speculates on the best means whereby previously non-participant groups can be brought within the adult education citadel. The establishment of the Open University in 1969, the Russell report's concern to increase access to adult education for those individuals prevented from participating by personal incapacity, social deprivation or educational disadvantage, and the development of 'Second Chance' education initiatives (Hutchinson 1978) all reflect the concern of the adult education world to extend its boundaries to draw in educationally inexperienced adults.

The writer shares this concern and has himself engaged in developing new points of access to adult education through, for example, schemes

of individualised home study (Brookfield 1977, 1978), educational guidance (Brookfield 1977) and 'Return to Study' provision (Brookfield 1978). The danger which lies behind such attempts to increase participation in formal adult education is, however, that of coming to regard learning which takes place outside of adult education institutions and which is not 'enabled' or 'facilitated' by professional adult and community educators as somehow inadequate. In the understandable eagerness to broaden adult education provision for disadvantaged and non-participant groups the likelihood is that adult learning will come to be regarded as less than fully educative unless it is brought under the aegis of an adult education institution or accredited educator.

The purpose of this research is to redress any such balance which might be developing in favour of the formalisation of all adult learning through a demonstration of the extent and possible variety of non-institutionalised, independent adult learning. The independent learners in the sample surveyed were seen to adopt a number of possible learning styles, to engage in a planning of intermediate and terminal learning goals, to generate subjective and objective indices of evaluation and to devise patterns of problem solving. They were adept at using existing information sources to their advantage and created learning networks of fellow enthusiasts for the exchange of advice and information. They also showed considerable entrepreneurial and promotional skills in prompting non-enthusiasts to develop an interest in their subjects. Such activities can hardly be regarded as casual or incidental and, as the concluding chapter of the study will show, the development of precisely these independent learning skills has been declared to be the ultimate purpose of education by a number of educational psychologists and philosophers of education.

Since the emphasis of the present study is on the perceptions of the independent learners themselves, quotations from the interview transcripts have been used extensively to illustrate particular points. Aside from the methodological justification for using such quotations to validate general observations on the nature of independent learning, it is hoped that they will enable the reader of the study more closely to understand the individual fears and satisfactions of the sample members. The researcher himself came to develop a genuine admiration for the resolution, initiative and creativity exhibited by his subjects, although he was careful to detach such feelings from his analysis of transcript comment. Readers of the following pages will, perhaps, develop a similar appreciation of the trials, enthusiasms and successes of the adults whose experiences comprise this record.

CHAPTER ONE

THE NATURE OF INDEPENDENT ADULT LEARNING

The researcher into independent adult learning is likely to be bewildered by the terminological ambiguity he encounters on the first excursions into his chosen field of study. The plethora of definitional terms seems more likely to confuse than to clarify when, for example, the same act of learning (such as a prospective parent scanning the library for books on child development) can be variously described as independent learning, self-teaching, isolated learning, autodidactic activity, autonomous learning, self-directed study and informal education. Again, the single term 'Independent Learning' can be used by different writers to refer to such dissimilar activities as the completion of a closely prescribed correspondence course and an amateur botanist's daily recording of his field observations.

Faced with this terminological ambiguity it becomes incumbent on any new researcher in the field to attempt an initial tightening of his concepts and to devise a clear statement of the activities to which they refer. The purpose of this chapter is to clarify the nature of independent adult learning and to venture a definition of the cognitive and other behaviours which, it is proposed, qualify for inclusion in that category.

The Notion of Independence

As R.M. Gagne has pointed out in his discussion of learner mediation processes, there is a sense in which we are all independent learners. Even within the formal classroom teacher messages and behaviours (the learner's external stimuli) will be perceived and categorised according to the learner's own idiosyncratic and individual coding procedures. His past experience and the previous learning which

has taken his nervous system to its current state will perform a mediatory function with regard to the reception of new stimuli. Mediation is thus regarded as "an inferred process by means of which external stimuli are coded by the learner's nervous system before being functionally connected, or associated by learning, with responses" (Gagne 1971;25). Each individual perceives, filters and codifies stimuli in an idiosyncratic fashion and to that extent all learning activities are characterised by a degree of independence.

Equally, however, there is a sense in which totally independent learning is an impossibility. Cognitive activity which is anything other than contemplative introspection involves interaction with external stimuli and, since this implies change (no organism ever retains its exact previous equilibrium after interaction), there is a sense in which all contact with non-human material alters the learning effort. This difficulty would be more easily resolved if there was no conscious intention to effect cognitive change contained within the non-human materials, but much of it - television and radio broadcasts, textbooks, self-help manuals, instructional magazines - is deliberately sequenced and contains messages designed to effect learner change. A further complication is presented by the fact that 'non-human' resources are not characterised by a previous absence of human contact; books, cassettes, magazines, records and broadcasts are all devised and manufactured by humans for instructional purposes. The physical absence of a human presence does not mean that the solitary reader or viewer is unaffected by the unseen writer or producer, since these individuals certainly affect the learner's cognitive

operations. Thus, the independent learner should not be thought of as "an intellectual Robinson Crusoe, castaway and shut off in self-sufficiency" (Moore 1973;669): whether human or non-human resources are used, the acquisition of knowledge and skill is facilitated by the learner's interaction with external stimuli such as peers, books and broadcasts.

Learner Responsibility

Ideas as to the features of learner behaviour which cause his or her learning to be labelled 'independent' fall into two categories. There is, firstly, the approach adopted by Moore at the beginning of his paper outlining a theory of independent learning where the physical location of the student is deemed the important feature. Through this approach, the separation of student and teacher is the criterion by which the degree of independence is judged so that independent teaching and learning are defined as "an educational system in which the learner is autonomous and separated from his teacher by space and time, so that communication is by print, electronic or other non-human media" (Moore 1973;663). The Open University, correspondence courses, language instruction through cassettes and records, educational broadcasting - these would all qualify as examples of independent learning activities by this definition. It is not, however, the physical separation which is the focus of Moore's attention, but the ramifications of this separation for the learner's behaviour. As Moore points out,...

"Because he is alone .. the learner is compelled to accept a comparatively high degree of responsibility for the conduct of his learning programme. Simply

stated, we have decided that the influence of distance on learners and teachers can be stated in terms of increased learner responsibility, the characteristic of an autonomous learner." (Moore 1973;666)

It is this exercise of a greatly increased learner responsibility which is the chief feature characterising the other approach adopted by researchers in the field. Instead of regarding the features of autonomous and responsible learner behaviour as an incidental consequence of the student's physical isolation, it is the existence of this very behaviour which establishes the fact of independence. As Bacon and Redmond remark ...

"the key point is that the adult learner organises his own programme of study, including the selection of subject matter, choice of learning material and programme of action." (Bacon & Redmond 1977;16)

It is this emphasis on the cognitive behaviours of the learner (rather than his physical isolation) which characterises this research. For an activity to qualify as an instance of independent learning it must exhibit learner control over the direction of learning efforts, even if this is temporarily submerged in order to acquire specific skills. This is similar to Tough's definition of adult self-teaching as occurring when the learner assumes "the primary responsibility for planning, initiating and conducting the learning project" (Tough 1973;3), although the emphasis he places on the deliberate formulation of closely specified goals means that this notion must be separated from that of independent learning.

The definition which comes closest to conveying the idea of independent learning as contained within the present study is Malcolm Knowles's conceptualisation of self-directed learning as ...

" a process in which individuals take the initiative 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. " (Knowles 1975;18)

In addition to emphasising the primacy of learner control over the direction of learning, Knowles also acknowledges the role of learning groups ...

" self-directed learning usually takes place in association with various kinds of helpers, such as teachers, tutors, mentors, resource people and peers. There is a lot of mutuality among a group of self-directed learners. " (Knowles 1975;18)

The importance of such groups to the learners in the present survey is demonstrated in Chapter (14).

Finally, Knowles also supports Tough's contention (discussed in the next chapter) that there is no contradiction between an individual retaining the responsibility for learning and his use of assistants, provided this contact is temporary and viewed as only one element

in the overall learning project ...

" If self-directed learners recognise that there are occasions on which they will need to be taught, they will enter into those taught-learning situations in a searching, probing frame of mind and will exploit them as resources for learning without losing their self-directedness. " (Knowles 1975;21)

The present study furnishes several examples of learners engaging in the temporary submission of authority to an accredited expert when, for example, a budgerigar breeder or aquarist visits a specialist on disease diagnosis to learn how to detect and treat common bird or fish ailments. The overall responsibility for the learning activity, however, rests with the breeder or aquarist and when the expert has provided the specialist knowledge required, the learner reasserts control over the direction of future learning. Independent learning, therefore, is regarded as occurring when the decisions about intermediate and terminal learning goals to be pursued, methods of enquiry, evaluative procedures and sources of information to be used are the responsibility of the learner.

Learning and Intention

The notion of intention is regarded by several philosophers as the distinctive characteristic of education. R.S. Peters, for example, argues that for an activity to be considered educative there must be an intentional transmission of a worthwhile state of mind accomplished in a morally acceptable manner. Thus, education

occurs "where we deliberately put ourselves or others in the way of something that is thought to be conducive to valuable states of mind" (Peters 1966;91). The student is initiated into "some body of knowledge and mode of conduct which it takes time and determination to master", in other words, into "the impersonal content and procedures which are enshrined in public traditions". (Peters 1972;103). Lawson defines a learning situation "in terms which involve the identification of what is to be learned. Goals have to be specified as do standards of attainment which count as having learnt" (Lawson 1976;30); for learning to take place there must be an intentional pursuit of previously identified objectives.

Moore also regards learning as "a purposeful and deliberate activity" and dismisses "knowledge which is acquired by casual experience, or unsought, random, incidental knowledge" (Moore 1973;662). In contrast to these philosophers, however, Patterson believes that ...

" no objective or determinate criterion can do justice to the quality of adult educational work .. to make some undefined educational 'standards' the criterion is to beg the whole question. The depth and quality of an individual's self-realisation are not open to calculation .. therefore talk of 'success' or 'failure', in so far as this constitutes a possible finality, is a betrayal of the very spirit of the enterprise itself. "

(Patterson 1964;51)

An insistence on the centrality of the intentional pursuit of closely prescribed learning as a condition of learning, certainly seems to pose problems when the activities of independent learners are considered. Many of the individuals in the present survey indicated that at the outset of their studies they had no more than a vague desire to find out more about a particular topic, that they were not aware of a goal-setting process, and that they had no terminal objective in mind. The organic gardener's developing interest was a result of his membership of a particular peer group and not of a conscious intention to achieve some specific learning goal ...

" If you share enough interests in a particular group, you assimilate all the attitudes of that group... it never occurred to me to do anything but organic gardening. It's in more recent years that probably I've built the foundation for my belief that organic gardening was a good thing to do. I think it was very much blind faith originally. It was purely a commitment to it because of my peer group, because of all my general attitudes. I don't ever remember sitting about in my coffee bar and talking about organic gardening, it was just a thing that developed as a result of developing those kinds of attitudes. " (1)

The subsequent activities of this particular subject included the development of an Area Health Foundation and the promotion of courses on organic gardening techniques, so his learning would be difficult to dismiss as merely casual and incidental.

Correspondence students were also ready to contradict the requirement that their learning goals be closely specified. As Chapter (4) demonstrates, the most common reason for taking a correspondence course was to strengthen the learner's self-esteem, rather than to develop a particular skill or acquire a knowledge of a specific subject ...

" There was a bit of an ulterior motive in that everybody else in the family's got a degree so I thought well, I'd try and see if I could have a go as well .. So much had happened in the twenty-five years that I'd spent raising a family that I felt I'd been left behind. My husband was in education and my son had gone and done his degree course and then a social work training course so I felt well, it's time I got round to doing something. I felt I'd been left behind when it came to understanding the way that society was changing. " (30)

This student was not required, however, to specify particular learning goals since this was acknowledged to be the function of the correspondence institution. In a sense, then, the intentionality condition was met in that the Open University took the responsibility for setting goals and imposing deadlines for their attainment. Again, whilst the organic gardener may have had his interest aroused by peer group interaction, his subsequent activity was characterised by a gradual confirmation and conscious development of that interest. So, although independent learning projects may be initiated by chance, the subsequent activities of the learner are characterised by the intentional pursuit of appropriate

knowledge and the grateful utilisation and integration of such knowledge when it results from a chance occurrence.

It is on the question of highly specified goals that some modification to the conventional notion of learning is required when the activities of independent learners are considered. Taken to its extreme, the insistence on pre-defined, specific goals as endemic to all learning seems almost to deny the existence of learning for its own sake. It implies a wholly operational approach to learning - that the learner must demonstrate previously declared, terminal, observable behaviours to prove that real learning has taken place - and such an approach is noticeably absent from the comments of independent learners. For example, a classical and jazz music enthusiast described the beginnings of his enthusiasm as follows ...

" As far as I can remember, I first heard it on the radio, there wasn't anyone who really introduced it to me as such. I'd hear something and I'd think 'That sounds good' .. Whenever I heard something I liked on the radio I'd put all the details down in my book .. I don't think it was a case of intentionally expanding my knowledge, it was just that it all fascinated me so I wanted to find out more about it .. I wanted to know as much as I could about these things and so I just collected what I could - the stuff I eventually ended up reading was really chosen randomly. " (15)

In this case there was no specification of terminal cognitive or psychomotor skills, no prescribed learning scheme, and an admission

that the activity appeared haphazard. The intrinsic fascination of the field was all the motive force necessary for this subject and the nearest to a specified goal was the desire "to know as much as I could about these things". It could be argued, however, that this learning did constitute (to use Moore's phrase) "a deliberate and purposeful activity". Had the goals been too closely prescribed the sense of exploration and exhilaration (not too strong a word to use in view of the enthusiasm revealed during the interview) exhibited by the subject might never have been experienced. In this respect it was interesting to note that he reported very little response to formal music appreciation whilst at school.

Aside from the question of intrinsic interest, the insistence on the observability of specified goals as a condition of learning runs into another difficulty where independent learners are concerned. If an adult is engaged in a struggle to come to terms with an unfamiliar subject area, and no peer or accredited expert can be contacted to take responsibility for overseeing his learning, it is in the nature of the exploratory activity itself that no terminal learning goal can be specified. The classical music enthusiast was fired by a desire to know more of the work of those who had given him such immediate gratification but the development of an appreciation of the subtleties and merits of their work could only occur as his efforts took him further into an acquaintance with what Peters called "the grammar of the activity" (Peters 1972;109); that is, the standards and operations deemed intrinsic to the subject itself. As he came to acquire this 'grammar' and came to realise the inherent standards of excellence and the criteria by which attempts to reach these standards were to be judged, he

could begin to set himself specific goals for short-term pursuit which could be sequentially organised according to his requirements and interests. For Peters this is winning through to the "stage of autonomy" (Peters 1972;109) where the learner has mastered the grammar of the activity and can begin to explore new ground and attempt new syntheses. In the same way the adult who is attempting to come to terms with an unfamiliar subject area can really have only the most general of goals - 'to know as much as I can about this' - until he has got the "grammar of the activity into his guts" (Peters 1972;109). When this stage is reached he can then begin the generation of more specific and appropriate objectives but at the outset of his activities, when he is working from a position of ignorance, it is impossible for him to state precisely the specific goals towards which his efforts are directed.

Discussion

The writer attempting the clarification of a concept which has acquired an unfortunate variety of associations and interpretations has two choices. He can elaborate as clearly as possible the range of activities to which the term under consideration must be applied in his own research and hope that others keep this usage in mind; or, alternatively, he can jettison the accepted term altogether and search for another form of words which has not acquired any associations in the minds of his readers and which will therefore more clearly convey his ideas. An instance of the second approach is provided by the submission of terms as alternatives to adult education - continuing, recurrent, lifelong and permanent education. For the

purposes of this research the first approach will be adopted; that is, the nature of independent adult learning in the present study will be clarified.

The twenty-five adults comprising the independent learners' sample in the present study had to meet two conditions to justify their inclusion. Firstly, they had to enjoy local or national recognition by their peers for their possession of an unusually high level of expertise in their particular field. Secondly, such expertise had to have been attained without the benefit of class attendance, correspondence course enrolment or participation in any other form of instruction planned by an external agency (such as training courses organised by a local enthusiasts' society). These learners were judged to have assumed the overall responsibility for the execution of their project; they devised various evaluative procedures as these seemed appropriate, they consulted a range of information sources and assembled their own private libraries, they planned their intermediate and terminal learning goals (or completely rejected the notion of an end point to their studies), they developed supportive learning networks for exchange of information, and they devised patterns of resolution to deal with the problems they encountered. Their independence, therefore, was measured in cognitive terms rather than in any form of physical separation from fellow enthusiasts. Indeed, as chapter (14) demonstrates, society members and other individuals could prove to be an invaluable source of advice especially in their suggestions for future activity or their recommendation of problem-solving strategies. There were occasional instances of learners temporarily submitting their directive control to a skilled fellow enthusiast; such submissions did not, however, remove the learner's responsibility for the overall direction of

his activity and they were deliberately sought for the purpose of resolving specific difficulties, or acquiring much needed skills, in as short a time as possible.

This notion of independent adult learning can be seen to owe much to the ideas of Allen Tough and his research into self-teaching and this debt is further acknowledged in the next chapter. Tough defines a self-teaching project as "a person's deliberate attempt to learn some specific knowledge or skill" (Tough 1967;4) and as "a major highly deliberate effort to learn some specific knowledge or skill" (Tough 1971;1). He shares, therefore, the emphasis of the present study on the retention of learner control over the direction of learning activities. For self-teaching to occur the adult must also have spent at least eight hours engaged in the pursuit of these specified goals in the year prior to the interview. Tough calculates the median length of a self-teaching project to be six months and at the conclusion of his project the adult concerned will have learned a specific skill such as how to wire a basement, how to conduct committee meetings or how to move house without professional help. The self-teacher is thus engaged in the mastery of a precisely defined area of knowledge or set of skills.

The independent learners in the present study did not have as their object the attainment of previously specified learning goals; rather, they were concerned with the general exploration of an area of interest because of the intrinsic fascination it held for them. Their activities were measured in years rather than months and would often be self-perpetuating in that new avenues of enquiry were seen to be constantly arising out of their existing activity.

Their learner behaviours were not deliberately oriented towards the short-term mastery of pre-defined cognitive or psychomotor skills and they could include activities which were habitual (such as monthly attendance at a society meeting or perusal of a weekly journal) or haphazard (such as allowing the quest for knowledge to be determined by the chance acquisition of antique pieces). Thus, the twenty-five independent learners were engaged in the long-term exploration of a field of knowledge, in the gradual development of a high level of expertise, and in the understanding of the 'grammar' of an activity. For the purposes of the present study the attainment of the two latter objectives was signalled by the granting of local or national peer recognition.

Although the chief focus of the present study is the activities of the independent learners, a sub-sample of ten correspondence students was assembled for purposes of comparison. The reasons for examining the activities of this second group of learners are discussed in detail in chapter (3) and at this point it is enough to say that the recording of the experiences of students following a closely prescribed course within a well defined institutional framework was intended to highlight the unique and distinctive aspects of independent learning. There was also the purely operational justification for making some reference to correspondence study in that such activity is frequently catalogued as an example of 'independent' learning. Chapter (11) deals with the attempts of correspondence students to resist the imposition of too rigid an external control on their learning.

CHAPTER TWO

RESEARCH INTO INDEPENDENT ADULT LEARNING

The absence of a major survey into independent adult learning from the British adult education tradition is not hard to understand given the concerns of most adult education practitioners. The efforts of the most devoted and hardworking of adult educators will probably, in their own eyes, be far better employed broadening the clientele partaking of their programmes than studying those who choose to ignore them completely and to devise their own learning schemes. Thus, the concern of the most important post-war inquiry into the development of adult education, the Russell Report (H.M.S.O. 1973), was to recommend a change in the emphasis of the service which would result in the increased participation of groups not normally associated with adult education activity. Again, the major National Institute of Adult Education report of recent years (N.I.A.E. 1970) undertook a comprehensive survey of adult education in seven selected areas which concentrated on student characteristics and tutor activities. The rationale behind both of these studies was the reassessment of the adult education service in order to ensure that its activities were relevant to the largest possible proportion of the population.

This concern with the broadening of provision can be accounted for in practical and methodological terms. Practically, the survival of the service in an era of growing accountability can be seen to be dependent on its reaching as many potential customers on as broad a base as possible. If participation can be increased and extended it gives an economic strength and social justification to arguments for the service's effectiveness and importance. In addition, the reorientation of the service to a more explicitly 'Second Chance' function, or one engaged in the business of

facilitating continual retraining in an everchanging technological world, provides a vocational relevance to counter the image of adult, education as a middle class leisure club. The service comes to be seen as responding to social change and technological innovation as well as promoting equality of creative and educational opportunity. Methodologically, it is much simpler to analyse the characteristics and activities of a readily identifiable sample engaged in easily classifiable activities than it is to attempt to uncover a group of adults whose learning activities are for the most part non-institutional and disconcertingly diverse.

Independent Learning in North America

Although independent learners have remained largely unresearched in Britain, their activities have attracted the attention of several North American researchers. Apart from the seminal work of Allen Tough (to be discussed later) the possible extent of independent learning has been attested to in large scale investigations of adult education activity. A Governor's Commission on Education in the state of Wisconsin reported in 1970 that the state contained a population of over 800,000 potential independent learners, approximately one-third of its population (Moore 1973;677). The Commission on Non-Traditional Study estimated a total of 16.9 per cent of self-learners in various categories (Gould 1973;82), whilst a recent O.E.C.D. (Organisation for Economic and Cultural Development) survey contained information submitted by the American Department of Health, Education and Welfare which indicated that ...

" Almost every North American adult undertakes one or more activities in a given year that can be considered

learning: these are undertakings which involve sequential approaches to information sought in order to achieve satisfaction of some knowledge or skill attainment goal. The major planner of adult learning activities, so considered, is the learner himself. Self-planned and self-initiated learning accounts for approximately two-thirds of the total learning efforts of adults .. Learning for credit constitutes only a minor proportion of the educational behaviour of adults. " (O.E.C.D. 1977;20)

This estimate of the importance of non-institutional education had, in fact, been foreshadowed by the massive Johnstone and Rivera survey of American adult education, 'Volunteers for Learning', published over a decade earlier. Whilst their study was predominantly concerned with formal adult education participation, the authors did acknowledge that "self-instruction is probably the most overlooked avenue of activity in the whole field of adult education" and that "the incidence of self-education throughout the whole adult population is much greater than we had anticipated" (Johnstone & Rivera 1965;37). Amongst the nine million people judged by the authors to be active in independent study, an interesting class differential was noted in the likelihood of a learner's choosing self-instructional methods. In response to a question on how adults in three socio-economic groups would go about acquiring a foreign language, a relationship was noted between socio-economic position and apparent readiness to use self-instructional methods ..

"methods of self-instruction made up a larger proportion of the total methods mentioned by persons of high socio-

economic background than of those identified by persons further down the socio-economic ladder .. The people in higher educational and income brackets, then, are not only more likely to think of something to do in the first place, but are also relatively more likely to think about undertaking a learning task independently. " (Johnstone & Rivera 1965;209)

In more specific terms ...

" Techniques of self-instruction made up 21 per cent of all methods identified by persons of low socio-economic status, 25 per cent of those mentioned by persons located in the middle socio-economic grouping, and 31 per cent of those identified by persons of high socio-economic status. " (Johnstone & Rivera 1965;209)

That this apparent class difference may not be as significant as first appears is recognised by the authors in their comment that ...

" It is quite possible, for instance, that these persons mentioned individual study methods more often simply because they were very much more aware of the existence of these approaches. " (Johnstone & Rivera 1965; 209)

In fact, the authors' suspicions regarding adult preferences for non-formal learning methods directly contradict their own findings ...

" At the same time, there is probably good reason to think that persons low in socio-economic status are more favourably oriented than those of high socio-economic status to the more informal methods of

learning. Since persons of low socio-economic status have for the most part had very abbreviated experience in the school system we might expect them to be considerably more wary about engaging in formal learning activities. " (Johnstone & Rivera 1965;209)

The 'Volunteers for Learning' study initiated a much closer look at independent adult learning in North America, especially under the auspices of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (O.I.S.E.). Since 1967, under the direction of Allen Tough, the Institute has published a series of studies on adult self-teaching to the point where a recent statistical survey of part-time learning in the province of Ontario used 'Self-Directed' learning as an integral part of its classificatory scheme for the identification of different types of adult education activity (Waniewicz 1976).

Allen Tough and Self-Teaching

It is hard to overestimate the contribution of Allen Tough to the researching of independent adult learning as the discussion on the nature of independent adult learning has already testified. Indeed, on almost every aspect of the study of independent adult learning Tough has made a contribution which merits consideration. The purpose of the following brief discussion is to outline Tough's researches and to distinguish the differences in emphasis and approach between his concerns and those of the present study.

Tough's published work spans over a decade beginning with his 1965 study of forty Toronto graduates and broadening its focus until eleven years later he was able to record that an average person

"conducts eight different learning projects, eight major learning efforts each year - in eight quite different areas of knowledge and skill" (Tough 1976;60). These efforts would total approximately 700 hours. Throughout these eleven years the emphasis of his research interest was continually changing and the three main themes upon which his attention was successively centred - the self-teacher's use of assistance, the origins of learning projects, and the implications for educational practice of his research - will now be considered.

(1) Assistance during Self-Teaching

Tough's first study of forty Toronto graduates was published in 1967 under the title, 'Learning Without a Teacher'. The general notion of self-teaching has already received consideration in the previous chapter so this section concentrates on the self-teacher's use of assistance. Superficially this seems a contradiction in terms but Tough maintains that ...

" No contradiction exists between the definition of self-teaching and the notion that the self-teacher may obtain advice from several individuals. He can retain the major responsibility for planning, supervising, and controlling his learning and simultaneously obtain advice, encouragement and other assistance from several friends, colleagues and other individuals. If the self-teacher seeks and evaluates most of the assistance .. he can certainly retain the responsibility for making most of the important decisions. " (Tough 1967;30)

Assistance was sought most frequently to help the learner cope with new subject matter which was difficult to understand, to aid in the planning and evaluation of projects, and to provide much needed encouragement and support. All forty subjects used at least four assistants and the total number of assistants used was 424, with each sample member obtaining assistance from an average of 10.6 individuals. One interesting and unexpected point which emerged was the increased motivation which often resulted from encountering a particularly unhelpful individual ..

" Several subjects mentioned that at least one person, by being unpleasant, smug, critical, or obstructive, unintentionally increased the subject's motivation. In short, a person's attempt to block or criticise the learning project, may actually increase the motivation. "

(Tough 1967;49)

Although Tough was concentrating on the practical aspects of the type and extent of assistance used during self-teaching projects, he could not help but notice a similarity in the way the initiators of such projects perceived their activity ...

" Frequently a self-deprecating statement accompanied the response .. it seemed to the interviewer that some subjects compared the amount learned during their recent project to some vague but very high standard, or to what was learned during an undergraduate course .. the writer was surprised that so many college graduates felt strongly (and with concern) that their current learning was somehow inferior in amount, quality and method to

the learning of most adults and to their own learning while a full time student. As most interviews progressed it became evident that the subject had greatly underestimated his own learning. In almost every interview, the amount learned, the amount of time spent, the variety of methods and the number of assistants turned out to be much greater than had been apparent near the beginning of the interview. " (Tough 1967;40)

Although a self-deprecating manner was often displayed by the adults in the present sample, they did not, as a rule, regard their own efforts and achievements as being of little worth. The sample members had, of course, all been chosen because of the esteem in which their efforts were held by their peers, so to denigrate their own expertise would have been modesty bordering on the absurd. As will be seen in the discussion of the evaluative procedures of independent learners, there was at the very least a recognition by most subjects that they could 'hold their own' in a group of fellow enthusiasts. If Tough had assembled his sample using the same criterion of peer acknowledgement of his subjects' expertise, he would no doubt have found a similar awareness and appreciation with regard to the value and extent of their learning.

(2) The Origins of Learning Projects

In 1968 Tough published a follow-up study of thirty-five adults in the Toronto region who were aged over 21 and who had completed at least six months of further education after Grade Twelve (twenty-one of them had, in fact, one or more college degrees to their

credit). Although acknowledging that his sample was "certainly not rigorously representative of any larger population", he believed that "the general findings would probably be duplicated with almost any group of urban, middle class, fairly well educated, relatively young, North American adults" (Tough 1968;5). By presenting to his subjects a series of sheets with one reason on each of them for starting a learning project, he hoped to estimate the relative strength of reasons for starting and continuing a learning project. The extent to which these results are paralleled in the present study will be discussed in chapter (4) and at this stage only the broad findings of Tough's study will be considered.

The overwhelming impression Tough gained from the ratings of his interviewees was of the diversity of motivations present in any one learning project. He recorded that "in the typical learning project five different reasons are strong, and another is weak but definitely present" concluding that "it is rare for an adult learner to be motivated by only one reason, even two or three are fairly uncommon" (Tough 1968;8). Perhaps the most interesting finding concerned the way in which learning projects took on their own motivational momentum so that "for many learners the total motivation for continuing is stronger than their original motivation for beginning" (Tough 1968;9). This was because "the typical adult learner has one more reason for continuing his learning project than for beginning it" (Tough 1968;8), this additional reason being rated as 'Very Strong'. The cumulative result of this self-generating motivation is that "it is relatively rare for a learner to be troubled by a tendency to quit before reaching his goal" (Tough 1968;9).

During his post-interview reflections, Tough also asked himself "the following question concerning each learning project; was it or was it not, clearly begun largely in anticipation of a major change, as part of such a change, or as a result of such a change?" (Tough 1968;52). For only twelve of his projects (approximately one-third) was there a clear link between a change in lifestyle and starting a project, and where an association did exist the changes were occupational ones. The rest of the sample perceived their learning as "simply part of an ongoing job responsibility, leisure activity, or family life, or were prompted by relatively minor changes" (Tough 1968;52)

(3) Implications of Research into Self-Teaching

In his overview summary of research to date, 'The Adult's Learning Projects', Tough took the opportunity to speculate on the implications of his research for the future of the educational system. Not surprisingly, he foresaw a growth both in the recognition of the importance of independent learning and in the institutional assistance made available to independent learners. Thus ...

" the man or woman of the future will have a high regard for deliberate learning efforts and will perceive them as normal and significant .. the adult learner of the future will be highly competent in deciding what to learn, and in planning and arranging his own learning. " (Tough 1971;70)

The prestige accruing to these efforts will reap a rich harvest of

institutional assistance ...

" The help available to him will be greatly improved and readily available .. helping individual learners will be regarded as an important responsibility of educational institutions, libraries, professional associations and sales persons. " (Tough 1971;170)

The next thirty years would also, according to Tough, see the study of independent learning becoming a major area of educational research. He predicted that ...

" the body of knowledge regarding human learning projects will be much more complete and accurate than it is at present. The comprehensive study of learning projects will be a well-defined field of research and theory, integrating the efforts of persons from various fields that are now widely separated. " (Tough 1971;170)

The way in which this research should be conducted is outlined in a paper subtitled 'Recent Research and Future Directions' ...

" We need an in-depth survey to collect accurate basic data from the men and women of various countries in the world. These surveys would use intensive semi-structured interviews, with highly skilled probing by interviewers thoroughly familiar with the concept of a learning project. Each interview would take up to one hour to collect basic data on exactly what knowledge and skill the person was trying to gain, the number of projects, their duration and the planner

.. Detailed information could also be collected on peer learning groups and self-help groups such as local and historical societies .. Fascinating insights could emerge from an in-depth study of the adult's anticipated benefits from a major learning effort. " (Tough 1977;17)

As an addendum to this elaboration of Tough's researches, it should perhaps be pointed out that the passage quoted above was encountered several months after the beginning of the present research, by which time the main outlines of the current enquiry had emerged. It was gratifying to learn that the directions Tough envisaged as being the most fruitful for future research were those already taken in the present study. The following section will consider the ways in which this study explores those directions and the differences it exhibits in method and content from Tough's researches.

Research Differences

Differences of approach and emphasis between Tough's research concerns and those of the present study can be identified in three areas; the nature of the learning projects examined, the conduct of the interviews, and the composition of the sample of independent learners.

(1) The Nature of Learning Projects

For a learner's activity to qualify as an example of self-teaching it must, according to Tough, constitute a deliberate attempt to attain a previously specified goal. This goal consists of knowledge and skill to be attained and must have taken at least eight hours

of the subject's time in the year prior to the interview. Throughout this time the learner must have assumed the primary responsibility for initiating, planning and executing the project. The content of the skill and knowledge goals is not restricted and can include vocationally oriented projects as well as those undertaken for the sheer pleasure of learning (thirty per cent of Tough's surveyed projects were vocationally related). The time spent on the project can vary from two weeks to three years though the median length of time spent by Tough's sample was six months.

In contrast to this, the learning activities which are the chief concern of the current research are of a much longer time-span and exhibit a greater breadth of interest. Subjects measured their projects in years rather than weeks or months and a common feature was the breadth of knowledge falling within their parameters. Rather than a short-term pursuit of pre-defined goals, the projects represented a gradual exploration of a field of knowledge and during their execution the focus of interest would shift across traditional subject boundaries. Throughout the interviews sample members would allude to an interest in areas of enquiry related to their project; a botanist confessed to a good working knowledge of birds, insects, moths and butterflies; a fitness enthusiast engaged in weight training, soccer, kung-fu, running, individual and group exercises; a record collector saw his music as a springboard for other interests such as painting and poetry; a steam engine enthusiast admitted a range of interests in other forms of transport such as canals, railways and paddle steamers and, again in the natural history field, an ornithologist had developed an interest in botany and

wildlife photography as a result of her birdwatching. This perception of learning as being the gradual exploration of a limitless vista of knowledge was encountered time and again during the interviews and will be considered more closely in Chapter (5).

The activities of the present sample had, on the whole, no vocational relevance, though this in no way robbed them of significance for their participants. Indeed, the impression gained from the interviews was that the project activities often required the exercise of many more skills, and instilled a greater degree of commitment, than the subjects own paid employment.

(2) The Conduct of Interviews

From the outset of his researches Tough placed an emphasis on pre-coded questions and categories which is not paralleled in the present study. In the initial survey of forty college graduates, for example, the subjects were first presented with a list of common self-teaching projects and a definition of self-teaching and then asked to indicate their own examples of such activities. The interviewer then selected one example of self-teaching mentioned and asked the learner to list all the individuals who gave assistance during the project. This was followed by the subject's reading of twelve common teaching tasks (derived from writings on the functions of class teachers, teaching machines, curriculum planners etc.) and his specifying of those tasks which he had performed. The problems encountered and the assistance used during the performance of these tasks were discussed and a questionnaire completed on such matters as the frequency of task-performance. A list of individuals who

might typically assist in learning projects was then presented to the subject for him to mark off those who were consulted during his own activities. This approach was continued in the study two years later of typical origins of learning projects with subjects being asked to rate (on a scale of 'Very Strong' to 'Not Present') some common reasons for starting projects, which were presented on separate sheets.

The establishing of pre-coded categories into which are fitted subjects' experiences was regarded as inappropriate to the present study. The methodological reasoning behind this decision is dealt with more fully in Chapter (3) but it is perhaps pertinent at this point to mention that it was based on two assumptions; the fact that this was a previously non-researched topic in independent learning and the markedly diverse nature of the projects surveyed. Thus, rather than subjects placing their experiences within an already elaborated conceptual schema, the framework for classifying and interpreting material began to take shape as the interviews progressed. Important refinements and modifications which were made to the evolving framework are dealt with more fully in the next chapter.

(3) Sample Composition

The samples investigated by Tough in 1966, 1968 and 1971 differ in two important respects from the sample surveyed in the present study; in the criterion of sample selection and in the characteristics of sample members. In assembling his group of independent learners Tough was not concerned to 'screen' potential interviewees by a preliminary investigation of the projects they had conducted to

see whether or not substantial learning had taken place. This was, after all, the chief purpose of the research itself; to take a group of reasonably well educated Canadians and to assess the nature and extent of their learning. His sample members were selected on the basis of their educational background and occupational status, rather than because they had shown dramatic evidence of extensive self-teaching. Thus, the first group of forty college graduates was followed by a survey of thirty-five adults in the Toronto region who had all completed six months of further education after Grade Twelve. In order to broaden the research, the 1970 study examined sixty-six individuals from seven identifiable occupational groups *. All three of these samples were presented with examples of self-teaching activity and asked to recount their own experience of such activities. It was their educational level and socio-economic position which exposed them to inclusion in the sample and not the public acclaim which greeted their execution of learning projects. Indeed, Tough admitted that "when we asked them to list their highly deliberate efforts to learn, these examples only emerged after a great deal of probing and stimulating." (Tough 1970;75).

In contrast to this, the subjects in the present study owed their inclusion in the sample to their demonstrable expertise and achievements. They were highly visible in the community as individuals who had come to be regarded as expert in their own field of interest. Subjects came to occupy the office of society

* These were blue collar factory workers, lower white collar male and female workers, elementary schoolteachers, municipal politicians, social science professors and upper middle class women with young children.

secretary and their fame was reflected in the acclaim of their peers as well as their publishing of books and articles on their specialisms. It was the peer recognition of their achievements, not their educational level or occupational status, which determined their inclusion.

Aside from the question of the criteria for sample composition, the present group of independent learners also differs from Tough's in their general characteristics. Whilst the three Toronto groups were mostly in their twenties and thirties, the thirty-five English subjects were spread more evenly over the age range with an elicited median age of 41 and a mean age of 45. This age differential is perhaps not as surprising as first appears given the nature of the current study's concerns. In contrast to Tough's emphasis on the short-term attainment of previously specified goals, it was the long-term accumulation of knowledge and expertise to the point where an individual became recognised locally as the expert in his field, which was the focus of interest. This is a process measured in years rather than months so those that have reached this point will often be in their forties and fifties rather than in their twenties and thirties. Indeed, the time necessary for the development of these levels of expertise may only be available at a later stage of life when children have left home and occupational and domestic pressures have relaxed. This question of the timing of learning projects within the adult life cycle is pursued further at several points in the study.

Apart from a minority of blue and white collar workers in the 1970 study, all Tough's self-teachers had attained an educational level

well above the average. The first group of adults surveyed in 'Learning Without a Teacher' were all college graduates and the thirty-five adults questioned in the 1967 study had completed at least six months of further education after Grade Twelve with twenty-one of their number in possession of one or more college degrees. The thirty-five subjects in the present sample are of a much lower educational level, with only three degree holders and a further thirteen having undergone some form of technical or professional training (nursing, engineering, teacher training). Nineteen had finished their full time education by the age of 16.

A similar survey undertaken twenty-five years hence may find that the general educational level of its sample is much higher, since many of the present subjects were at school before the 1944 Education Act and certainly before the introduction of any kind of comprehensive education *. That they could have left school at 14 or 15, yet come to be regarded as expert in their particular field, would seem to endorse the arguments of those who believe the formal educational system fails to take account of the great potential for learning in adulthood. One particular case which illustrates the way in which educational 'failures' can achieve national and even international recognition in their field is perhaps worth mentioning at this point. This is of a retired joiner of 68 years of age who, at the age of 64, began to write articles for the County Beekeeping Bulletin based on his lifetime experience of hive management. He was asked to do this by a member of staff at the local College of Horticulture, and, three

* The National Institute of Adult Education survey of 1970 showed a clear statistical difference in exposure to education between those over 35 and those under 35 (N.I.A.E. 1970;79)

years later, collected some of these pieces together into a book on the management of bee swarms which has an international circulation with orders from India, New Zealand and America.

This man left his local village school at 14, has never attended any classes or courses since, and still lives within half a mile of that school.

Conclusion

Although the foregoing pages have chronicled a number of differences between Tough's research concerns and those of the present study, difference should not be equated with denigration. There is no doubt that his enquiries have been crucial to this research; indeed, it would almost certainly never have been envisaged without the stimulus of his ideas. It was reading a copy of 'Learning Without a Teacher' that first demonstrated the enormous potential for research into independent, non-institutionalised learning, and an impressive amount of evidence has been presented over the succeeding decade to confirm the validity of its findings. Tough has shown that institutionalised adult education classes are only the tip of the adult learning iceberg and thereby given support to those who are engaged in facilitating adult learning in other contexts such as libraries, museums, clubs and societies. The methodological and conceptual schemas developed during his enquiries have also provided a valuable paradigm for the study of independent adult learning.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Unlike his colleagues in other branches of educational research, the student of independent adult learning is entering largely uncharted research waters. He cannot enjoy the luxury of consulting established research paradigms and, given the paucity of theoretical frameworks in the field of adult education research, he is unlikely to be able to devote his energies to verifying or modifying a previously elaborated theory. This freedom from methodological canons requires the researcher to make explicit the assumptions, intentions and strategies which have guided his enquiries. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the way in which the research sample was assembled and the interviews conducted. It also seeks to demonstrate the techniques used to analyse the interview transcripts.

The emphasis of the present study is qualitative in that its substantive concerns and classificatory schemas emerged during the research activity itself and that its chief investigative tool was the semi-structured interview. The qualitative tradition is one which emphasises the importance of subjects' perceptions of their experiences and it was from these perceptions that the conceptual categories and theoretical elements of the present study emerged. This notion of emergent conceptualisations has found its most forceful expression in recent years in Glaser and Strauss's 'The Discovery of Grounded Theory' where the authors advise that the study of a new field of research be undertaken "without any preconceived theory that dictates, prior to the research, 'relevancies' in concepts and hypotheses" (Glaser & Strauss 1968;33). A similar emphasis can be found in Holmes paper on research methodology where he declares that subjects' "definitions of relevance" and the "taken for granted" elements in their perspectives should direct the course

of the enquiry (Holmes 1976;153). The current study also displays a qualitative emphasis in that it shares with other qualitative investigations of previously non-researched areas a 'scene-setting' function. It attempts to suggest characteristic features of independent learning, appropriate typologies and classifications, a whole paradigm of investigation in fact, which can be verified and refined in a more rigorous manner in subsequent studies.

The Research Sample

A group of thirty-five adult learners was assembled to comprise the research sample. Since the emphasis of the study was to be placed on the activities of the independent learners, twenty-five such learners were selected to be the chief object of research attention. These learners had all achieved local or national recognition as expert in their particular field of interest, yet such expertise had been attained without the benefit of formal institutional instruction whether that be through class attendance, correspondence course enrolment or viewing an educational television series. These learners took the responsibility for planning the course of their learning and for evaluating its progress. They set their terminal learning goals (or completely rejected the notion of a final end point to their studies), they generated learning networks based on society membership or enthusiasts' shops, and they assembled personal resource libraries. They developed their own styles of learning and devised set patterns of resolution to deal with the problems they encountered. Occasional interludes in their activities took the form of a temporary submission of learner autonomy to the direction

of an external agent (usually a more skilled enthusiast) but such submission constituted an uncharacteristic interruption rather than a regular feature of their learning. In short, these twenty-five learners retained control over the planning, execution and evaluation of their learning.

The remaining ten students in the sample were all engaged in correspondence study. Seven were Open University students, two were enrolled in the Malvern Hills College Home Study Service, and one was following a National Extension College course. They were selected to form a sub-sample of learners whose experiences could be compared to those of the independent learners. Unlike this latter group, the ten correspondence students had placed their activities under the direction of an external authority. They were, admittedly, in a situation of physical isolation, separated from their tutors and from fellow students. Such physical detachment did not, however, imply cognitive independence. The material to be studied and the rate of its assimilation, the evaluation of progress, and the final public accreditation of success or failure, were all the responsibility of the correspondence institution. The correspondence institutions concerned also arranged a counselling component in their students' courses and students were encouraged to contact their course tutors when a problem arose which threatened to block successful course completion.

The chief reason for surveying the activities of this latter group of students was to illustrate the differences which existed between groups of apparently similar learners. Describing the learning activities which could be regarded as truly independent would go

some way towards clarifying the nature of independent learning and indicating those distinctive aspects which separated it from individualised instruction or isolated correspondence study. This would, in turn, reduce the conceptual and semantic confusion surrounding the term 'independent learning'. As Chapter (1) has already mentioned, this term has been employed to describe a variety of very different learning activities. In particular, it has been held to be interchangeable with 'isolated' learning; an adult engaged in devising classification schemes for plants he had observed, or in experimenting with different methods for managing bee swarms, is judged to be involved in the same kind of activity as a student enrolled in a correspondence study course. This judgement ignores the fact that the decisions about the subject matter the latter student is to cover, the resource materials he is to consult, and the rate of his progress, rest entirely with the correspondence institution. A paper on 'New Developments and Changes in Independent Study' provides a good example of the way in which the terms 'independent' and 'isolated' are held to be equivalent ...

" The three years that have elapsed since the last International Conference have been important ones for independent study in the United States. Probably at no time since the correspondence study movement began in this country has there been so much activity and so much promise for the future. " (Driscoll 1972;28)

Similarly, B. Frank Brown's summary of new approaches to independent study concerns itself with techniques of individualised instruction (Frank Brown 1968), whilst three reports from Asia on experiments in independent study deal solely with innovations in correspondence

education systems (Convergence 1972;70). As well as promoting conceptual clarity, it was hoped that the exploration of the differences between the activities of the independent learners and those of the correspondence students would help to illustrate the unique aspects of the former. By contrasting the correspondence students' perceptions of the institutionalised, prescriptive framework within which they worked with the independent learners' attempts to explore their fields of knowledge, the distinctive features of the latter would be thrown into even sharper relief. Additionally, as has already been mentioned in Chapter (1), there is the purely operational justification for considering the activities of correspondence learners within the present study, given that such activities are frequently catalogued as examples of independent learning.

Table (1) provides a brief summary of the research sample. It lists the learning activities in which the independent learners had gained local or national recognition and gives details of the courses on which the correspondence students were enrolled. The method of recording the interviews is noted (tape-recording or shorthand notation) as is the location of each interview (subject's home, researcher's home or researcher's office). The numbers in parentheses to the left of each sample member's details are used throughout the study to indicate the source of interviewee quotations. This allows the reader at a glance to determine the conditions under which the interview was conducted and the area of interest of the individual concerned.

INDEPENDENT LEARNERS

<u>Learning Activity</u>	<u>Interview Record</u>	<u>Location</u>
(1) Organic Gardening	Tape Recorded	Researcher's Home
(2) Chess	Tape Recorded	Researcher's Home
(3) Drama Production	Tape Recorded	Researcher's Home
(4) Angling	Tape Recorded	Subject's Home
(5) Fitness Techniques	Tape Recorded	Researcher's Home
(6) Bridge	Tape Recorded	Researcher's Home
(7) Horticulture	Tape Recorded	Researcher's Home
(8) Philosophy	Tape Recorded	Subject's Home
(9) Tropical Fish Keeping	Tape Recorded	Subject's Home
(10) Philately	Tape Recorded	Subject's Home
(11) Narrow Gauge Railways	Tape Recorded	Researcher's Home
(12) Record Collecting	Tape Recorded	Subject's Home
(13) Budgerigar Breeding	Tape Recorded	Researcher's Home
(14) Antiques Dealing	Notes	Subject's Home
(15) Jazz and Classical Music	Notes	Subject's Home
(16) Antique China	Notes	Subject's Home
(17) Botany	Notes	Subject's Home
(18) Ornithology	Notes	Subject's Home
(19) Steam Traction Engines	Notes	Subject's Home
(20) Pigeon Racing	Notes	Subject's Home
(21) Beekeeping	Notes	Subject's Home
(22) Aero-Modelling	Notes	Subject's Home
(23) Rail Management/Modelling	Notes	Subject's Home
(24) Rabbit Breeding	Notes	Subject's Home
(25) Pedigree Dog Breeding	Notes	Subject's Home

CORRESPONDENCE STUDENTS

(26) Open Univ. Arts Course	Tape Recorded	Researcher's Home
(27) Open Univ. Arts Course	Tape Recorded	Researcher's Home
(28) Open Univ. Science Graduate	Tape Recorded	Researcher's Home
(29) Open Univ. Arts Course	Tape Recorded	Researcher's Home
(30) Open Univ. Arts Foundation	Tape Recorded	Subject's Home
(31) Open Univ. Science Graduate	Tape Recorded	Subject's Home
(32) Open Univ. Arts Course	Tape Recorded	Subject's Home
(33) Home Study Service 'A' Level	Tape Recorded	Researcher's Office
(34) Home Study Service 'O' Level	Notes	Researcher's Office
(35) Nat. Extension College 'A'	Tape Recorded	Subject's Home

Perhaps the most frequently encountered difficulty bedevilling small scale research concerns the representative nature of the sample. The present study makes no claim to statistical rigour in terms of sample membership. Indeed, it is difficult to know how a truly representative cross-section of independent learners might be assembled in view of the non-institutionalised nature of their learning. Without the parameters afforded by such features as shared course membership, institutional affiliation, or common vocational orientation, the potential sample membership comprised all those individuals who had independently directed their efforts over a period of time to becoming skilled or knowledgeable in a particular field. It would, in effect, take in learners engaged in developing the whole range of cognitive and psychomotor skills and cover the entire spectrum of knowledge.

In the present study the sample was selected in order to reflect, in however limited a way, this enormous range of possible variations. Instead of concentrating on the common characteristics of a group following one particular enthusiasm, the study seeks to demonstrate the spread of possible variations amongst independent learners from the highly academic development of philosophical knowledge to the blend of cognitive and psychomotor skills required by competition angling. Although many sample members belonged to local societies (the functions of which are discussed in Chapter (14)), the use of such societies as the sampling frame for the study was rejected. By selecting only society members the isolated individual (such as the botanist, apiarist and fitness enthusiast) would be ignored. Admittedly each subject had at some point to have his efforts acknowledged by other enthusiasts for him to qualify for inclusion in the sample. As we shall see, however, local reputations could

be acquired without a prolonged period of society involvement.

Each project constitutes a highly specific, individual creative act and together they indicate the possible variations in learning activities which can be obtained by blending differing elements of learning methods. These ranged from an extended period of experimentation to a dependence on the oral transmission of knowledge, or an engagement in problem-solving activity. The importance of different sources of information varied according to the situation of the learner and the nature of his project as did the evaluative indices he adopted. Uniformities did emerge on, for example, the question of spouse support, the importance of enthusiasts' societies, attitudes to learning and patterns of problem-solving. The overall impression gained from the research, however, was of a richness and diversity in project execution and a capacity for learner adaptability according to individual circumstance.

Aside from the difficulties of sample composition already mentioned, a criticism of the assembled group of learners might be that they are all too successful; that is to say, it might be argued that a more revealing picture of the nature of independent learning would be drawn by considering the experiences of adults who have abandoned what they consider to be unsuccessful learning projects. In identifying blocks to learning such as inadequate local resources, inappropriate learner expectations as to possible progress, or an inability to specify the intermediate steps towards a long-term goal, agencies such as public libraries would be able more effectively to facilitate independent adult learning. Of course, the identification of this group of unsuccessful learners will pose even more problems

than those raised in assembling the present sample. Given the natural desire to conceal perceived inadequacies, it will require an uncommonly well adjusted person to expose his failure to the probings of an outsider, even if that failure can first be admitted. This theme may well benefit from further exploration but in the context of the present study it was felt that omitting a section on unsuccessful independent adult learning did not invalidate the findings concerning the experiences of those who were successful in managing their learning activities.

Biographies and Case Studies of Independent Learners

Throughout this study, quotations from sample members are given in support of generalisations concerning the scope, methods and variety of independent learning activities. From Chapter (4) onwards, individual learning projects are referred to within the context of a wider discussion; the narrow gauge rail enthusiast's development of a critical attitude towards experts in his field is cited as an example of a subjective index of evaluation in Chapter (9). Again, the botanist's colour coding system used as the basis of his diary of plant observations is presented as an illustration of independent learners' record keeping in Chapter (7). The detail drawn from individual projects is used for the illustration and confirmation of general statements on the nature of independent learning. As this chapter has already pointed out, however, each project can also be regarded as an individual and idiosyncratic creative act. Although common elements did emerge in such things as learning methods employed, attitudes to learning, or evaluative procedures adopted, each of the projects exhibited its own unique character.

Some of the flavour of these projects will be conveyed during the more general discussions of independent learning activities. The purpose of the next few pages, however, is briefly to record the details of each project, in particular its origins, length and method of execution. As well as being of interest in itself, this will more clearly fix the source of quotations in subsequent chapters in the reader's mind and allow him to place the quotation or act of learning discussed in the context of the individual's overall learning effort. Since the experiences of the sample members can be considered a series of case studies, this section attempts to summarise the singularity of each of these cases as well as indicating the similarities of purpose and execution.

Each project is presented in a chronological fashion beginning with the learner's perceptions as to the reasons for beginning learning, estimating the length of the project to date and charting any change in focus which has occurred. As well as presenting common elements in independent learning activities such as sources of information most frequently used, shared attitudes towards learning or evaluative procedures adopted, the unique features of each of the projects are highlighted. The twenty-five case studies are recorded, as far as possible, in the order in which they came to the researcher's attention and for ease of reference the projects are dealt with in the order in which they appear in Table (1), 'The Research Sample'. Since the ten correspondence students were engaged in a more readily identifiable educational experience, and since the scope for individual variation was severely limited, the details of their activities are not included in the following section.

(1) Organic Gardening

Biography : Male, aged 29, married. Left Grammar School at 19 having obtained nine 'O' levels and two 'A' levels. Has since worked as a professional musician and shop assistant.

Project : Interest arose out of membership of an 'alternative' sub-culture, no one person particularly influential. Developed his knowledge through consulting books and magazines and, occasionally, peers. Displayed resourcefulness and persistence and used library facilities to good effect - a member of several libraries and knew several staff personally. Trial and error rejected as too costly a method although he did participate in a Henry Doubleday Home Experiment programme. Tried to promote the use of organic gardening methods amongst his fellow gardeners and involved in establishing a local food co-operative at the time of interview. Length of Project : Eight Years.

(2) Chess

Biography : Male, aged 46, married. Left Grammar School at 16 and served in the army. Currently employed as an engineering inspector.

Project : Began to play chess at school but interest waned while in the army. Renewed after changing civilian jobs and experiencing a vacuum in his spare time. Developed an 'obsession' with the game, rising to become team captain and President of his local club. Evolved an individual style after immersing himself in the literature of the game. Accepts he will never be a top class player but believes he performs a valuable function as captain and instructor of novices. Length of Project : Fifteen Years.

(3) Drama Production

Biography : Female, aged 33, married. Left Girls High School at 16 to work in a bank. Now a full time housewife.

Project : Interest in play production arose out of suggestion of a family friend, himself a B.B.C. producer, to take charge of a local Nativity play. Each production an example of a self-contained learning project although the web of useful contacts widens with each play. As a producer now sees her main tasks as being those of personnel management - the resolution of personality clashes and the motivation of her casts. Confident exterior said to conceal insecurity and each production takes its toll on family members. Length of Project : Four Years.

(4) Angling

Biography : Male, aged 30, married. Left Grammar School at 16 to become an apprentice in the army. Now a telephone engineer.

Project : Began fishing in boyhood after cousin's encouragement and interest reawakened in adulthood by work colleague. Developing expertise signalled by membership of increasingly exclusive clubs and entry into open match circuit. Overwhelming importance of peers as a learning resource - observation of fellow enthusiasts and competitors, contact with club members, weekly discussions at tackle shop. Pursuit of competition success an important motivating force and success often secured through solving problems common to all competitors. Length of Project : Eight Years.

(5) Fitness Techniques

Biography : Male, aged 38, married. Left Secondary Modern School at 16 to become a barber. Attended Art School as a mature student and now a full time lecturer in Art.

Project : No clearly discernible beginnings, engaged in fitness activities for as long as he could recall. Exercises and routines developed and performed in private with no membership of sports clubs which were seen as placing too much emphasis on physical aggression rather than fitness. Attained a desired equilibrium of fitness and accepts his limitations. Would like to work with an instructor on an individual basis. Inspired by attainments and presence of successful athletes and sees physical fitness as crucial to artistic creativity and mental health. Length of Project : Twenty-two Years.

(6) Bridge

Biography : Female, aged 48, married. Full time housewife and part time Bridge teacher at local adult education evening institute.

Project : Member of card-playing family but only developed serious interest in Bridge after regular games with a friend in need of social contact. Played at local and then national level and as quality of opposition improved, so experienced consequent refinement of skills. Pleasure of playing a continual reinforcement, especially in her enjoyment of competition success. Timing of project at an appropriate stage in her life - impossible to have developed a similar commitment in early motherhood. Encouraged her son's interest in Bridge as well as that of work colleagues and students. Length of Project : Fourteen Years

(7) Horticulture

Biography : Male, aged 64, married. Left Grammar School at 16 to become a builder. Now retired.

Project : Interest attributed to early influence of key individuals - teacher, father, employer. Regards himself as continually learning and experimenting with new plants. Recorded activities over the years in a diary and a progress chart and marked his developing expertise by his attainment of judge status. Society membership granted the benefit of contacts with other enthusiasts and exchange of information. Problems solved through contacting commercial firms, specialist magazines and Royal Horticultural Society if his own library or conversations with peers failed to yield necessary information. Enthusiasm inherited by sons. Length of Project : Forty-Six Years.

(8) Philosophy

Biography : Male, aged 41, married. Left Catholic Grammar School at 16 to become Electronics Engineer. Now employed as computer systems analyst.

Project : Interest in philosophy attributed to influence of a particular teacher and to his mother, both of whom encouraged a spirit of enquiry. Adopted a problem-solving approach to his reading and reflection, considering what the 'greats' of philosophy have to say about social obligations and the development of morality. Wants to publish his ideas on the application of computer logic to problems of social conflict. Informal discussion group an important source of investigative leads and reinforcement of enthusiasm. Work held so important it must be published. Length of Project : Sixteen Years.

(9) Tropical Fish Keeping

Biography : Male, aged 42, married. Left Secondary Modern School at 15 and now a civil engineer.

Project : Interest derived from wife's involvement with tropical fish. His greatest joys experienced in problem-solving, especially combatting disease. Founded a local Aquarist Society and has a ten year development scheme in mind. Regards himself as continually learning, unable ever to reach omniscience in his field. Developed a special knowledge of aquarium plants and now feels confident about criticising accredited 'experts'. Became known as a local consultant on tropical fish keeping and regularly asked to give talks and to contribute to journals. Length of Project : Fourteen Years.

(10) Philately

Biography : Male, aged 52, married. Left school at 14 and in early adulthood emigrated to Australia. Now living in England and foreman at motor car assembly plant.

Project : Schoolboy interest rekindled after twenty-five year gap whilst working in Australia and seeing stamps on letters other workers received from their home countries. Collecting for its own sake gradually replaced by interest in production of stamps and then participation in club competitions. Knowledge derived initially from magazines but deliberately sought to expand his knowledge through club membership. Such membership provides good source of contacts and materials and is regarded as necessary to attainment of expert status. Length of Project : Twelve Years.

(11) Narrow Gauge Railways

Biography : Male, aged 34, bachelor. Left school at 16 and gained O.N.C. in Building. Now employed by Water Board.

Project : Interest aroused by father's modelling activities. Joined railway restoration project in Wales after seeing advert in enthusiasts' magazine. Sets high standards as stimulus and has occasionally to apply brakes on his obsessive involvement. As society secretary has tried to recruit members with desired skills to assist in local restoration project. A self-confessed 'Jack-of-all-Trades' with regard to restoration though sufficiently confident of his abilities to criticise the writings and activities of published experts. Length of Project : Nineteen Years.

(12) Record Collecting

Biography : Male, aged 30, bachelor. Left Secondary School at 16 and now assistant manager of an artists' materials shop.

Project : 'Pirate' radio of 1960's crucial in opening new musical horizons and stimulating interest in record collecting. Collecting regarded as central to his life, 'like breathing', and no end point of a complete collection is envisaged. Collection of 3,500 albums spanning all types of music - folk, jazz, blues, classical. Regards himself as promoting access to alternative musical styles not featured on radio, this achieved through the establishing of a local music club. Acts as consultant on new releases, musical events and specialist sources for other local collectors. Length of Project : Thirteen Years.

(13) Budgerigar Breeding

Biography : Male, aged 31, bachelor. Left Secondary School at 16 to follow a building course at local Technical College and now a building surveyor.

Project : Paternal encouragement and access to father's breeding facilities crucial in developing subject's interest. Mistakes in early years but joining a society granted valuable knowledge concerning bird care and disease diagnosis. Developed particular interest in genetics and expertise acknowledged by receipt of invitations to talk on this to other societies. After ten years formed separate society to concentrate solely on budgerigars. Society membership regarded as necessary to development of knowledge, especially if 'Champions' are co-members since these possess an unusually high level of expertise. Doubts of predominance of competitions in hobby since these cause distress and dissatisfaction - emphasis on money as key to success destroys intrinsic pleasure of hobby. Length of Project : Fifteen Years.

(14) Antiques Dealing

Biography : Male, aged 40, married. Left Public School at 17 to enter motor industry as management trainee. At 35, being disillusioned with industry, decided to open an antiques shop.

Project : Shop opened as part of larger rejection of previous lifestyle. Chose to develop antiques business as a result of chance purchase of an item sold for a good profit later, also because of wife's interest in the field. Other traders a network of mutually supportive contacts. Public library a useful information source and mastery of his field held to be impossible because of its diversity. Engaged in continual learning project with final aim 'Peace of Mind'. Project : Five Years.

(15) Jazz and Classical Music

Biography : Male, aged 47, married. Left Grammar School at 16 to work in local government administration. Now owner of small record shop.

Project : Radio perceived as crucial to the development of his love of music. As a teenager spent many hours listening to concerts on B.B.C. radio and compiled a notebook of composers and compositions classified according to his own rating system. Then undertook research into lives of highly-rated composers and sought out recordings of their works. No support for interest at school or home and perceived himself as developing his knowledge in total isolation. Exceptionally well-informed on 'the general facts of music - who wrote what', though weak on interpretative aspects. Length of Project : Twenty-Nine Years.

(16) Antique China

Biography : Female, aged 64, married. Left school at 16 and worked as a secretary before marriage. Part-time teacher of flower arranging, now retired.

Project : Origins of interest traced back to childhood and reinforced by later membership of local Ceramics Circle. Club contacts important for exchange of information on items in members' collections. Her own knowledge developed through chance acquisition of pieces which were then researched. Library a useful source of reference whilst dealers and collectors always willing to value items. Elected secretary of local Antiques Society and husband serves as its treasurer. Length of Project : Thirty-Nine Years.

(17) Botany

Biography : Male, aged 63, widower. Oxford graduate who became History teacher, now retired.

Project : Interest traced back to boarding school days and seeing fellow pupils' books of pressed flowers. Adult leisure time spent in solitary rambles and compilation of a diary of observations and a herbarium. A continuous learning project and one which branched out into observing birds, moths, insects and fungi. Heavy reliance on books and acquired an extensive personal reference library. Only a recent involvement with club activities, mainly to assist in search for sites for conservation. Solitary nature of his learning meant it was difficult for him to assess his knowledge but recent class membership revealed its depth. Length of Project : Forty-Eight Years.

(18) Ornithology

Biography : Female, aged 62, married. Left Grammar School at 16 and became a commercial designer before opening a sweet shop. Now a freelance writer.

Project : Interest traced back to farm childhood. Knowledge developed through solitary walking and observation and assembled extensive personal reference library. Participated in national nest record scheme and co-founder of two societies as well as belonging to many others. Began weekly nature column for local paper and has since published two small books herself, contributing to one other. Continually developing new interests, most recently in wildlife photography. Has apprenticed several youngsters in bird recognition by taking them on her walks and compiled a slide show for schools and colleges. Length of Project : Thirty Years.

(19) Steam Traction Engines

Biography : Male, aged 70, widower. Left Grammar School at 16 to become apprentice engineer and emigrated to Australia where he spent twenty years. Retired.

Project : Interest in engines initially aroused during apprenticeship but neglected while in Australia. On his return worked next to a haulage contractor and enthusiasm rekindled through watching their workers maintaining steam engines. Undertook massive search for documentation on 'Sentinel' steam wagon culminating in authorship of a book. Has built up extensive collection of books, pamphlets and journals and is frequently asked to contribute to enthusiasts' magazines. Rallies and club gatherings important for research contacts and currently he is secretary of national society. Has trained a succession of engine mates over the years who went on to buy their own engines. Length of Project : Twenty-Nine Years.

(20) Pigeon Racing

Biography : Male, aged 60, married. Left Elementary School at 14 and remained in the same town since that time. Currently transport driver for local council.

Project : Took over son's hobby after son had lost interest and neglected birds and equipment. Still regards himself as novice even though elected secretary of local club. Despite twelve years following his hobby still derives as much pleasure as ever when a bird returns from a 400 mile journey. Enthusiasts' club at centre of his activities allowing advice from other enthusiasts and participation in racing competitions. Competition success regarded as intermediate and terminal learning goals and development of good birds possible only after years of observation. Length of Project : Twelve Years.

(21) Beekeeping

Biography : Male, aged 68, married. Left Elementary School at 14 and lived within two miles radius ever since. Retired carpenter.

Project : Asked to build hives for local enthusiasts and this aroused his interest in bees. Despite fifty years study of bees still felt he had much to learn, particularly in swarm management. Project pursued through a series of experiments based on his reading - five years estimated as minimum period needed to judge effectiveness of a new method. No society membership for first 35 years of his hobby and critical of standards when he did attend meetings. In last three years asked to write several articles which have been collected and published as a book bringing him international recognition. Length of Project : Fifty Years.

(22) Aero-Modelling

Biography : Male, aged 36, married. Left Grammar School at 17 to take an O.N.C. in electrical engineering and now a scientific officer.

Project : Originally interested at school and encouraged by father who owned a radio and electronics shop. Enthusiasm waned during adolescence but revitalised in adulthood by work colleague. Formed local club in 1971 to promote access to good flying sites. Models initially based on plans from magazines but, as his knowledge developed, designed his own. Expertise developed through encountering defects and trying to find a better way of constructing that feature. Emphasised innate enjoyment derived from modelling and flying and determined his club would not organise competitions. These caused bitterness and destroyed innate enjoyment of activity. Length of Project : Fifteen Years.

(23) Railway Management and Modelling

Biography : Male, aged 74, married. Trained as an anaesthetist and became consultant but forced by ulcer to retire at 55. Asked to become manager of local railway trust.

Project : Interest in railways a result of father's encouragement and enthusiasm. Spent his childhood holidays visiting engine sheds and engine works and then developed interest in modelling. Enthusiasm waned during undergraduate days but seen as valuable therapy once he began work. No desire to participate in competitions and undertook modelling, observation of railways, and collection of memorabilia on his own. Assembled extensive reference library and now knowledgeable enough to spot inaccuracies in newly published texts. Growing awareness of expertise through ease of conversation with professional rail engineers and through requests for him to give talks and undertake society secretarial duties. Length of Project : Forty-Eight Years.

(24) Rabbit Breeding

Biography : Female, aged 31, married. Left Secondary School at 15 and has since worked as a typist and book-keeper.

Project : Father's involvement in rabbit breeding prompted subject's interest though this waned during adolescence. After starting a family resumed her hobby and converted her husband and daughter. Her efforts centre on competition success and this serves to reinforce her enthusiasm. Disparages pet books and relies on other breeders for advice though 'Fur and Feather' journal is invaluable diary of events, show results and small ads. Advises novice breeders and helps to marry supply of rabbits to demand from beginners for new stock. Length of Project : Sixteen Years.

(25) Pedigree Dog Breeding

Biography : Male, aged 55, married. Left school at 15 and served as soldier before joining the Indian Civil Service. Returned to England to join Police and now runs a kennel equipment business.

Project : Father trained gun and sheep dogs and passed this love of dogs onto his son. Subject believes this affinity with dogs and intuitive eye for their good characteristics can only be inherited, not acquired. Stress placed on importance of competitions and need to gain acclaim of other breeders. Knowledge developed over years of observation culminating in election as breed judge. Evolved his own criterion for judging dogs, this in addition to that set by Kennel Club handbook. Club membership essential to competition success through exchange of information, advice from experienced breeders and stud arrangements. Shows regarded as a social leveller, enthusiasts being united in their love of dogs. Articles published in several magazines and he now serves as referral point for all enquiries regarding dogs received by the Citizens' Advice Bureau. Length of Project : Twenty Years.

The Use of Interviews

In their critical analysis of survey research methods in adult education, Pilsworth and Ruddock point out the 'culture-specific' nature of the interview as a "western phenomenon as rooted in our society as are the mass media, which have, incidentally, shaped the conventions of the interview situation perhaps more than any other single agency" (Pilsworth & Ruddock 1975;35). In ordinary discourse the term 'interview' calls to mind television confrontations in

which a detached questioner elicits information in a more or less hostile manner from a knowledgeable and articulate subject; or, the term suggests 'interrogation', since its other common usage is with the competitive and anxiety-provoking job 'interview'.

It was because of the dangers of alarming potential subjects that the initial letters of contact for the study deliberately avoided too frequent a use of the term 'interview'. Instead, the letters asked sample members to 'chat' or 'talk' about their interests and referred to these 'conversations' being transcribed for research purposes. The hope was that the informal and non-threatening associations of these words would confirm that a reciprocal dialogue was sought and not a staged 'question-and-answer' session. Admittedly, the circumstances occasioning that dialogue could not be forgotten and it would be necessary to intervene if the interview was becoming repetitive or to probe an apparently casual, but revealing, aside. The intention was, however, to make the encounter as enjoyable for the subject as for the researcher. Through encouraging the subject to reflect on his activities in a way which was revealing to him, he would come away from the interview with some stimulating insights. Thus, Hyman et. al. have argued that "the interviewer, while he might be a biasing agent, might conceivably be an insightful, helpful person" (Hyman et. al. 1954;99). As Zweig's studies of British manual workers have shown, this interviewing style is not only more enjoyable for the participants, it is also more likely to result in a meaningful exchange ...

" The act of interviewing does not need to sink to
the level of mechanicalness. It can be a graceful

and joyful act, enjoyed by the two sides and suffered by neither. What is more, my contention is that unless it becomes such an act, it will only fail in its main function. One cannot conduct an interview by bombarding one's victim with a barrage of questions, which is only tiresome and tiring for both sides. The only way is to make the interview an enjoyable social act, both for the interviewer and the respondent, a two-way traffic, so that the respondent feels not a 'victim' but a true partner, a true conversationalist. " (Zweig 1965;265)

If the interviewer is to ask people to reveal details of activities which are of great personal significance to them, then he, the interviewer, must also be prepared to voice his own enthusiasms, pleasures and anxieties. In the present research this occurred throughout the interviews as the expression of a genuine admiration for the activities of the sample members came quite naturally to the researcher. This was no calculating strategem to put subjects off their guard in the hope of prompting an indiscreet revelation, but a spontaneous response to encountering repeated evidence of sustained commitment and considerable achievement.

Location of Interviews

Of the thirty-five interviews, nineteen were held at the subjects' homes, twelve at the researcher's home, two at subjects' workplaces and two in the researcher's office. The advantage of meeting in

a subject's home are twofold. Firstly, he or she feels more confident and relaxed and, secondly, there is the opportunity for the researcher to see practical examples of the learning activity. The latter advantage means that as well as providing valuable observational material, the course of the interview can be altered, and interesting lines of enquiry pursued, through reference to a particular artefact. Asking about the other members in a photograph taken at an exhibition can lead into a discussion on the use of clubs and societies as informal learning networks; being shown a china collection reveals the rationale behind the collecting activity, indicating the parameters placed upon what constitutes a 'complete' collection and saying something about the development of good and bad pieces. Zweig, again, has written that ...

" The value (of an interview) is still more enhanced if one can interview a person in his own surroundings at home or place of work, which gives larger scope for observation, as so many of the potential questions are answered immediately and truthfully simply by using one's own eyes. One can understand the respondent much better, seeing him in a concrete environment and a concrete situation. " (Zweig 1965;254)

Contacting Sample Members

The source of contact for each of the thirty-five interviewees reflects an increasing dependence on contacts made through society secretaries. Five years experience as an adult education organiser

in one town was sufficient to provide an initial group of subjects, especially those in the correspondence students' sample, through personal acquaintance and press coverage of independent learning achievements. Although the use of local societies as the sampling frame was rejected, it became necessary to contact such societies as the research progressed and the supply of potential subjects began to be depleted. Thus, 64 per cent of the independent learners were contacted through local enthusiasts' societies and, of this group, 81 per cent themselves occupied the position of society secretary or chairman. The initial letters of contact asked the officer concerned to recommend a particularly knowledgeable enthusiast who had gained his knowledge without the benefit of institutional instruction, adding that they might like to consider themselves as potential interview subjects.

The reasoning behind this latter suggestion was that club secretaries might come to occupy their position because they were demonstrably more knowledgeable and enthusiastic than the normal club member. Some of those interviewed were founder members of their respective societies and the section in the concluding chapter of this study examines the contribution such 'animateurs' made to their local communities. It should be made clear that there was no attempt to erect criteria of expertise to which the subjects would have to conform in order to qualify for inclusion in the sample. Given the intentionally diverse nature of the projects surveyed, no one researcher could hope to be in a position to judge the levels of expertise of enthusiasts in all those fields. Instead, he must appeal to the judgement of those already engaged in such activities. Thus, learners were considered to be suitable for inclusion in the sample

if they were acknowledged by their peers to be possessed of a level of expertise well above the average.

The Conduct of Interviews

From the outset the interviews took on an organic character rather than being a question-and-answer session. They became organic in the sense that areas to which attention was directed were explored, wherever possible, through the clarification or elaboration of previous comments. The purpose of this was to prompt a naturally flowing conversational interchange directed, when appropriate, by reference to elicited responses or to photographs, magazines and collectors' items at the subject's house. Grounding the exploration of a general theme within the context of a specific activity or occurrence would help the respondent to feel in familiar territory. Recounting the details of individual incidents instead of answering generalised, abstract questions would ease the subject's anxieties resulting from expectations about interview protocol and the provision of 'correct' responses. It would be easier to discuss, say, the role of competitions in reinforcing motivation and directing the course of learning efforts, by commenting on a prominently displayed rosette or certificate and allowing the conversation to develop from that reference. An illustration of this is provided by the following extract from the interview with the angler who earlier that day had participated in a competition ...

"I've gone to the Avon today, really, geared up to fish the Severn, because that's what I usually fish and that's what I'm geared up to fish. I've gone along with the wrong rod which is too heavy, exerts too much power

when I strike, and consequently I've lost fish through it. It's cost me a lot of money and I'm not very pleased about it! Because I didn't think enough about it before I went.

Question : How could you have increased your chances of success then, before you arrived at the river?

By doing your homework. Firstly, you must know what sort of state the river is in, whether it's up, normal level, whether it's rising, falling - that's a must. Then you compare results probably from the last three weeks on the venue. I always read the angling papers each week to find out what weights have been winning matches and what weights have been getting in the prize money. It's the angler who catches the heaviest weight of fish that wins the money. I also get most of the results sent through to me anyway. We do a lot of talking in the local tackle shop. We go in there and say what won the match at Huxley's on the Avon, and what won the match at Stourport this week, how did friends get on?, what did they do ?, how did they fish ? " (4)

Rooting a question in the context of an incident occurring that same day here encouraged the respondent to talk about the general principles regarding the use of relevant knowledge to his best advantage and the function of peer groups (in this instance a tackle shop rather than an enthusiasts' society) as information exchanges. A totally non-directive interview is an impossibility in that the researcher will bring to the encounter hunches, expectations of relevance, and an

overall research concern which inevitably will influence the choice of those apparently casual, incidental comments selected for further exploration. As far as was possible, however, the interviews were self-generating in that new questions were asked in response to previous remarks.

When the idea of researching the activities of independent learners first occurred, a number of preconceptions undoubtedly came to mind as to the aspects of independent learning on which the study would concentrate. The origins of learning projects were to be investigated, particularly the extent to which an identifiable incident or person had been influential. What proved to be an undue emphasis was placed on the importance of the mass media as sources of information and it was also assumed that the discussion of problems encountered during the execution of projects would take up a much greater part of the interviews than it eventually did. As the interview programme progressed, however, a number of potentially fruitful avenues of enquiry began to emerge which were in addition to, and separate from, the author's initial preconceptions. On their emergence, these features would be noted and followed up in subsequent interviews and, if their importance was confirmed, they came to occupy a central place in the research scheme. In this way, for example, was suggested the distinction between subjective and objective indices of evaluation, the importance of competition participation as a stimulus to learning, and the characteristic attitude of independent learners towards what they saw as the ever-expanding nature of their projects.

Interview Transcription

The interview as a medium of educational research is one fraught with potential dangers in transcription and interpretation, especially when, as in the present study, the subjects are recounting their experiences of activities which differ greatly in their detail. With those interviews which were taped and then transcribed (twenty-two in number) there was at least a fixed record of the subject's perceptions. Since some respondents had made clear their dislike of the conversation being tape recorded there had to be a reliance on notetaking with the remaining thirteen subjects. Because a verbatim record of an interview is impossible to take through shorthand notation the researcher must recognise the existence of a conscious and unconscious sifting of messages whilst he attempts to note what appear to be the most significant comments. Fortunately, the majority of the first group of twenty-five interviews were tape recorded and then transcribed (in fact twenty of the first twenty-five were taped) so that by the time of the enforced reliance on notetaking the chief areas of interest had emerged. Whilst it would have been preferable to record all of the last ten interviews, it was at least possible to realise when a confirmation or invalidation of previously noted experiences was forthcoming. The element in interviewees' comments which was the most frequently ignored was the detailed description of national and regional society hierarchies. Since the concern of the research was the subjects' perceptions of their learning experiences, the composition of national committees and frequency of official elections were features that were discarded unless they had a direct bearing on the project itself, (for example where a subject had been involved in standing for election or had taken on the responsibility of committee membership).

One way to reduce the potential inaccuracies caused by the dependence on notetaking was to invite the subjects to read through the interview reports and indicate any mistakes made in summarising the substance of their comments. With regard to the thirteen untaped interviews, all the subjects concerned returned a checked transcript and several were prompted to add to the interview summary their own post-interview reflection. The danger of submitting an interview record to the interviewees for their verification must be that such records will be subtly altered in an attempt to show the subjects in what they regard as a more favourable light. Alteration of this nature never posed a serious threat to the study. One interview was rewritten in article form by a subject who felt that the interview notes were inadequate in conveying the depth and breadth of her interest *. Another subject rephrased some passages giving as his reason that "in some instances my wife thinks it is too pretentious". In this case the subject's wife shared his interest and had been present throughout much of the interview. Of the other eleven untaped interview reports, eight were returned with no more than minor alterations and three were accompanied by comments praising the accuracy of the reports ...

" I would like to say how well you have sorted out the facts. I was delighted at seeing myself in black and white. My husband and my friend (the one of twenty years standing) thought you had done a very good job. " (24)

" Your summary of our interview seems to me a very fair

* This subject was a journalist and author in the field of her interest and this perhaps explains her conversion of the report to article form.

one and I have made only a very few alterations
and comments. " (22)

" So sorry to be late in returning your copy. I
think it is very good indeed and correct. My
congratulations. " (25)

The chance to check the record of the interview conversation was deliberately stressed as a condition of sample members' agreement to participate in the research. It was hoped that this would go some way towards removing the association of interview with interrogation and that it would help to establish an open and reciprocal atmosphere. Knowing that a veto could be exercised over the contents of the interview report, and that there would be no attempt to tease out indiscreet revelations which would then be made public, would help to build a trust between researcher and interviewee. An assurance of anonymity was also given at the outset of each interview and all taping or notetaking was preceded by an explanation of the purposes of the encounter; that it was for a university research project on independent adult learning and that the focus of interest would be the development of skills and knowledge.

An interesting feature of the interviews which recalled their culture-specific nature (and in particular the influence of the media) was the self-censorship applied by some subjects who prefaced certain remarks by declaring "This bit is off the record" or "This is between ourselves". Such comments were generally followed by anecdotes concerning local figures and all such wishes or instructions were respected and observed. The additional precaution was taken in the interview transcripts of using only

initials wherever names were mentioned. This would assure the respondents that their own identity was guarded and that fellow enthusiasts, family members and work colleagues would also fall under the cloak of anonymity.

The verbatim transcription of each interview conversation took place as soon as possible after the encounter. Since most subjects agreed to verify the accuracy of the interview record, it was considered important to send them the transcript whilst the encounter was still clearly remembered. Any mistakes in transcription would thus be more readily detected and any ambiguities more easily clarified. For the thirteen interviews in which the use of a cassette recorded was rejected by the subject, the researcher was forced to take notes during the conversation of what seemed to be the subject's most relevant comments and to paraphrase particularly telling remarks. These interview notes were then used as the basis of an interview report consisting of summaries of the subject's comments on such topics as the means of assessing progress, the benefits of society participation and the problems encountered during the execution of the project.

For the most part, then, the interview reports on these thirteen untaped encounters paraphrased what seemed to the researcher to be the subject's perceptions regarding the central concerns of the study. Wherever possible, however, the device of reported speech was employed. If, for example, an interview report could be compiled during the evening following an encounter that afternoon, the report would contain quotations attributed to the subject. Such quotations would be derived from the two sources of interview notes and the researcher's memory of that afternoon's conversation. The interview report, complete with quotations, would then be sent to the interviewee

for verification. Appendix (1) consists of an interview report, including reported speech quotations, which was written in the evening following an interview with a rabbit breeder earlier in the day.

The single most important source of material for the study was, however, the transcripts of the twenty-two taped interviews. These were typed by the researcher and it was not uncommon for a two hour interview to yield some twelve pages of single spaced typescript. The management of this material, the discerning of central themes, and the coding of interviewee comment into emergent categories are all considered in the succeeding paragraphs.

An Emergent Schedule

To come to an area of research with no preconceptions as to the most fruitful avenues of enquiry existing therein is hardly possible. In the very acts of framing a provisional interview schedule, assembling a research sample, and deciding upon investigative parameters, the researcher is called on to express preferences as to the themes and topics he wishes to investigate and these choices thereby exclude the consideration of other possible features. The preliminary interview schedule (reproduced as Appendix (3)) was devised as a support for the researcher should subjects' comments fail to yield information on certain matters during the informal conversation. As the schedule shows, the original intention was to explore the following topics ...

- (1) Origins of Independent Learning
- (2) Sources of Information

- (3) Contacts with Fellow Enthusiasts
- (4) Planning of Learning Goals
- (5) Independent Learners as 'Animateurs'
- (6) Evaluating Independent Learning
- (7) Self-Perceptions of Independent Learners
- (8) Relation between School Experience and Independent Learning
- (9) Importance of Spouse Support
- (10) Problems of Independent Learning

Once the interview programme was underway it soon became apparent that the preliminary schedule required revision and refinement. The section dealing with self-perception was dropped as subjects proved unwilling to engage in self-analysis. The distinction between objective and subjective indices of evaluation revealed early on in the interview programme resulted in the addition of follow-up questions. Instead of merely being asked how they judged their progress, later subjects were asked to say whether or not they made comparisons with peers, at which point they felt they had come to understand the overall pattern of their field of interest, and which event (if any) had signalled their attainment of an unusual level of expertise or command of knowledge. Again, as the importance of competitions as stimuli to learning, as evaluative indices, and as intermediate learning goals emerged as themes of importance, so the schedule was adjusted accordingly.

The questions comprising the interview schedule therefore established some of the central themes of the research. As far as possible, however, subjects were encouraged to talk freely and informally about their interest and interruptions were restricted to

clarification or to a redirection of attention at obvious pauses in the conversation. The respondent was not forced continually on to the 'point' since no point, (that is, no central hypothesis), had been previously determined. This meant that the interview transcripts contained large sections of material which, as unprompted comment, did not relate to a set question. A major research task was the analysis of such comment.

The Analysis of Interview Transcripts

In order to manage the mass of interviewee comment, a two-stage filtering system was devised consisting of the production of interview reports and subsequent abstraction of the information contained therein in the form of data sheets. The interview reports were documents of five or six pages in length which were prepared on each sample member. They summarised the chief features of the conversation and illustrated these with extensive quotations drawn from the transcript. Thus, instead of twelve pages of unbroken interviewee comment, the basic interview record consisted of six pages of headings and sub-headings summarising the main themes of the interview supported by relevant verbatim extracts from the conversation. The interview reports thus constituted the chief source of primary data for the study, (see Appendix (1)).

The second stage in this process of managing the mass of transcript comment was the compilation of data sheets for each of the sample members. These were single sheets containing brief biographical details and a reproduction of the headings and sub-headings in the interview reports. Thus, a typical data sheet would have headings such as ...

- (1) Origins of Project
- (2) Features of Learning Activity
- (3) Final Aim
- (4) Sources of Information
- (5) Evaluation
- (6) Spouse Support
- (7) Peer Contact
- (8) Animateur
- (9) Problems

Under each of these headings would be several numbered points which the transcript had revealed as relevant to those overall themes. The data sheet for the aquarist in the sample is reproduced as Appendix (4) to illustrate this process. At the end of this filtering process the researcher had thirty-five interview reports each of five to six pages in length and thirty-five single page data sheets. The data sheets were not intended to serve as a primary source of material for the study but rather as a shorthand record of the perceptions of any one sample member, or group of members, on a particular theme.

The coding of transcript comment into various categories was undertaken using a colour coding method and through shorthand notation in the margins of the typewritten transcript. This is seen in Appendix (2) where a verbatim interview record is coded into manageable sections. Thus, comment regarding evaluative procedures was underlined in red and signalled by the abbreviation 'Eval.' in the margin. The description of the role of chance acquisition in determining the pattern of learning activity was underlined in blue and signalled by the abbreviation 'L.A. - Role of Chance'. Comments on the sources of information used were underlined in green and marked 'Sources'.

In typing the verbatim transcript of interview conversations the researcher deliberately allowed a wide margin for the addition of shorthand notes so that the specific nature of the comments on each theme could be indicated. To take one example, that of evaluating independent learning, the sections in the transcript dealing with this theme would be underlined in red and marked by the abbreviation 'Eval.'. In addition, however, as each index of evaluation or self-rating was given, the abbreviation 'Eval.' would be followed by a description of this index such as 'Peer Comparison', 'Competition Success' or 'Critical re. Experts'.

Given the exploratory nature of this research, it was inevitable that new categories would emerge as the interview programme progressed. One such category was that of 'Attitudes to Learning'. The first mentions of distinctive attitudes towards their learning held by independent learners were subsumed under the general category of 'Learning Activity'. As the frequency and congruence of comment on this matter made it clear that independent learners shared a remarkably similar view of the fields of knowledge opening before them, so these attitudes were detached from the overall 'Learning Activity' category and awarded the status of a separate, single category. Comment in subsequent transcripts relating to learner views of his field of knowledge was henceforth signalled by the abbreviation 'Att.'.

The categories and themes which came to comprise the interview reports and which were summarised in the data sheets were derived from two sources. The first of these was the researcher's own ideas and speculations concerning the likely activities of

independent learners which were based on his reading of the work done in this field by Tough, Houle, Moore and others. The extent and form of these speculations is summarised by the contents of the preliminary schedule (Appendix 3) and they provided an initial framework on which to base the research proposal and the first group of interviews.

Inevitably, however, the progress of the research saw the emergence of a number of new themes such as the already mentioned importance of competitions, the view of the ever-expanding nature of independent learning projects, and the apparent lack of awareness of problems. Additionally, the general categories such as Evaluation, Learning Activity and Peer Contact began to assume clear outlines and to contain within them several highlighted features and emphases. In this way the general category of 'Learning Activity' was broken down into several particular categories such as Attitude to Learning, Learning Methods and Learning Goals. Each of these categories then came to form separate chapter headings and were, in turn, broken down into a number of constituent features. In Chapter (6), for example, the continuum of learning methods characterised by increasing degrees of learner deliberation was suggested by interviewee comment. It was not devised by the researcher beforehand to assist in the analysis and ordering of such comment. Similarly, the category of 'Evaluation' attained specific shape as respondents spoke of subjective and objective indices of evaluation and their attempts at self-assessment. Again, the responses concerning society participation and membership suggested a classification of different types of learning group and indicated a number of educational functions exhibited by these groups.

Because the interview reports and data sheets were compiled after each encounter rather than at the end of the complete interview programme, themes emerged in earlier interviews which could be explored in subsequent conversations. The subjects' perceptions of their fields of interest as affording the opportunity for endless exploration was a theme suggested in the first few interviews and one which subsequently was raised by the researcher if no comment on this was offered spontaneously. Similarly, the obvious significance attributed to competition participation by respondents in the early stages of the interview programme prompted the questioning of subjects as to the extent of their competitive activities. The only hypothesis to be formally tested was that proposed by Houle to the effect that ...

" no matter how intensely an individual may want to learn, he or she usually does not do so very actively if the marriage partner objects. The cost of participation on such terms is too great a price to pay. " (Houle 1963;43)

As Chapter (13) shows, spouse attitudes towards their partners' studies were explored in the interviews with a view to testing the truth of Houle's assertion. Apart from this, all other generalisations, classifications and typologies used in the research, the selection of significant themes for further exploration, the organisation of material into chapters, and the presentation of findings within those chapters, arose out of the researcher's continual re-reading and refining of transcript comment over a period of three years.

Conclusion

Since the focus of the study is on the subjects' perceptions of their learning, the succeeding chapters rely heavily on quotations taken from the thirty-five transcripts. Whenever a typology is erected, or an attitude explored, it is supported by extensive quotations. This not only provides validation for the researcher's speculations, but it also serves to highlight the unique character of each of the projects surveyed. It is hoped that the reader of this study will develop, by the end of his perusal, a knowledge of, and sensitivity to, the particular pleasures and anxieties of each of the thirty-five individuals comprising the sample. To indicate the exact source of each quote, and to allow the reader to discover the conditions under which the interview was conducted, each quotation is followed by a number in parentheses. This number refers to the number of the independent learning project or correspondence course as it appears in Table (1), 'The Research Sample'. Thus, number (1) placed at the end of a quotation refers to the conversation with the organic gardener, number (27) to the transcript of an Open University Arts student.

The overall methodological perspective employed in this research is one of inductive development; that is, the questions to be asked, the analysis of subsequent answers, and the presentation of the chief features of this dialogue have all arisen out of the research experience itself. As significant themes began to emerge, and classifications to suggest themselves, so the questions asked and the coding techniques employed were altered. Stress was placed on emergent themes, concepts and typologies since, in Glaser and

Stauss's words, these ...

" usually prove to be the most relevant and the best fitted to the data. As they are emerging, their fullest possible generality and meaning are continually being developed and checked for relevance. " (Glaser & Strauss 1968;37)

Further support for the method of inductive development is provided by Holmes who argues that "methodology must be considered as a variable in research and not as an abstract body of dogma" (Holmes 1976;160). In his view researchers are faced with ...

" a moral choice, whether they are prepared to 'come up with the data' which has the appearance of presenting clear-cut facts, or, whether to develop methods which may have nothing to do with administrative or cost-effective solutions but which bring into play independent and critical thinking based on (though not limited to) the subjective perceptions of the students and an understanding of the reality in which they live. " (Holmes 1976;163)

The dangers of the latter approach are obvious. The researcher may become so immersed in the data that he is unable to develop an overall perspective with regard to its main features. His typologies may be subject to such continual refinement that no clear framework for the management and coding of responses emerges. He may seize on what seem to be particularly fruitful avenues of enquiry early on in the study only to find that much time and effort has been

invested in the exploration of thematic cul-de-sacs as these features remain unmentioned in subsequent interviews.

In a research field which is characterised by a history of developed and accepted hypotheses and experimental procedures, much of this exploratory effort is removed. In an area such as that covered by the present study where no methodological paradigm exists to guide the researcher he is forced to adopt an inductive approach to the management of his material. The very nature of enquiry into non-traditional areas thus dictates a flexible and developing methodology in which the major themes and classificatory schemes will emerge only after the researcher has immersed himself in the data (whether this be in the form of 'objective' statistics or subjective perceptions).and reflected upon its internal logic. Too rigid an adherence to a preconceived theoretical framework in which the chief research concerns, the major concepts, and the preliminary hypotheses have all been previously formulated, may produce a neatly consistent and precise set of results. But it can also mean that the finished research says more about the preconceptions of the researcher than the significance which the sample members ascribe to their actions.

Finally, some explanation of the organisation of material into different chapters might be appropriate at this point. Chapter (4) examines the motivations for learning expressed by the independent learners and correspondence students but the succeeding six chapters deal solely with the experiences of the independent learners. Since this latter group is the focus of attention in this study, it was felt that the learning activities of its members were deserving of extended and separate treatment. Chapters (5) to (10) are concerned, therefore, with exploring the twenty-five independent learners' attitudes

towards their learning, the methods used in their search for knowledge, the sources of information they found most useful, the extent to which they specified intermediate and terminal learning goals, the evaluative procedures they adopted, and the importance of competitions as stimuli to learning. The similarities between the correspondence students' learning activities and those of the independent learners are examined in Chapter (11) and this chapter also discusses the correspondence learners' reactions to institutional direction regarding their rate of progress, the subject matter they were to consult, and the range of permitted interpretations of set materials.

The final chapters in the study include evidence obtained from both groups of learners. Chapter (12) recounts the sample members' perceptions regarding the problems they faced in pursuing their interests and the patterns of resolution they devised. The question of familial support to learning is investigated in Chapter (13) and Houle's assertion as to the importance of spouse support is checked. Chapter (14) describes the learning groups in which independent learners and correspondence students participated and considers the educational functions of such groups. The concluding Chapter (15) explores the connections between independent learning and formal education and examines the contributions made by independent learners to the educational life of their communities. It also seeks to suggest ways in which independent adult learning might be supported.

CHAPTER FOUR

ORIGINS OF LEARNING ACTIVITIES

The establishment of causation with regard to past events is the central concern of historians and raises a number of problems which have received considerable discussion in textbooks on historiography. An individual's memory of participation in past events can be criticised as a highly unreliable information source. The passage of time may have distorted recollections to the point where actions are attributed to entirely different reasons than those originally present. In particular, the role of chance is likely to be underestimated as accidental occurrences come to be regarded as elements in a naturally developing and consciously shaped series of events. In historical terms, this interpretation of the past is termed 'colligation', the underlying assumption of which is "that different historical events can be regarded as going together to constitute a single process, a whole of which they are all parts and in which they belong together in a specially intimate way" (Walsh 1967; 24).

This process of colligation was repeatedly, though unwittingly, demonstrated by independent learners. In the analysis of the origins of their learning activities, these learners took much longer to recreate their state of mind and to recall their domestic and occupational circumstances than did the correspondence students. For the latter group, the onset of learning was a specific event marked by acts such as the payment of fees, completion of registration forms, purchase of 'set' texts and initial contact with tutors and students. The independent learners, however, found it difficult to remember a time when they hadn't pursued their particular interest and would be

reduced to asserting that they had 'always' loved animals, or watched birds or collected pieces of china. The events which had initially occasioned these enthusiasms would be totally beyond recall and their self-image had always been that of botanist, birdwatcher, or lover of the past.

Despite these difficulties, it was considered important to investigate the origins of independent learning activities and most interviews commenced with the subject's recollections of the first stirrings of interest. For those individuals who were unable to remember the circumstances under which their projects began, a comment or question later in the interview would often trigger the recollection of those earlier events. Only one subject proved unable to offer any account of the awakening of his interest.

The Diversity of Motivations

As chapter (2) has already mentioned, Allen Tough's 1968 study of thirty-five Toronto adults yielded an astonishing variety of reasons for beginning a learning project. His results indicated that "apparently it is rare for an adult learner to be motivated by only one reason, even two or three reasons are uncommon" and he concluded "in the typical learning project, five different reasons are strong, and another is weak but definitely present" (Tough 1968; 8). His study did take into account reasons for continuing as well as beginning a learning project but, even so, there is a marked difference between his findings and those of the present study. Of the thirty-five interviews

conducted with independent learners, fifteen revealed a perception of one overwhelming reason as being responsible for the project's initiation. Amongst the other ten subjects, seven recalled two reasons and three each recalled three reasons. The mean number of reasons given was 1.52 and the median number was 1.00. The correspondence students revealed a slightly higher figure with a mean of 1.8 reasons and a median of 2.00, but this still presents a sharp contrast to Tough's findings.

This divergence between the two studies deserves further scrutiny. It is possible that the thirty-five adults, with their exceptionally high educational level, possessed genuinely superior recall abilities and were able more exactly to recreate their state of mind at the outset of their projects. A more likely explanation, however, is that the difference in research methodology accounts for the discrepancy of results. In the Toronto study the subjects were presented with a series of separate sheets each containing a possible reason for starting and continuing a learning project. If they stated that the reason applied in their particular case, they were then asked to rate its relative strength. In the present study, however, subjects were asked in general terms about the way in which they began their learning activities and were prompted with examples of possible motivations only if repeated questioning failed to produce an answer. It may be that the presentation of alternatives in Tough's research interviews elicited a corresponding variety of responses, whereas the general questions of the present study prompted recall of only the strongest motivations.

Additionally, the Toronto study was concerned solely with reasons for starting and continuing a learning project and consequently the whole of the interview time was devoted to that theme. This concentration of attention would be likely to produce results showing more possible motivations for learning than in the present study where the origins of independent learning activities was only one of a number of themes to be explored.

The Origins of Independent Learning Activities

From amongst the comments of the sample of independent learners, the influence and encouragement of particular individuals emerged as by far the most important reason for starting a learning project. As Table (2) shows, this was mentioned in over half the interviews and in over a third of cases it was quoted as the whole motivation. The influence of peer groups was regarded as being next in importance followed by the recognition of the importance of chance. Two respondents located the beginnings of their learning activities in a desire to change the status quo of their personal and occupational lives and another two (both music enthusiasts) testified to the importance of radio. Only one subject categorically stated he could not recall the beginnings of his interest but two others could think of no other origins than that their childhood surroundings had nurtured their enthusiasms.

Table (2) Origins of Learning; Independent Learners

<u>Reason for developing interest</u>	<u>Sample members mentioning reason</u>	<u>No. of times reason was sole motivation</u>
Influence of key individuals	13	9
Influence of peers	7	1
Chance occurrence	7	1
Importance of radio	2	2
Change of lifestyle	2	1
Childhood surroundings	2	1

(1) Influence of Key Individuals

Familial links dominated this category as twelve of the thirteen respondents concerned traced the origins of their learning activity at least partially back to parental or spouse interest. The role of the father was particularly noticeable here, with six of the thirteen attributing the development of their interest solely to their father's encouragement. Typical of the process whereby a child was drawn into the father's activity was the experience of a budgerigar breeder ...

" My father really was an inspiration ... he kept canaries for a long time ... I can remember right back to coronation year when we lived in a different house from the one where I started and we were breeding canaries - at least my father was, I was helping him as children do. So it's always been a part of me in

some form or other since I was about eight ... I saw them and looked at them during the day when I came home from school and he was out at work. Then, when breeding time came around or cleaning out time, he'd take me in and we'd generally sort of mess around, cleaning out and looking on ... I can still remember where the aviary was when I was about eight and the layout of it all ... I bought my first pair of budgerigars from a fellow up the road and kept them in my father's old aviary. That's how it started really, I was about 14." (13)

In this particular case, the motivation derived from parental encouragement was supported by the possibility of immediate access to good resources; that is, an existing aviary. This dual aspect of parental influence - encouragement supported by provision of facilities - was paralleled with three other subjects who referred to the father's role. Thus, a model aero enthusiast had access to his father's radio shop, a rabbit breeder was the daughter of a rabbit and chinchilla breeder and a dog breeder had the use of his father's facilities for training gundogs and sheepdogs.

It seems that where adequate resources are allied to parental encouragement a definite family tradition is likely to emerge spanning at least three generations. The rabbit breeder's husband and daughter had joined the club she had established to promote her favourite breed. The dog breeder asserted most strongly that he had 'inherited' a love of dogs from his father and that this, in turn, had been passed on to

his own son who was not running a petfoods and kennel equipment business. There was little evidence to suggest that these subjects felt their fathers had deliberately manipulated a growing interest in order to establish a family tradition. Only one subject spoke of having been "trained at an early age" (eleven) and even here the rest of the interview failed to provide any supportive evidence for the exercise of rigid parental control suggested by the use of the word "trained".

The role of other family members in initiating an interest in one of their number is relatively minor when compared to that of the father. In one case the transmission of influence from father to son was reversed; as the son's interest in pigeon racing declined and his equipment and birds began to be neglected, so the father took over the responsibility for their maintenance. Although, as we shall see later, the spouse often had a strong supportive role, in only one instance was the initiation of the learning project a direct result of spouse encouragement. This was an aquarist who subsequently founded a local society and became nationally known as an expert on tropical fish ...

" It was my wife actually that started it. She'd been married before and her husband used to keep them. When we lived down in London she said 'Why don't you keep tropical fish?' because we couldn't have any other pets and previously when I was single, I'd kept tropical birds ... Anyway, she went out and bought this little tank, 18" x 12" x 12" because she wanted it. She'd been married for seventeen years and they'd always had tropical fish

in the house so she intended to have a tank. She set it up herself and bought some fish and in amongst them were a pair of swords ... One day she said to me 'That female sword is going to have young soon' and up until then I'd always imagined that all fish laid eggs which then hatched out. Then, about 10.30 p.m. just as the news finished, she was going to turn out the light on the tank and she said 'They're having babies' and I looked in the tank and there were these tiny things about $\frac{1}{4}$ " long and I lay down on the floor and I was hooked! I was there watching them till 4.15 a.m. We went out that weekend and bought a three foot tank so we could get all the big ones in the big tank and keep the baby ones in the small tank to rear them up. We just went mad and it mushroomed - and in three years I'd got up to twenty-three tanks, it was ridiculous." (9)

The number of non-family individuals mentioned as being influential in originating learning activities was small - a work colleague, a friend, an employer and two teachers. In the latter cases, though, the impact of teacher enthusiasms were remembered very clearly and vividly recalled ...

" I really started gardening, well having an interest in gardening, when I was at the Elementary School at L.W. We had a new headmaster who came when I was about eight and he was very keen on everything - full of enthusiasm. He was a keen chrysanthemum grower ... and I used to go and help him on Saturday mornings, evening and so on." (7)

" I started off with Theology at school ... I did the G.C.E. equivalent in R.I. at school and got a distinction in that and then Father L.H. took a year's Sixth Form teaching and he was absolutely superb. He sort of got me interested in the idea that you don't just have hard theories, you don't just have beliefs, but you always have a reason for those beliefs. Probably, the philosophical outlook has stemmed from that time." (8)

(2) Peer Group Influence

This was the second most important category in terms of the number of subjects referring to the importance of such groups in initiating their interest. Its influence cannot, however, be compared with that of parental encouragement since, in all but one case, the peer group acted as an early reinforcer of developing interests rather than being their direct instigator. The one case which proved to be the exception was the Organic Gardener (already quoted in Chapter (1)), whose early commitment to his gardening methods was based on a strong identification with a particular sub-culture ...

" Given the environment I was living under, given the length of my hair and my companions in my teens, given that I belonged to C.N.D., that I looked like someone who people would shout "Hippie!" at, it was inevitable that I would be into organic gardening and not chemical gardening. If you share enough

interests in a particular group you assimilate all the attitudes of that group ... because of the sub-culture I was in, it was inevitably going to be organic gardening." (1)

The other respondents who mentioned the influence of peer groups spoke in terms of their having revived or strengthened the original interest rather than assuming direct responsibility for its initiation. A good example of this is the Fitness Enthusiast whose activities were reinforced by the 'He-Man' cult (as he described it) embraced by his peers ...

" ... the other element came into it in my teenage years because one got involved in that kind of culture. Not exactly gang warfare on that scale, but you suddenly found you had to start asserting yourself with friends. And the general atmosphere of that time as I remember it was one of the 'He-Man' cult and the group of ten people I moved about with had that kind of atmosphere about it ... the people I did go around with did get involved in fights occasionally and I had to get into this because I was a part of it." (5)

The other instances in which peer group influence was important were those of an antiques collector whose interest was revived by joining a ceramics circle, a bridge player who marked the development of her serious interest by the stimulus of regular peer competition and three subjects - a philatelist, botanist and model aero enthusiast - who all remembered their enthusiasms receiving an early stimulus through their being shared with fellow school pupils.

(3) The Role of Chance

This is, inevitably, a category of diverse character with the nature of the accidental occurrence which helped to spark off an interest varying from case to case. Only one person, an internationally known apiarist, attributed the development of his interest purely to chance. A carpenter by trade, he had become interested in beekeeping as a result of building hives for other local enthusiasts.

The only similarity which reveals itself in the differing accounts of the role of chance is that of the sudden and unexpected availability of resources for pursuing a particular pastime. Thus, a philatelist revived his boyhood hobby after some twenty-five years when confronted with the basis of a good collection. Working in Australia he was surrounded by expatriate Greeks and Italians who were receiving regular correspondence from home and he began to use their stamps to form his basic collection. Again, the aquarist already mentioned was living in London at the time of his awakening interest and enjoyed access to a range of well stocked shops with cheap prices, unparalleled in the provinces. The secretary of a National Steam Engine club traced the revival of his interest after a twenty year gap, to his working (as a domestic electrical engineer) in a firm next to a haulage contractor. Seeing the workers with their traction engines during his lunch hour rekindled an enthusiasm which has culminated in co-authorship of two books on steam engine history. Finally, the owner of a small antiques business chose to specialise in this activity because of a unique

combination of circumstances - the arrival on the market of a suitable property, the fact that minimal capital investment was required, and the chance purchase of an item sold later for a good profit.

(4) The Importance of Radio

This is a highly specific category in two senses; both the projects were concerned with music and in both cases the influence of radio was cited as the sole reason for their growing enthusiasm. In one of the cases the respondent even identified a particular programme which had a life-changing impact for him ...

" (It) literally had an immense effect on me. It really did in an amazing way. The main thing from that was that I heard records that I'd never heard before, the sort of thing that you didn't come into contact with through the normal media at that time on the Light Programme. So I didn't get exposed to any of that music at all and listening to those programmes I first heard blues through that - John Mayall, Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf - who I'd never heard before in my life and they really had a deep effect because it just seemed such amazing music. 1967 was a very big year with the 'Flower Power' era, it stood out as an amazing year for music and from then I just started collecting records." (12)

The particular programme was John Peel's 'Perfumed Garden' programme on Radio London and the freedom allowed by the 'Pirate' radio stations meant that it did not restrict its scope to music ...

" I'd go so far as to say that changed my life in a lot of ways because up to that point I was very interested in music but not the extent that the programme brought home to me - the depth and the variety. It really had a great impact and not just musically either, he got into poetry, art, things I knew very little about, yet things I was interested in." (12)

The other project, though concerned with the contrasting area of classical music, found its development totally determined by radio provision ...

" As far as I can remember I first heard it on the radio, there wasn't anyone who really introduced me to it as such. I'd hear something and I'd think 'That sounds good' ... that was something I got into really through listening to the radio by myself ... Whenever I heard something I liked on the radio, I'd put all the details down in my book ... I used to spend a lot of time listening to the radio, playing around with the dial to try and pick up all the foreign stations ... The radio was the really important thing." (15)

(5) Change in Lifestyle

Two projects differed markedly from the other twenty-five independent learning projects in that both the individuals concerned began their learning activity without any strong, innate interest in the enthusiasm they were pursuing. In both cases there was a perception of a vacuum in their lives which needed to be filled with some kind of creative

activity. For one, a disillusioned motor industry executive, an interest in antiques and the development of a small antiques business was an intermediate step in the attainment of a major change of lifestyle ...

" Well, I didn't really decide (to go into antiques) it was more of a negative thing really. I'd got fed up with the motor trade, it was all salaries, money, what can we get out of it ... cars were becoming less interesting and the whole business was starting to bore me. The cars were losing their individuality ... Also the whole industry had a general lack of incentive ... Profit or thought of money didn't really come into it, what I wanted was peace of mind." (14)

The second individual experienced a vacuum in his extra-work interests and so decided to pursue chess seriously after a brief acquaintance with the game at school. As with the antiques dealer, this individual had just experienced an occupational change, though his new interest was an accompaniment of that change rather than its instigator ...

" I'd just changed jobs, left my office job and gone to work on the factory floor and for the first time I wasn't doing night school or any sort of course and I just thought I'd take up chess again ... time was dragging on my hands and I thought I really will give it a try and I haven't regretted it." (2)

(6) Childhood Surroundings

This category would be subsumed under that of parental encouragement

were it not for the fact that the two subjects concerned made no reference to the influence of particular individuals. Rather, the lifestyle they had enjoyed as a child was one which lent itself naturally to the development of a particular enthusiasm. A collector of antique china recalled the atmosphere of her home and the way this encouraged a love of the past ...

" I can trace my interest in antiques and the past back to my early days at home with all the back issues of the 'Strand' magazine being bound and about the only thing for me to read. I read Lamb's essays and was deeply impressed by the one on china ... The house was just full of old things." (16)

The second subject in this category, an ornithologist of international reputation, had grown up on a farm and believed that was the source of her love for wildlife.

The Origins of Correspondence Learning

Ten correspondence students were surveyed for purposes of comparison with the main sample of independent learners and displayed the following (perceived) motivations for beginning their courses.

Table (3) Origins of Correspondence Learning

<u>Reason for learning</u>	<u>Sample members mentioning reason</u>	<u>No. of times reason was sole motivation</u>
Affirmation of self-esteem	4	-
Desire for intellectual stimulus	4	2
Second chance	3	-
Vocational change	1	-
Miscellaneous	3	-

(1) Affirmation of Self-Esteem

This was mentioned in four interviews as a reason for taking a correspondence course, with a marked difference revealed in emphasis according to sex. The two males wished to demonstrate to their own satisfaction that, having been denied a university education at an earlier stage in their lives, they were capable of degree level study ...

" I've got to prove to myself that I had got the ability, that I could have made the grade if I really wanted to. I think that was the prime motivation ... a sort of challenge and an effort to try to prove to myself that I was good enough." (27)

" I work at R.S.R.E. and probably half the people there are graduates and I wasn't and I think that was one of the reasons - for my satisfaction more than anything else. I got 'A' levels at school and a place at university but I couldn't actually

take it up, for which I've kicked myself many times. Perhaps that's one of the reasons I did the O.U., to see if I could have got through it had I gone to university. I consciously thought that - that was one of the reasons why I was doing it." (31)

In sharp contrast to this, the two women respondents wished to restore a parity of familial esteem. Faced with family change and in particular the attainment by other members of the family of degrees and certificates, these two women wished to demonstrate to their families, as well as to themselves, their intellectual pedigree. It was as if some kind of public certification or recognition of their abilities was necessary for this reordering of the familial hierarchy ...

" There was a bit of an ulterior motive, I suppose, in that everybody else in the family's got a degree so I thought well I'd try and have a go as well." (26)

" My husband was in education and my son had gone and done his degree course and then a social work training course. So I felt, well it's time I got around to doing something. I felt I'd been left behind. When it came to understanding the way that society, the social system was changing - so much had happened in the twenty-five years that I'd spent raising a family and I felt I'd been left behind." (30)

(2) Desire for Intellectual Stimulus

This was mentioned in a general way by three sample members with the student quoted above specifying the area of the Social Sciences as the one she wished to explore. The need for continual mental stimulus was regarded by one student almost as a disease ...

" I gradually became aware that I very much needed mental or intellectual stimulus and began to search for it ... I went to live in Holland for a year and nearly died through total cultural deprivation of every kind, there was no cultural stimulus whatever ... So I came back to London and two years after I moved to this area and again the sickness came about, this awful dearth of stimulus ... " (33)

An 'A' level correspondence student who subsequently entered a degree course at a College of Higher Education became aware of a need for stimulus at a certain stage in her life ...

" I think that I came to a stage in my life when I realised I'd got to do something positive. You spend a few years at home with children and you don't really think very much about what you're doing. You half read the newspaper and you chat with your friends, you hope intellectually, between the teething problems! But I think you do tend to develop a butterfly mind and when the children do go off to school you've got to do something positive or else you do just coast along and become a cabbage. That's not terribly kind but this was the feeling I had. I think I really felt I'd rather like to do some writing, I felt a need to do something creative." (35)

Much the same sentiments were expressed by a third level O.U. student of comparative religion ...

" I was about nearly forty and I just thought that forty was a

good time to try something new, try and make a change. So I took it on (a) as a leisure thing and (b) a sort of challenge." (27)

(3) Second Chance Education

The 1973 Russell Report on Adult Education devoted several paragraphs to the concept of 'Second Chance' education in particular the many students who "lacking the opportunity of higher education will have stopped short of their potential and will be employed in occupations that neither extend their capacities nor engage their interests. We have reached the conclusion that one of the more important services that adult education can provide for the nation is to create opportunities for people whose education has been curtailed, and who later wish to qualify themselves" (H.M.S.O. 1973; para. 287). The way in which the opportunity to develop his undeniable potential was denied to him was vividly described by the Open University student quoted above ...

" The main reason is that I feel I missed the chance when I was younger. I left school just at the end of the war and at the time I was extremely interested in psychology. It was a new thing, it was the thing and I'd always been a prolific reader of books, even from the age of thirteen or fourteen, and I had picked up books on psychology and I became very interested in it. When I left school I wanted to become a psychologist but I was born into a working class family, brought up by my grandparents, and there was no way that I could get to University when I left Grammar School. At that time there was no external way of getting a degree in Psychology and I suppose there was a certain sort of working class attitude that the purpose of going to Grammar School was to get a good job." (27)

Two other students in the correspondence learners' sample emphasised the 'Second Chance' function that Open University study served for them ...

" For me it's a missed opportunity because I never went to University when I think I should have." (31)

" When I met my husband he was in teacher training at the time and at that time I could earn more money shorthand and typing than he got from a grant so I gave up my chance of education to get some money ... So I suppose that maybe sub-consciously I'm making up for that with the O.U." (30)

(4) Vocational Change

The only instance of a subject using a correspondence course to a specific vocational end was that of an aspirant teacher who hoped his Open University studies would enable him to gain entry to the teaching profession ...

" I realised it just wasn't financially viable for me to give up work and take three years at college, especially since jobs were hard to come by anyway and so I thought I'm not going to be able to become a full time student and the O.U. course looked interesting, so I thought I'd try it ... I did think that if I got the degree I could maybe do a Dip.Ed. for a year afterwards and get into teaching that way." (29)

Finally, three supplementary motivations were mentioned in separate interviews as affecting the decision to undertake correspondence study. All occurred during interviews with Open University students, all three of whom identified a mix of motivations occasioning their studies. Peer influence was felt by a teacher whose colleagues had apparently pressurised her into applying ...

" I think really I was cajoled into it. The heads of Science and Biology at my school were both doing it and they suggested I did it ... They showed me the units and the application forms as well I think - I didn't really realise it at the time, but when I look back I think "Crafty things!" (28)

The desire to structure her previously haphazard learning pattern was mentioned by another lady who was tired of the annual decision as to which course to take for that particular year. This student was obviously quite happy to relinquish her independence in favour of an imposition of external control on her activities ...

" Why I thought of it was because every year I'd done a course of some sort, every year there was something different, so I thought well the best thing to do is to have a structure ... it really was in the first place, structured learning rather than odd scraps - sort of every year doing something and every year having to decide what I wanted to do. This was planned for me and I'd got to do that or fall out ... my time is limited like everyone else's and I find that I can cope with things that are

set down, whereas if it was a wide field, I probably wouldn't be able to do any of it. It would be too wide for you to make any impact on it." (26)

Finally, an O.U. graduate who was now completing an honours credit course, believed his studies would set a good familial example ...

" I've got two children and I wanted to set them a good example with books and I'm sure it's done that." (31)

Conclusions

The overwhelming impression gained from the analysis of the origins of learning projects is of the diversity of motivations, even if in the case of individual subjects the diversity did not parallel that exhibited in Tough's Toronto study. Altogether, twelve different types of reason for beginning a learning project were mentioned and nine of these categories contained significant variations from case to case. The spread of motivations was remarkable, making a nonsense of attempts to classify these on a vocational or non-vocational basis. Even in the correspondence students' sample, where a vocational orientation might be expected, the emotional and intellectual ends served by the learning were viewed more significantly than any possible vocational outcomes.

There were also marked differences in perception between the two samples. External influences were regarded as being particularly important by the independent learners who rated as crucial the influence of key individuals and peer groups. By contrast, the correspondence learners'

motivations took the form of internal desires which were clearly realised and then satisfied; only one person mentioned other individuals as being of any significance. In this recognition of internal desires and absence of external influence, it is, surprisingly, the correspondence students and not the independent learners which come closest to Knowle's assumptions regarding the origins of self-directed learning ...

" Self-directed learning assumes that learners are motivated by internal incentives, such as the need for esteem (especially self-esteem), the desire to achieve, the urge to grow, the satisfaction of accomplishment, the need to know something specific and curiosity." (Knowles 1975; 21)

The role of chance was also emphasised by the independent learners, over half of whom regarded an accidental occurrence, especially the sudden availability of appropriate resources, as playing some part in causing them to take up their learning. This emphasis was entirely absent from the responses of the correspondence students who traced the beginnings of their studies to deliberate, premeditated decisions. They also displayed no problems of recall on the question of origins unlike many of the independent learners who initially found it difficult to remember a time when their enthusiasm had not been at the centre of their lives.

These are, of course, the subjects' perceptions of the initiation of their learning and it may be that these recollections are sometimes inaccurate and distorted. It is impossible within the context of the present study to verify the correctness of these perceptions and, even with unlimited time available, trying to recreate exactly the subjects'

mental and familial circumstances at the time they began their project would be a daunting task. This section makes no claim to being anything other than a record of interviewees' perceptions of the stirrings of their interests. It has demonstrated the variety of circumstances which can facilitate the development of a lifelong commitment to a particular activity and it has assessed the relative importance of some of these different factors. The next task of this study is to investigate the patterns of learning activity which occurred once the initial commitment to learning had been made.

CHAPTER FIVE

ATTITUDES TO LEARNING

This chapter has as its concern the attitudes towards their learning displayed by the independent learners. Three themes in particular emerge - the belief that their activities represent the gradual exploration of a limitless field of knowledge, the perception of their learning as continuous, and the breadth of their interest. .

(1) A Limitless Vista of Knowledge

To the majority of independent learners, knowledge was not ordered into clearly defined subject categories and neither was their field of interest of such a finite nature as to permit of its being mastered at some future date. Rather, learning was made the more enjoyable by there being a constant discovery of new avenues of enquiry. There was no sense of failure about admitting to an inability to dominate a body of knowledge. Indeed, it was intimated that if the point of complete command of their field was ever reached, the challenge and thus the enjoyment of learning would disappear. Mastery was held to be concurrent with stagnation ...

" There's a couple of fellows in London that have been keeping them longer than me, but they're no more advanced now than they were after three or four years, they've just ceased to carry on the learning process; whereas me, I've just - I've got a library of books there and I'm always borrowing them from the library because I'm always going out and giving talks all over the place ... It's a continual process of learning the hobby. In fact if I ever did get to a stage where I couldn't learn anything else, I think I'd pack it in. - I'd be bored to tears." (9)

It was the element of surprise, of there always being unfamiliar areas to investigate and new skills to acquire, which was the key to the learners' continued absorption. The following comments taken from interviews covering a wide variety of enthusiasms, illustrate the remarkable similarity of outlook displayed on this matter.

" The field's so enormous and the price range is so different, that it's really impossible to keep up with it ... we're learning every day ... there's always something new to learn, you'll never know it all." (14)

" There's so many different skills to fishing, so many facets of it, that to be really good you need to know them all."
(4)

" You can't know everything about gardening, every day you can learn something more, that's the best part of it ... I grow something of everything in the greenhouse - that's the fun of it. I don't want to specialise." (7)

" You're never too old to learn as they say and in this hobby you're learning all the time. After all, the great factor in pigeon racing - the homing instinct - has never been explained." (20)

" This is the beauty of our hobby. It doesn't matter how long you've kept fish, you'll never know everything there is to know about them. There are new species that are new even to the Natural History Museum - new plants, new equipment, new cures, new food, the lot. It's a hobby you can't know everything about, it's like all of nature." (9)

" I don't think I could ever have enough records - I could fill this room with them and still wouldn't have enough. I can only see it getting wider, not narrower ... I can't see me ever saying 'Oh, I've got all the records I want now, the complete lot' because it doesn't work like that at all. I can imagine I'll still be buying records when I'm eighty, whatever is the equivalent of new wave then. I'm not going to get all of them like a set of books." (12)

" Breeders can never know all there is to know about their particular breed, there's always something else to know, something new to learn. I feel I'm always open to correction about my own knowledge, because this often happens." (25)

(2) The Continuity of Learning

Coterminous with the view of learning as the exploration of an ever-widening area of knowledge is the independent learners' commitment to their activities over a long period of time. Several subjects spoke in terms of a lifelong pursuit of their interest and, as has already been made clear, all measured their involvement in years and not months. The nationally renowned apiarist based his forty years' study of bees on a five year experimental cycle, that being the period necessary to judge the effectiveness of a new technique. The fitness enthusiast traced the development of his activities over the past twenty-two years ...

" ... there's not been any real break in it since I was about sixteen years old, there's always been that concern with it (fitness) ... a sort of graduation - from isometrics, to the bar and on to the weights - progressive resistance." (5)

The philosophy of continuous improvement over time was well illustrated by an expert bridge player ...

" ... it is a thing that you can go on with all your life, more so than many other things. It doesn't matter how much you work at it and how much you can learn, you can always get better. There's always somewhere to go ... you can improve all the time as long as you're prepared to work reasonably at it." (6)

As has already been pointed out in Chapter (4), it was often difficult to estimate the length of many projects since the exact time of their initiation could not be recalled. Respondents would state that they had 'always' been interested in their subject, or pursued an activity 'as long as I can remember' or 'ever since I was a child'. These projects can, therefore, be described as true examples of lifelong learning given that they originated in childhood or adolescence and continued, sometimes with interruptions, throughout adult life.

The question of interruptions to the continuity of learning is an interesting one which came to the fore as the interviews progressed. Nine subjects recalled how their interest had been awakened in childhood and then temporarily abandoned in adolescence or adulthood before being resumed in later years. The philatelist who began collecting stamps after a twenty-five year gap and the steam engine enthusiast whose interest was rekindled after twenty years of

non-involvement have both been mentioned already. Aside from these, however, were the experiences of seven independent learners whose commitment had wavered during adolescence or early adulthood as a result of social pressures. A railway enthusiast who had turned his interest into a major post-retirement project (as manager of a railway trust) related how his interest had waned during his undergraduate days. The angler and the chess captain dropped their interests during their time in the armed services and the fitness enthusiast's programme was interrupted by his entry (as a mature student) to Art School. A similar fluctuation was observed in the cases of the rabbit breeder and model aero enthusiast, both of whom had abandoned their activities during adolescence. The bridge player had played regularly in her adolescence but this had been followed by a period of spasmodic and half-hearted involvement until a friend's personal crisis and need for social contact had accidentally prompted the subject's return to serious competition. Her commitment was confirmed as a result of the family circumstances pertaining at the time ...

" My husband was commuting to London, Monday - Friday, my children were at school and getting beyond the stage of really needing me very much and I always knew that if I started really playing bridge then I'd become a bit fanatical ... so there was a fair amount of time at that stage ... if I'd started it ten years earlier I'd have been a ghastly mother spending all my time playing bridge." (6)

Attention to this question of the timing of projects within the adult life-cycle was first alerted by the comments of an Open University

student of sixty-three regarding the 'dying' phase of her life. Only when domestic responsibilities had declined to an acceptable level could purposeful study be countenanced. A more stoical philosophy of self-acceptance had also developed in her later years and the fear of failure had been replaced by a readiness to accept intellectual challenge and an interest in academic concerns ...

" There are phases in your life when you could do it and other phases when you couldn't possibly. I mean at the moment I'm in the dying phases, say, when all the children are gone and therefore I have very much more time now than I did in the middle years. So if somebody had said to me when I was forty 'Do an O.U. course' I would have thought they were mad and I couldn't have. I think I must be a late developer. I suppose in many ways I've changed, I always used to think I couldn't do things but it's sort of changed I suppose. You get the feeling 'Well, if I can't do it, it's not the end of the world' whereas when I was young I used to think 'Well, it'll be a disgrace'. It's really since I've been married I think I've become more aware of academic things, so it's a change of emphasis in a way." (26)

Frank Musgrove has placed the optimum time for personal change at the much earlier period of the late twenties. In his study of seven 'marginal' groups which had come to occupy "unusual, extreme or abnormal positions in contemporary English society" (Musgrove 1977; 1) he concluded that "fundamental change of perspectives occurred most

readily between the early twenties and the early thirties" (Musgrove 1977; 225). He did admit, however, that "people in middle age and beyond are able to progress intellectually and socially and acquire difficult new skills" (Musgrove 1977; 225) and it was this acquisition of skills, rather than evidence of a major change in personal perspectives, which was echoed most in the comments of the sample members in the present study.

To havighurst and Orr, the members of the present sample who felt they could undertake learning only when familial responsibilities had declined, would be at a 'teachable moment' in their lives. They write ...

" Certain developmental tasks come with great urgency to a person during a relatively short period of time. At this time one's motive to learn is intense ... this might be called a 'teachable moment' in their lives." (Havighurst & Orr 1956; 34)

Such moments are held by these writers to occur in middle age when children have left home, occupational demands are fewer and more leisure time is available. At this time "the task of making a constructive use of leisure may have a teachable moment" (Havighurst & Orr 1956; 36).

Amongst the independent learners, only four admitted to initiating their interest in adulthood (an antiques dealer, drama producer, aquarist and pigeon racer), the other twenty-one being able to trace the origins of their activities to childhood or adolescence. This

confirms the major difference between these learners and the correspondence students which was mentioned in the previous chapter. The correspondence students had experienced something of a personal and intellectual reawakening as they embarked on a course of study and consequently could locate this much more easily in their life-cycle. Their decision to study had been the result of deliberation and reflection and had taken the form of the clarification and subsequent satisfaction of specific needs - affirmation of self-esteem, desire for intellectual stimulus, change in lifestyle, second chance education. In contrast to this, the independent learners were much less likely to be able to relate the pursuit of their interest to a particular period within the adult life-cycle since the commitment had been one of lifelong duration.

(3) Breadth of Interest

The tendency of independent learners to ignore conventional subject boundaries has already been noted during the discussion of the work of Allen Tough and the purpose of this short section is to give some examples of this. In fact the assertion of a breadth of interest, both within their own field and in a range of fields relating to the chief area of their attention, was the attitude most frequently encountered ...

" You can't be interested in flowers and plants generally, without having an interest in all aspects of natural history ... I've spent some time studying birds, butterflies, moths and insects for example." (17)

" I can only see my interest in music getting wider not narrower. Just getting into all the archive music there is ... and there's so much music of other countries I've never discovered. I've got a few records - South American flute music which is beautiful and a record of music from Turkey and L.P.'s of Indian Ragas, sitar music. There's so much and with that I'm only scratching the surface.

I'm amazed at how music has expanded my life. I do so many other things because of music like getting involved with running a folk club, getting involved with a poetry and music group. I'm also an Amnesty International member and I like to do oil painting when I can. I don't think I'm purposefully getting all these things to take up my time because even now I don't have time to listen to some of the records I want to."

(12)

" Steam engines are my first love, especially since I've got my own engine that takes up so much time to restore, but I do have interests in a lot of other areas that are connected with engines I suppose. Or types of transport anyway. Canals for example; this summer I traced the Ledbury - Ashperton canal route. I'm also interested in paddle steamers, railways and photography generally." (19)

" As well as my fish I've got a couple of other hobbies - photography and butterflies. I work a six-and-a-half day week and I've got an allotment. This year has been taking up even more time than usual because of starting up on the lecture tours."

(9)

" When people say to me 'What the hell do you see in railways?' I try to put across to them that you can see the engines, there's the railways themselves, in fact it's very nearly all-enveloping. There's the scenery, the surroundings, industrial archeology, anything at all. It's one of the most widesweeping hobbies I know, or is capable of being." (11)

Although possessing such a range of interests could make almost impossible demands on the learner's time, there was a marked reluctance to engage in specialisation. It was as if too great a degree of specialisation would result in a loss of the joy of learning ...

" I grow something of everything in the greenhouse ... that's the fun of it, I don't want to specialise." (7)

" ... the biggest thing I suppose is lack of time, because I've got so many other things I want to do ... I've got too many other interests." (12)

" You don't really realise what goes on in stamp collecting until you get further into it. If you're going to be narrow and just keep your collection to yourself, you're going to be - you're going to learn nothing. I think that people that have joined the club, they're really pleased and amazed that they can broaden their outlook this way; through competition, six sheets and nine sheets." (10)

Conclusion

To speak of the activities of independent learners as 'pastimes' or 'recreation' is to ascribe to them a frivolity totally at variance with

the attitudes revealed in the interviews. The subjects did not regard their activities as being on the periphery of their lives to be pursued only in the few spare moments allowed by the demands of work and family commitments; rather, they constituted what industrial sociologists have called a 'Central Life Interest'*. That is, they were the aspect of an individual's life to which a great part of his energies were devoted and which required the exercise of a range of skills. Success (and its recognition) in the learning activity was a source of considerable self-esteem and the significance attributed to such visible marks of competence will be well illustrated in chapter (10) on the role of competitions. For those who felt they had failed to reach their full potential in other spheres, or who had initially been intimidated by the prospect of engaging in a particular activity, eventual success served as a powerful bolster to their self-image ...

" ... I've always had a sort of inferiority complex and I thought it was going to be very clever and I was a bit scared of going along ... a lot of my workmates have this idea that they're too scared to go to a chess club, the thought of going frightens them off.

Not everyone can play tennis, not everyone can play football because of physical advantages ... but when I'm standing in front of a chess board those sort of advantages are to a large extent eliminated. You can get all sorts playing chess - weaklings and strongmen - but it's a question I suppose of

* For a further elaboration of this concept see "The Subjective Experience of Work" in (Parker et al. 1967).

mental power ... it's the only game I know where you can sit down and you pretty well start off even. There is no advantage, no luck, it pretty well boils down to skill and pure skill in the game." (2)

The above quote comes from an interview which also revealed a theme to be encountered in several subsequent conversations. Just as the learning project came to constitute a Central Life Interest requiring a substantial amount of time and energy and prompting a significant emotional investment, so it also ran the risk of promoting a dangerously obsessive involvement ...

" ... to some extent I think it became too much, I ate, slept and drank chess for several years ... Officially it's not supposed to be, but believe me chess can be a really cut-throat affair, even at club level ... It's as bad as duelling in the sixteenth century. I'm quite certain that I've seen matches where, if the players had guns, they'd have shot one another, I've seen that sort of state. Some people really do take it very seriously ... You hit a terrible low every time you lose an important game, it can take you twenty-four hours to get over it especially if you've done something stupid." (2)

This involvement was paralleled by the commitment of an antiques dealer ...

" The thing with this business is that the interest grips you - you can never put it down ... you've got to be prepared to work hard for seven days a week and you've got to accept the poor hours ... you can never get away from it, it's a seven day a week thing." (14)

The steps taken to guard against a compulsive obsession were described by a record collector and narrow gauge rail enthusiast ...

" There's a danger in collecting anything really - if you let it get on top of you. The danger is if you let it become the one interest in your life. I don't think there's that danger with me because I listen to John Peel and he plays such a variety of things and from that sort of music you get interested in all other sorts of things through the music press, media and so on. So you get lots of other interests as well, you're not stuck with one style of music that you've got to listen to all the time." (12)

" I lumber myself with things to do because I'm one of these shocking people who always thinks he can do it better than anybody else. He sees somebody floundering and he says 'Oh for God's sake give it here!' ... I do get to the stage where I become obsessed with something and I put the brakes on for a length of time, I put a stop to it. Otherwise you can become so narrow minded and have such a one track mind - narrow gauge of course!" (11)

Of course the learners' degree of obsessive involvement in their interest can never be satisfactorily judged if their own perceptions comprise the sole information source. It may be that an individual regards his commitment to the activity as being reasonable and limited when those surrounding him view his involvement with alarm. The familial reactions to learners' activities will supply a valuable additional perspective and these will be explored in chapter (13).

Finally, it is interesting to note that the three themes which emerged as distinctive attitudes towards learning held by the independent learners - the view of their learning as the exploration of an ever widening area of knowledge, the continuity of their learning, and the breadth of their interests - indicate a parallel between this research and Houle's study of lifelong learners (Houle 1963). In his survey of twenty-two continuing learners Houle distinguished three types of student, one of which regarded education as "a constant rather than a continuing activity" (Houle 1963; 24). This was the 'learning-orientated' student who had "at the back of all this (learning) activity (is) quite simply, the desire to know" (Houle 1963; 25). When asked about their learning activities these students asserted that they had been "engrossed in learning as long as they can remember" (Houle 1963; 60).

Houle's subjects were, admittedly, engaged primarily in formal educational activity; but, in their attitudes towards their learning they exhibit a remarkable resemblance to the twenty-five adults in the independent learners' sample. There is also an interesting parallel in the method by which the sample for the two studies were assembled. Houle's students were all "so conspicuously engaged in various forms of continuing learning that they could be readily identified for me by their personal friends or by the counselors and directors of adult educational institutions" (Houle 1963; 13).

In much the same way the sample of independent learners for the present study was comprised of individuals who were highly visible as experts in their particular field. If they were not known to me personally, then they had been referred by acquaintances, had been the subject of local press attention, or were contacted through various society secretaries.

CHAPTER SIX

LEARNING METHODS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF KNOWLEDGE

Decisions as to the methods of enquiry most suited to a particular learning goal are, for most classroom students, in the hands of an instructor or lecturer. His job will be to present the relevant background information to a topic, to introduce the central concepts used in its exploration and to offer problems for the consideration of students in the form of seminar titles, essay questions, practical tasks or experiments. The means by which students acquire their information, develop an understanding of concept and perform psychomotor operations are decided by an outsider.

This is in direct contrast to the present study, however, where sample members had to devise and then implement their own methods of developing their knowledge. In the absence of external direction, the sample members were faced with the task of recognising, and then implementing, the learning methods most suited to their particular purposes. Individuals were faced with a mass of potential information - the accumulated experience of peers, the hobbyists' manuals, enthusiasts' magazines, broadcasts and specialist society lectures - but they had no professional guidance as to techniques of selection or discrimination between relevant and unnecessary information or the criteria behind such selection. If their studies were to be anything other than an uncritical assimilation of information, then at some point there had to be a decision as to which books to read (and which chapters were most useful) and what questions to ask a more experienced colleague. There may have to be a choice between spending time at society meetings, pursuing a programme of solitary reading or engaging in a prolonged period of observation. Underlying these decisions would be implicit assumptions about the best ways of developing knowledge and the relative

usefulness of different sources. Would learners be advised to spend their time resolving difficulties common to all enthusiasts? Should they be trying out a number of different techniques so as to find the one best suited to their purposes and abilities? Was there a well defined model of excellence in their field towards the attainment of which their efforts should be directed?

The elucidation of information on these matters was, for several reasons, one of the most difficult interview tasks undertaken. Firstly, the individuals encountered had simply never spent any time reflecting on the ways in which their knowledge and skills had developed, viewing this very much as a 'natural' process, without need of explanation. Secondly, and this may have been a result of the way questions on this were either phrased or delivered, the subjects often confused methods of learning with sources of information most frequently used. In seeking to recount how they had become expert in their field, they would tell of the books, periodicals and individuals that had been the most productive in their search for knowledge, without any reference to the way in which that search had been ordered. There was also the constant worry that the questions asked might prompt inaccurate responses which were given, nonetheless, for fear of appearing uninformed or inexperienced. Too much concentration by the interviewer on, for example, techniques of experimentation or problem-solving, might encourage an undue emphasis to be placed on these features by the respondent. Finally, there was the danger that trivial and incidental examples of learning activity would be eagerly converted by the researcher into instances of a particular learning method.

Notwithstanding all these potential risks, it was considered important to see if any general similarities could be detected in the ways in which knowledge and expertise were developed. The title originally intended for this chapter had been 'Learning Strategies' but, on reflection, it was felt that the term 'strategies' contained associations of deliberation and pre-planning which were inappropriate in many cases. To talk of a learning strategy implies a premeditated decision to use a particular approach because that is the most effective for the purposes of the student. Independent learners tended not to talk of their experiences in this way, in fact, as has already been pointed out, the interview often seemed to be the first time in which they had engaged in this kind of reflection.

The question of the generation of learning goals, which is closely related to this topic, will be dealt with in chapter (8). The purpose of the present discussion is to illustrate those similarities which existed in the search for knowledge. Learners were encouraged to give practical examples of past learning or to recall the details of a recent learning episode and from these accounts a picture emerged of the different approaches adopted towards the acquisition of new knowledge. Since these episodes were recalled with the benefit of hindsight, there was always the danger that their execution would be granted a greater degree of deliberation than was, in reality, the case. However, sample members seemed to be less wary of admitting to the importance of chance meetings with other enthusiasts or to the accidental discovery of new techniques derived from a casual perusal of monthly magazines, than would students engaged on a formal course of study; here, the temptation

would be to attribute such discoveries to conscious intention. To admit to an accidental discovery of a new method or piece of knowledge held no threat to the independent learners' self-image as learners.

Where learners could be persuaded to discuss the execution of their search for knowledge, four broad approaches seemed to emerge which, taken together, suggest a continuum distinguished by an ever increasing degree of learner deliberation. At the one end of the continuum, the development of knowledge is the result of random exploration; at the other, the learner has in mind a terminal 'ideal' or model state, which serves to guide his efforts. Sample members did not, however, adopt only one of these approaches in their search for knowledge. They were quite willing to admit to employing different methods at different times and for different purposes and, as is shown by comments later in this discussion, sample members provided several examples of projects which used all four approaches.

Random Exploration

This category represents one end of the independent learners' continuum of learning methods and is distinguished by an haphazard and piecemeal development of knowledge determined by the accidental acquisition of certain objects connected to the learning interest. It was, admittedly, rare to find subjects who claimed that their knowledge had developed solely as a result of random exploration. By definition, an acknowledged expert in a particular field requires a grasp of the general features of that field and some awareness of its parameters before developing a specialised appreciation of one of its aspects. This would be impossible to attain were the learner to rely on accidental occurrences to shape the search for knowledge. Such a pattern was claimed, however, by the secretary of a local Antiques Collectors club. Her breadth of knowledge

had resulted in her being asked to produce articles on her specialism of china for the local paper, yet she asserted that this expertise had been acquired in an accidental fashion ...

" I've picked up my knowledge in a really haphazard way, often by picking up pieces which I thought to be interesting and then getting them home and finding out about them." (16)

This subject certainly allowed the direction of her enquiries to be determined by the chance acquisition of particular items and to that extent her learning was an example of random exploration. It was noticeable, however, that once the piece had been purchased her research into its background details was highly deliberate, competent and determined ...

" I think that there's nothing you can't know if you really want to, and there's nothing you can't do if you put your mind to it. I think that if you want to find out something you always have people to ask or books to get hold of - if you want something that badly you can always get it. But only if you're prepared to put everything else aside and just go for that thing all the time." (16)

The second example of a project in which the accidental acquisition of items had played a significant role in determining the direction of enquiry was that of a tropical fish keeper (aquarist) ...

" I suppose you really get knowledge from going into a retail aquarist and seeing a fish that you haven't had before and you

like the look of it. So you shoot home, get all the books out and find out (if you can), exactly what it is - how big it grows, if it's carnivorous or herbivorous, where it comes from - everything you can about that particular fish. And if you can't find it in your books at home, that's when you start going out to other society members if you're a society member, or London Zoo, Dudley Zoo or the Natural History Museum. If you can find out about it from them, it might be worth paying the retailer another couple of bob to hang on to it for a couple of weeks until you have found out about it." (9)

It should be pointed out, however, that elsewhere in the interview this subject displayed evidence of considerable pre-planning: the search for knowledge he undertook each time he encountered a new species was itself an example of systematic enquiry involving the consultation of private reference books, peers and museums. It was only the particular prompt for each of these learning episodes which was the result of an accidental occurrence.

Several other individuals also acknowledged the element of chance which characterised their search for knowledge. A budgerigar breeder had built up his aviary by visiting local pet shops and buying birds "which took my fancy, with a very inexperienced eye". Both of the music enthusiasts found their developing interest influenced by broadcasting and, to the extent that the programming of particular broadcast concerts was outside their control, can be regarded as haphazard in the pursuit of their passion. The naturalists in the sample (a botanist and ornithologist) would be encouraged to research into plants and birds they had happened to observe on their field visits, whilst the chess and bridge players had the development of their skills partly dependent on chance; that is, the quality of their opponents.

It must be said, however, that the method of random exploration was, of the four contained in the continuum, the one least evident in interviewees' comments. A chance encounter with a new piece of china or an unfamiliar fish might prompt the learner to spend the next few weeks focussing his attention on researching these items; however, these encounters themselves were not wholly the result of chance since the enthusiast would have entered the relevant shop precisely to uncover some new specimens. The particular details of the enquiries thus prompted would be determined by whatever happened to be in the shop at the time, but the overall purpose behind the visit to the shop would have been a desire to extend the knowledge of the enthusiast concerned.

Problem-Solving

One of the most surprising elements revealed in the interviews was the frequent puzzlement over questions concerning the problems faced by the independent learners in the execution of their projects. As we shall see in chapter (12), there was often a marked inability to recall any problems that had been encountered and questions would have to be rephrased on this topic so that subjects were asked instead about 'difficulties' with which they had had to deal, 'blocks' which had been placed in the way of their learning and 'constraints' which had served to limit their efforts. Given the apparently alien nature of the concept of problems, it might be assumed that the method of problem-solving would be adopted only intermittently, if used at all. That this is not the case is demonstrated in the succeeding paragraphs.

In terms of the category of problem-solving as a learning method, the word 'problem' sheds its associations of anxiety and annoyance and takes on those of challenge and creativity. Individuals who employed this method would advance their knowledge by the continuous and progressive resolution of difficulties intrinsic to their activity. These must be distinguished from difficulties extrinsic to the subject matter such as peer ridicule, spouse hostility or financial constraints. That grappling with problems intrinsic to an activity could be a source of pleasure was demonstrated by the experience of the aquarist ...

" I kept marine fish at one time. I was the first in Worcestershire to keep them and while I was having trouble with them - losing them with disease and not knowing what the disease was and why they died and how I could stop them getting it - I was loving it, it was great!" (9)

The search for knowledge conducted by the model aero enthusiast was also affected by the problems he encountered ...

" You can get quite a lot of knowledge by trying to think of ways to deal with snags - when you meet occasional snags, especially if you're building your own design, you're forced to try and think of a better way of doing something." (22)

In both of these projects, encountering a difficulty had acted as a stimulus to learning and had served to focus the attention and efforts of

the learners on evolving some solution. In the search for ways of defeating the problem, the enthusiast would consult the sources of information discussed in chapter (7) and the learning groups described in chapter (14). He would use such assistance selectively, however, and, to this extent, the direction of his enquiries would be determined by the specific nature of the problem to be solved.

The project which best illustrated the use of problem-solving as a learning method was that of the philosopher. Trained in electronics and computing, he had embarked on an attempt to find, in human thought processes and the development of social structures, a parallel to the internal logic of computing systems. He had acquired a questioning approach from his mother and an influential teacher (mentioned in chapter (4)) and proceeded to pursue his philosophical quest through the progressive resolution of difficulties ...

" My philosophical outlook is sort of built on a statement of my mother's - if I don't know the answer you can be sure that somebody, somewhere, knows the answer. You might have to look a long time but you'll find an answer, so don't be afraid to ask. I'm willing to ask questions, yes; but not with the view of pulling holes in which I've already been told, more just to acquire new knowledge.

What's usually happened is that I've found myself up against an impasse. I've wanted to find something out, I have something I want to do, so I read anything that looks like being of interest to solve that problem. I think that's been the case all the way through - an intellectual problem to solve and I'm interested to read what anyone's got to say about it." (8)

Several respondents held that problem-solving skills, in the sense of being able to generate a speedy resolution of intellectual difficulties, were a necessary requirement for success in their spheres. Not surprisingly, the chess and bridge players both testified to the importance of such abilities. Problem-solving ability could also be the key to much desired competition success in that the solver possessed information which granted a position of advantage ...

" Mainly, I've tried to solve problems on my own because if I talk to the other blokes then I'm giving them the edge, giving them the problem to think about. And if they solve it, that's giving them the edge! If we solve it together then we've both got the edge but if I solve it myself then I've got it! Probably only for one match but that's still important." (4)

The experience of this angler was echoed in the comments of the rabbit breeder ...

" I think taking part in competitions means you don't share certain bits of information with others. For instance, if you get something like a cure for sore hocks that means you'll be in with a much better chance of doing well - so you wouldn't spread that around." (24)

It seems the, that in different circumstances the activity of problem-solving can constitute a pleasurable challenge, or determine the acquisition of knowledge, or become the key to competition success.

Though it was employed as the chief learning method in only one project (the philosopher's), aspects of problem-solving activity were present in many others. Such activities would be interludes in the projects, brief periods during which the learner devoted his efforts solely to exploring one particular feature. In that such episodes were mentioned by a good range of sample members, problem-solving was regarded as deserving of inclusion as a separate category in the learning methods continuum.

Experimentation

This is a method of learning which involves the learner in an attempt to extend his knowledge through the deliberate adoption of new techniques, or the fusion of previously separate elements, with no clear idea of the outcomes. It requires an openness to change on the part of the learner as well as a sufficient time-span for the results of the experiments to be observed and used as the basis of further work. A project which met all these requirements was that of the beekeeper (apiarist) who had spent fifty years pursuing his interest. Individual experiments were conducted on a five year basis and his access to other enthusiasts' hives had allowed him to compare the results of different hive management techniques ...

" I do a lot of trial and error experiments based on ideas from books. If you go back over my time with bees, you'd find that at any one time I'd have had several hives going, all run in difference ways so I could see the best ways to run them. I'd compare the results and try out new methods all the time.

You really need to have a lot of time if you're going to do experiments. I'd reckon on having at least five years to judge whether or not a method was working. The full time beekeepers are so busy keeping up their stocks of honey, they've no time for experimenting. I like to look after other people's hives that are far apart. That means I can experiment owing to the fact that these small apiaries are isolated." (21)

Another example of experimentation was provided by a horticulturalist who had won several local competitions and been awarded the status of competition judge. Despite his expertise, he still enjoyed the challenge of trying out new plants ...

" Every year I expect to have something new. I'll always buy perhaps two packets of seeds and try them out - I'm a great believer in experimentation." (7)

Only one subject was engaged in externally supervised experimentation. This was an organic gardener who conducted annual experiments under the aegis of the Henry Doubleday Research Association ...

" I belong to the Henry Doubleday Research Association which L.H. instigated for research into organic gardening. They do a lot of trials - the members themselves - we're doing two or three at the moment at our place which everyone all over the country is doing. At the start of the year in the magazine and newsletter they give you a whole load of things that they want people to do and then you write off for which ones you want to do and they give you back the report sheets - which you fill in and send back.' (1)

Several subjects spoke of their activities not as experimentation but in terms of 'trial and error'. Trial and error can, of course, occur without the deliberate intention of the learner; as mistakes in judgement and execution occur, so experience is widened and knowledge deepened. However, those responsible who did refer to this technique were obviously using it as a form of experimentation. They would try out new techniques, or alternative implementations of existing ones, in order to develop their knowledge. Thus, a budgerigar breeder used this method to further his knowledge of genetics and to determine the likely success of different fostering arrangements ...

" This fostering business is always a matter of knowing the bird, knowing what you can and can't do, which is only something you get by experience - keeping the birds, knowing what they'll tolerate. This will only come to trial and error, because you'll only find whether a hen will take to a particular chick by putting it there with it ... you're producing and, stemming from that, you're thinking 'If I put that bird with that other bird there, what will I get? What colour, what variation?' (13)

The aero-modeller also included an element of trial and error in his activities in that he furthered his understanding of model aeroplanes construction by trying out different plans. This was not an example of pure experimentation in that the form of the experiments (the plans themselves) had not been devised by the learner himself. However, the gradual accumulation of knowledge and construction skill which was the benefit accruing from trying out these different plans resulted in a piece of genuine innovation, namely, the subject designing two control line models suitable for beginners ...

" I'm always trying out different plans I get from all the modelling journals because every time you try out a new plan you learn something new. You've got to stick with them and persevere and eventually you'll be more skilful. I'm able to make my own plans now because I've learned something from all the other magazine plans I've tried." (22)

The potential dangers of experimenting were well illustrated by a fitness enthusiast who was trying to devise an exercise plan appropriate to his needs and abilities. The absence of skilled guidance meant that the injuries resulting from experimenting on his own were much more frequent than necessary ...

" I varied it and wrote charts down. I made a chart and did a few exercises, experimented with them and injured myself now and again, then crossed out those I couldn't handle. Everybody has different needs and circumstances and my needs are only appropriate to me. You've got to find the system and the method of exercising which suit your body and your needs. That's one of the disadvantages of studying on your own - I'd have loved to have had someone to go to who would have said 'You can't do this with this weight at the moment'; whereas out of sheer ignorance I did it and I've hurt myself and learned through these mistakes." (5)

The organic gardener also drew attention to the dangers of experimentation, this time where the necessary preliminary research had been omitted ...

" In the case of fishing, say, you've got more chance of trial and error haven't you? I mean you can go out fishing every week. With gardening, which is such a long term thing, you've got to go out of your way to find out if you're doing things wrong because it's going to be costly if you go wrong. You really need to have the information there before you take the first steps." (1)

The instances of experimentation dealt with in this section would probably be treated with scorn by a trained chemist or physicist. These learners were not conforming to the classic experimental sequence of framing a hypothesis, testing it and concluding by verifying its accuracy, demonstrating its invalidity or suggesting appropriate modifications. Their efforts were characterised by a much more cavalier approach, an attitude of 'Let's try this and see what happens'. Nonetheless, this freewheeling approach does seem to contain within it a genuine experimental outlook, a willingness to adopt new techniques or to combine existing ones in an innovatory fashion. Indeed, it may be that this informal approach is a necessary prelude to the rigorous application of the hypothetical-deductive method. Before even the framing of hypotheses must come the period of initial acquaintance with the field to be studied, during which time its parameters, variations and investigative possibilities are revealed. As independent learners engage in an unsystematic and uninformed exploration of a new area of interest, they will be tempted to devise their own ways of performing routine tasks (baiting fish hooks, controlling the diet of racing pigeons, practising opening moves in bridge or chess); as their knowledge grows, these idiosyncratic behaviours will be varied and results will be integrated into the stock of knowledge. A more considered experimental approach will follow

through the comparison of the effectiveness of different variations.

The Use of Models

This, the final category in the continuum, is the one requiring the greatest degree of learner deliberation. Subjects who are placed in this category directed their efforts towards achieving a previously specified state. They had erected a model, an ideal standard, which served as a continual reminder of the end point to which they were striving. In the case of the horticulturalist, this model received highly specific definition ...

" I think he (the ideal gardener) has got to be enthusiastic. He's got to be prepared to learn and you've also got to be prepared to go into detail with it. You've also got to be ruthless. Most people just cannot bring themselves to thin out vegetables and so on, they just will not thin out early enough. And, of course, you need a very strong back, you do need a strong physique. You've also got to have plenty of patience - in gardening you can't hurry anything along." (7)

The pursuit of such idealised perfections must not be confused with the concept of the 'Ideal Type' elaborated by Max Weber. In order to facilitate the ordering of social behaviour into classifiable categories, Weber erected a series of analytical constructs. These were comprised of the commonly occurring features which, when taken together, constituted typical examples of the behaviour or institution under examination. Thus, the ideal type of bureaucracy consisted of a hierarchical ordering of authority, a reliance on written records, a

separation of private and public concerns and a concentration of activity in the bureau, or office.*

The independent learners discussed in this section had erected a form of ideal type in that their notion of what constituted a good gardener, bridge player or fitness enthusiast, was clearly defined as a cluster of typical qualities. They differed from Weber, however, in that their ideal types were value laden, invested with the values of approval and desirability whereas Weber insisted that ideal types be value-free concepts. To the learners, these models represented the ultimate standard against which their own activities could be judged and served as an inspiration to guide their efforts. The chief purpose of their learning became the development of the skills regarded as central to notions of the 'good' gardener or weight trainer. In fact, it is in the development of skills that the use of models as a learning method has its greatest relevance. Those projects in which the learners were concerned to acquire a body of knowledge (the philosopher, jazz and classical music enthusiast, botanist) had no vision of the ideal philosopher, music enthusiast or botanist they were trying to emulate. In their development of the particular skills of discrimination or observation, they made no reference to attempts to imitate the behaviours of an admired colleague. This was in sharp contrast to the fitness enthusiast who had personalised his model instead of merely seeking to attain a set of abstracted qualities ...

" There was a soccer player who played for Aberystwyth first team when I was in the youth team. He was a sort of John Charles

* For a detailed discussion of this concept see Gerth & Mills, 1948.

type, incredibly well built and a marvellous footballer. He went on to play for Cardiff City, though he had a very short career. He influenced me a lot because I thought 'That's how I'd like to be', so I modelled myself on that guy." (5)

The desirability of problem-solving skills has already been mentioned in the cases of the chess and bridge players, but both of these specified a number of other abilities the possession of which were essential for the attainment of perfection. The chess captain mentioned the ability to think quickly as the distinguishing characteristic of chess excellence and the powers of concentration and of recall as useful adjuncts. The bridge enthusiast assessed the requirements of a good player as being self-discipline, concentration and mathematical competence.

All the subjects mentioned so far realised their limitations and accepted their inability to reach the idealised state of perfection. The chess captain acknowledged his inability to think quickly, the bridge player allowed her concentration to slip at important moments and the fitness enthusiast accepted that his physique could not develop beyond a certain point. To one learner, however, the failure to attain his own high standards recalled the desolation at competition failure described by several individuals in chapter (10) ...

" I usually fail to meet my standards. That, to a certain extent is deliberate. I try to set standards just beyond what I'm capable of because you can always produce just a bit better than you expect. If I'm being too successful, then I keep setting the targets higher and all of a sudden I fall flat on my face and I just lie there - my face in the mud, heartbroken. Because I've failed to do something." (11)

Finally, the last two members of the independent learners' sample to be interviewed (by coincidence a rabbit breeder and dog breeder), both used models to structure their learning in the form of an ideal example of a particular breed. The dog breeder was trying to reach perfection in the breeding of Cairn terriers, the criteria of perfection being based on two sources; the Kennel Club manual of breeding standards and the criterion he had developed for his own use when asked to judge at competitions ...

" I've got my own criterion for judging when I do shows which is to see how near the dogs come to being able to do what they were originally bred for. A terrier was supposed to go down burrows and drive out animals that were there so it needed certain physical features. Those are what I look for when I judge competition dogs." (25)

The rabbit breeder regarded the promotion of standards in her chosen breed as something of a personal crusade. This quest for perfection determined which of her stock were kept and the notion of the perfect Otter Rex dominated all her breeding activities. The diet the rabbits enjoyed was designed to accentuate certain physical characteristics, bucks and does were mated according to the qualities they exhibited, and those rabbits who had outlived their competitive use were killed.

The use of models, then, with its emphasis on the attainment of previously specified, 'ideal' qualities constitutes the final point in the continuum of independent learning methods as exhibited in the present study. Many of the issues raised in this section, particularly the relevance that the use of models has for the evaluative procedures of independent learners, will be considered later in the study.

Conclusions

This chapter has not sought to erect a typology of mutually exclusive categories, since such a typology would bear little relation to the actual experiences recounted in the interviews. It has sought, rather, to describe the different features of the learning methods most frequently favoured by independent learners and to give some examples of their adoption. There was little evidence of projects which relied on only one approach, sample members being decidedly catholic in their use of different methods as circumstances dictated. For example, in the pursuit of breeding success, the direction of learning would be determined by the model of perfection, the promotion of a particularly desired feature would be achieved through the experimental matching of certain dogs, birds or rabbits, and, where a breeder had been lucky enough to solve a problem which still beset his colleagues, he found himself in a uniquely advantageous position. Also, several learners recalled how the focus of their interest had altered over the years and this would inevitably entail some change in the methods adopted. A philatelist, for example, had rejected the simple collecting of stamps in favour of background research; two railway enthusiasts had experienced substantial shifts in interest leaving behind an early concern with modelling and becoming involved in the management and restoration of existing track. The section in chapter (5) dealing with the breadth of learners' interests has also provided a range of examples of the way in which attention shifted across traditional subject boundaries; a reliance on one learning method would, in these circumstances, be totally inappropriate.

CHAPTER SEVEN

LEARNING SOURCES

The correspondence students in the present survey exhibited an understandably heavy reliance on books, journals and broadcasts. This acquaintance was not based on personal choice but, rather, it was the result of institutional direction; students would be sent lists of reading suggestions with the titles divided into categories of 'essential', 'recommended' and 'background' and the course of their reading would be sequenced by their tutors according to the complexity of the tasks involved. In addition, the correspondence unit materials received were often regarded as self-sufficient and thus constituted these students' main source of information.

In contrast to this, the independent learners were faced with a bewildering range of investigative, evaluative and discriminatory tasks in their search for appropriate sources of information. The sources had first to be identified and located, a task requiring learners to master library classification systems and to realise the extent of the supportive loan network centred on inter-library loan arrangements and the British Lending Library. Unlike new Open University students, independent learners had no T.V. programme provided for them on how to make most effective use of libraries. Once located, the range of texts available had to be assessed according to their relevance for the task in hand. This would require independent learners to discriminate between works of introductory and advanced level, between theoretical analyses and practical guides, between highly specialised investigations and general surveys, and between books written in clearly comprehensive language and those adopting an unnecessarily verbose style. As such discriminatory capacities were developed, learners would come to their own conclusions about 'trusted' authors and they would erect their own rating systems taking, perhaps, the standards set by a particular author as their criterion for assessing new texts.

Given this range of tasks, it is not surprising that so many sample members emphasised their preference for the consultation of peers and learning groups as their main learning resource. This preference and its manifestations will form the subject matter of chapter (14). The purpose of the present discussion is to examine the range of non-human sources of information used and to comment on the independent learners' management of publicly provided facilities such as libraries and television and radio broadcasts.

The Importance of Books and Magazines

The statement that books and magazines were an important source of knowledge for independent learners is both trite and self-evident; no individual could hope to develop his expertise to the point of local recognition through an exclusive reliance on the spoken word. However, the ratio in which the printed word was favoured and found most effective in comparison with peers and enthusiasts' societies varied substantially throughout the sample. Only seven of the independent learners were prompted to emphasise their particular reliance on books and none of these exhibited a total dependence on the printed word.

Of these seven, the bridge and chess players both referred to the need to develop a knowledge of the literature of game skills and their comments have already received extended elaboration earlier in the study. The horticulturalist stressed the relative cheapness of this learning resource ...

" The best part of it is that you can find out so much about gardening just by reading ... you haven't got to put yourself to a lot of expense and go to expensive Technical Colleges and so on." (7)

The remaining four subjects in this group - the botanist, antique china expert, apiarist and philatelist - all regarded book usage as central to their project. The botanist's declared reliance on books was a result of his solitary nature; his interest had been pursued through a series of solitary rambles during the course of which plant specimens would be collected. These were then identified and classified by consulting his library of botanical reference books before being entered into his personal herbarium ...

" Really, all the years I've spent have been taken up with my own rambles. This area is a particularly good source of plant sites - especially the Hereford and Worcestershire border area - and I like to go out and find these and occasionally go further afield. I've got a good collection of books on all types of flora and fauna - plant, fungi, moths and butterflies. The more books you have, the better the chance you stand of making an accurate identification." (17)

For the apiarist, books were regarded as a basic learning tool because they provided suggestions for experimental activity ...

" I've got great faith in books, they're my main source of ideas. I've got a large number of books both new and old in my back room, including a lot of rare ones ... you can read the books and then try out their ideas yourself." (21)

The only time during the interviews that a subject referred to the term 'self-taught' was when the philatelist was speaking of his enthusiasm and tracing the development of his knowledge back to a general reliance on books and to one magazine in particular ...

" It was basically self-taught. I got a lot from books from the library and the philatelic magazines that were issued weekly and monthly. There's a tremendous amount of books about stamps in the library and though they don't carry the full range I've got a great deal of knowledge from those. I think the best source of knowledge I ever found was a weekly called 'Stamp Weekly' which had been going for years. It was a very, very good periodical and it explained a lot about stamps in simple terms and you could really enjoy it, you had pleasure from learning. 'Stamp Weekly' was really good and I got a lot of knowledge from that." (10)

Finally, books were regarded as one of the two most important sources of information by the collector of antique china ...

" I've got lots of books on the subject, I think that books are the main source of information together with personal contacts." (16)

Personal Libraries

Apart from their use of public library facilities, eleven subjects in the independent learner's sample claimed to have assembled extensive

personal reference libraries. These were formed as an incidental result of learner enthusiasm; that is, the library was assembled as a by-product of the subject's passion for his interest rather than as a necessary prelude to, or condition of, his learning. In seeking out as much information as he could about his interest he would gradually acquire a range of books, articles, catalogues and newsheets which would come to constitute a considerable resource bank. These libraries did, however, serve a number of useful functions for their owners once they had been assembled. The botanist relied on his collection of reference books for the identification and classification of new specimens; the dog breeder used his library to develop his knowledge of canine physiology; the apiarist derived the format of his experiments from his books, and the manager of a railway trust had built up a collection of practical manuals to help him in the performance of his duties and to deal with technical problems as they arose. This last feature was also revealed in the interviews with the horticulturalist, organic gardener and narrow gauge rail enthusiast, all of whom consulted their personal reference library as a first step in the resolution of difficulties. These patterns of problem-resolution will be explored in more detail in chapter (12).

" If I had a problem? ... Well, I've got quite a good reference library of my own and I'd look to that first of all ..." (7)

" Well, I suppose the first thing is, I'd look it up in a book. If it's not in the book I'd ask and generally that comes to the end of it. If I can't find it from a book then I suppose I ask anyone, and then if I don't know I suppose I arbitrarily pick strangers to write to." (1)

" If I've got a certain line of enquiry I'll make for the books first of all and use them as a basis of enquiry so at least I know what I'm talking about when I start to ask questions." (11)

The extent of these private library collections was generally acknowledged by their owners who realised that they possessed a resource bank which was considerably broader and of a greater depth than that of the average enthusiast. The purchase of such collections was an expensive activity and, as we shall see in chapter (12) such costs could present a major problem. The ornithologist was able to build her personal library largely from complimentary copies sent to her for review but the other nine subjects had to finance their libraries themselves. For the steam engine enthusiast such purchases constituted a considerable financial burden ...

" I often feel that I can't do all I really want to. I'm not able to because I just haven't got the money. The catalogue and research material take up so much and then the engines of course are really expensive." (19)

Personal Records

As well as assembling extensive personal libraries, several subjects described how they had come to amass a wealth of data on their enthusiasm which had somehow to be classified and organised for ease of retrieval. It was in this compilation of records and charts that the application of cataloguing skills was most apparent. For the most part, these records were devised by the learners themselves as a means of tracing the relative success of their efforts; partly for the innate

interest this activity involved and partly in an attempt to make these efforts more productive in the future. Two subjects did, however, find themselves engaged in externally directed recording activities. The organic gardener's research for the Henry Doubleday Research Association has already been documented and another instance of external control was provided by a renowned (though untrained) ornithologist who participated in the British Trust for Ornithology Nest Records Scheme between 1953 and 1962. This involved her in intensive daily fieldwork and culminated in the submission of around three thousand nest record cards. The format of these recording activities was, of course, designed by the B.T.O. each record card consisting of a number of sections corresponding to the different kinds of information requested. Interestingly enough, however, six years after the end of this project she embarked on her own farmland nest box scheme in which she arranged for detailed records to be compiled on some sixty nest boxes.

The observational records devised by independent learners for their own use (rather than that of an external organisation) tended to take the form of personalised diaries in which the progress of various hives, birds or plants was noted. A good example of this is provided by the horticulturalist whose recording activities spanned thirty years ...

" Another thing that helps me a lot is keeping a diary. I've kept my diary for thirty years at least and I can look back and see when I've planted things, how they did, what kind of results I got and so on. Also, it helps a great deal with exhibiting because then you can tell how long a thing takes on an average season to be ready for such and such." (7)

Not surprisingly, the apiarist's use of experimentation as his major learning style also involved the compilation of meticulous records ...

" I keep a hive record for all the different hives that I've got going at any one time. This means that I note down the behaviour of the bees in the different hives - things like feeding habits, mating, flight time. You can tell then if the way the hive is run is having any effects." (21)

An interesting example of relatively sophisticated record keeping was provided by the botanist who kept a record of events and sightings which had occurred on his ramblings. For ease of recording the diary of observations was based on a colour classification system with different types of sighting underlined in different coloured crayons ...

" Red crayons mean that is the first record of a flowering plant and green is for all later flower records. Olive is for liverworts, orange for lichens and fungi and violet for helleborines which I took a special interest in at one time. All insects, birds and animals are underlined in blue." (17)

Another dimension was added to this subject's recording activities by his compilation of a herbarium - a collection of dried flowers and plants, pressed and placed in several loose leaf folders with each entry labelled.

It is tempting to attribute the orderliness of this subject's recording technique and classification system to his academic training. He had enjoyed an Oxford education and had spent his subsequent professional life in teaching. Such considerations, however, could certainly not

be applied to the apiarist mentioned earlier (with a school leaving age of fourteen), nor to a classical music enthusiast who had left school at sixteen, and who subsequently pursued his interest through radio listening and the perusal of composer biographies. Crucial to his developing interest was his classification system ...

" When I heard something that I liked, I'd put down all the details - the name of the composer and the title of the piece - in a book, a notebook I'd got. I even got as far as working out a 'star' system for the things I'd heard; if I liked something I'd give it five stars and then it would go down to one. ... I'd always be taking biographies of composers out of the library because I wanted to find out all about them ... Whenever I heard something that I liked on the radio, I'd put down all the details in my book and then if I saw something else by that composer which I hadn't heard, on a 78 r.p.m. I'd probably buy it and more often than not find that I liked it - I used to do a lot of that kind of blind buying in those days."

(15)

In fact, this purchase of a comprehensive record collection was not an example of 'blind' (in the sense of random and non-rational) buying at all; a careful note of the composer's details had previously been made in the subject's notebook and the star rating system he developed served to direct the pattern of his buying.

Finally, the fitness enthusiast in the sample devised his own exercise charts in an attempt to find a system appropriate to his needs and capacities ...

" I decided to do a course of exercises which I'd planned myself - press-ups, sit ups, that kind of thing - a series of exercises to keep fit maybe three or four times a week ... I varied it and wrote charts down ... I made a chart out and I did a few exercises, experimented with them and injured myself now and again and crossed out those that I couldn't handle ... Everybody has different needs and circumstances and my needs are only appropriate to me ... you've got to find the system and the method of exercising which suit your body and your needs." (5)

That his efforts had met with some success became obvious during the interview ...

" I think I've reached my potential as far as building myself up to feel stronger is concerned. I just want to keep that, retain it, feel like I do now physically and just keep the weight I am, not lose any or put any more on. I feel comfortable now, I feel right, I'm quite happy ... I realise my limitations now, I couldn't accept them in the beginning. I realise I've got limitations and I can't go much further." (5)

Public Library Usage

Given that public libraries represent the local community's main learning resource bank and that they are characterised by their openness (in that no enrolment, registration or declaration of purpose is required of their users) it was expected that the respondents would devote considerable time to recounting their examples of library usage. It was surprising, therefore, to record references to this in only ten of the interviews and to discover that only six of these subjects placed a heavy reliance on library facilities. Some comments as to the way in which libraries might

play a greater role in assisting the efforts of independent learners are contained in chapter (15).

The six learners who used their local libraries a great deal were the two antiques experts, the organic gardener, the horticulturalist, the fitness enthusiast and the aquarist. The antiques collector and the dealer both found that the cost of books necessitated library use for research into individual items ...

" I get lots of books out of the library, especially when I've just bought a new piece and I don't really know what it is ... I use the library a lot since books are so expensive." (16)

" I use the library a lot as well because I buy stuff in bulk and there are often things I don't know anything about and I look these up using the library as a reference ... There are book type publications which I get out of the library because books are so fearfully expensive nowadays, it's £10 or £15 these days." (14)

Consultation of library stock items also assumed a financial aspect for the fitness enthusiast. When faced with the challenge of a new area of exercise he would sample the range of available texts on this topic in his library and then buy the most appropriate for his personal use thus avoiding the perils of random purchase. The horticulturalist also relied on his local library and complimented them on the quality of their stock. There was a suggestion that this very excellence might have been partially due to his own intervention ...

" I'm a great believer in looking up anything I don't know about. I use Malvern Library a lot, I've got three or four books at home from there at the moment ... About fifteen years ago I was on the P.T.A. committee when someone came to speak on the library service and I asked him if he couldn't take a better range of gardening books. Whether or not I can take credit I don't know, but since then the books they've got have been marvellous really." (7)

Finally, the organic gardener displayed a similar dependence on library facilities regarding their use as an ever present element in his project ...

" When I've had a specific book I wanted, then I'd look on the shelves and if it's there I'd get it and if it's not I'd reserve it. I've often known book titles so if I can't find them then I go and ask. I've almost always known someone in the library, whichever library I've been near to, I've known my way about libraries. I've always read so I've always known libraries. I've always thought in terms of the library if I wanted information." (1)

Magazines, Journals and Newsletters

Subscriptions to magazines, journals and newsletters assumed a much greater prominence in purely quantitative terms than did the use of

public libraries. Twenty of the twenty five independent learners mentioned either purchase of these items or their receipt as a result of society membership and it was common for a learner to consult two or three different magazines each month. Because these were specialist in nature it is difficult to generalise about the importance of such magazines in learning projects. They did seem, however, to fulfill two functions - instructional and news provision.

The instructional function was concerned with practical tips, hobbyist hints and suggestions for enthusiasts' activities. Typical of this was the provision of new model aero plans, the publication of new methods of treatment for plant diseases, the outlining of newly discovered chess opening moves, or the suggestion of previously untried angling baits. The comments of the philatelist at the beginning of this chapter and those of the aero-modeller earlier in the study testify to the instructional importance that an enthusiasts' magazine can assume. In general, though, this function was secondary to that of news provision. Magazines, journals and newsletters tended to concentrate more on giving details of forthcoming exhibitions or shows and on recording the results of those that had already taken place. A great deal of space was devoted to the advertisement of new products and 'Small Ads' sections, the latter taking up a substantial part of many papers. The purpose of these columns was to facilitate the exchange of items and services between individual enthusiasts and they therefore constituted an important source of equipment and materials. Testimony to the way in which hobbyist magazines served as a vital line of communication was offered by the rabbit and dog breeders in the sample ...

" 'Fur and Feather' really is a must for us because it's the main source of all the show dates and judges. There's a diary of events and anyone who wants to start a new breed writes to the correspondence column to let other people know and to see if anyone else is interested ... I wrote to 'Fur and Feather' suggesting a national Otter Rex club and several people got in touch so we all met at the Alexandra Palace Show ... it's the most important magazine for breeders." (24)

" I get a lot of magazines - 'Dog World', the editor of that's a friend of mine, the 'Breed Kennel Year Book', 'Kennel Gazette', the Kennel Club Yearbook', their stud book, their annual gazette ... they're a really important link between the breeders and the judges because they give the details of show results and the shows forthcoming and they've got articles and small-ads columns." (25)

Broadcasting

As with public libraries, it was anticipated that radio and television programmes would be mentioned in many interviews as important instructional sources. In actuality, only four subjects drew attention to such broadcasts and these divided neatly into two groups, the gardeners and the music enthusiasts. Chapter (4) has already outlined the crucial role of broadcasting in the development of the knowledge of the jazz and classical music enthusiast and the record collector, both of whom traced the origins of their interest to radio programmes.

For the organic gardener and the more conventional horticulturalist (conventional in terms of the techniques he employed) broadcasting assumed a much more restricted role representing an occasionally useful supplement to other more important sources of information. Both acknowledged the 'Gardener's Question Time' radio programme as a source of useful tips and they were aware of the range of television programmes dealing with their subject ('Mr. Smith's Vegetable Garden', 'Gardener's World', etc.). However, the relatively minor significance attached to these programmes can be judged by the fact that the organic gardener neglected to watch them because they 'tend to be on television a bit early so I don't have time to catch them' and the horticulturalist did not even own a television.

Conclusions

It seems that the most noticeable feature to emerge from this chapter is the relative importance placed by independent learners on sources of information other than the mass media, books and magazines. Despite the availability of self-instruction manuals, programmed learning texts and an impressive amount of educational broadcasting time, it was the importance of peer contacts, of societal learning networks, of early guides and mentors, and of peer inspiration, which received repeated emphasis. This may be partly a reflection of the method of sample selection; given the already mentioned reliance on society secretaries for possible contacts it is not surprising that sample members contacted this way frequently referred to other society members as a source of information, motivation and guidance. It may also be the case that the

duty of the public libraries and broadcasting networks to cater for the broad reading and viewing tastes of the community prevents them from developing special interest sections and programmes in the degree of detail required by the independent learner. A series of television broadcasts may introduce the viewer to a new field of interest and cover the ground equivalent to that of an introductory textbook but it will be unable to claim the broadcasting time needed to develop learner skills to an expert level. It could, in any case, offer only generalised instruction since the audience would be impersonal and passive receivers of messages transmitted. No scope would exist for detailed attention to individual learner difficulties. Again, the much greater emphasis placed on the reading of specialist magazines, journals and newsletters would seem to suggest that library stocks become obsolete after a particular level of expertise has been reached. The function of a local public library is the provision of general information covering as wide a range of knowledge as is possible rather than the stocking of specific materials on a narrow range of specialist interests. Libraries thus functioned as useful adjuncts to learning, especially where book costs were prohibitive, but they did not constitute the chief environment in which that learning took place.

CHAPTER EIGHT

LEARNING GOALS

Although the importance of emergent themes and concepts has been emphasised throughout this research, particularly in chapter (3), there were some concerns which exercised the author's attention at the outset of his efforts and which retained their prominence throughout the two years of interviews. The extent to which independent learners had planned their future enquiries around a series of learning goals was one of these and discussion of final project aims inevitably raised the question of intermediate learning goals.

One particular problem which arose in the investigation of such activities was the extent to which the planning of future stages in the learning project was dictated by the nature of the project itself rather than the learner's deliberations. An example of such a project was the drama producer's engagement in a series of presentations; mounting a Christmas Nativity play would require the execution of certain tasks such as arranging stage lighting, contacting musicians, notifying printers of deadlines for publicity material and assigning actors to different roles. These would be tasks intrinsic to the activity itself since there could obviously be no production unless they were attended to. The producer was not required to think deeply about the nature of mounting a performance before concluding that these were necessary activities; it would be accepted by all that such tasks were an intrinsic element of play production. The function of the producer was to allocate some of these tasks to appropriately qualified personnel and to establish a list of priorities with relevant deadlines for those with which she had to deal herself. There would be no goal-generating or goal-setting activity involved, only decisions about how best to attain the goals intrinsic to the activity.

The Importance of Preparation

Before dealing with more detailed planning activities it is perhaps worth mentioning that the general importance of preparation was a theme which received expression in several of the interviews. The correspondence students in particular regarded some kind of preparatory activity as crucial to eventual study success. This emphasis is not hard to understand; faced with the prospect of systematic and intellectually demanding study, the realisation of the value and necessity of preparing for this sudden change would increase in proportion to its imminence.

For those students in the independent learners' sample, however, there could not be an equivalent concentration on preparing for the project since this had been perceived as a lifelong commitment. Just as it proved difficult for respondents to recall the exact origins of learning activities, so the period immediately prior to the commencement of these efforts was unremembered. What emphasis was placed on the importance of preparation tended instead to refer to a period of reflection which it was deemed wise to take in order to ensure eventual success. The cost of omitting this reflection has already received expression in the comments of an organic gardener and a similar testament to adequate preparation was given by the competition angler in chapter (3). Rivalling the angler's emphasis on the importance of preparation, however, was the stress placed by the chess captain on the need to assimilate a preliminary body of knowledge. Only if the literature of game-openings was mastered could the player stand any hope of competitive success ...

" Over the years you've got a whole literature of set sequences of moves or underlying patterns of set sequences of moves for all different openings ... Until you've learned the theory of openings and why openings are there and all the various theories behind how to win games - until you've learned a bit about this, then you'll continue playing it as if it were a game of draughts, at a very elementary level. And you won't get an inkling of the potential that's in it." (?)

Intermediate Goal-Setting

The final section of this chapter deals with the activity of terminal goal-setting; that is the establishing of clearly specified objectives the attainment of which mark the completion of a lifelong learning project. Aside from this, however, several projects exhibited an element of planning ahead via a series of intermediate learning goals.

(1) Writing Goals

The self-imposed deadlines and the focussing of attention onto particular aspects of an interest which were entailed by the act of writing mean that such activities qualify as examples of intermediate goal-setting. Where a learner was engaged in the exploration of a diverse and (to them) ever-expanding field of knowledge, the production of a book or article served two useful functions; it prompted a necessary summation of their progress to date and it prevented their concentration from being continually diverted into the tangential pursuit of irrelevant though interesting, avenues of enquiry. The philosopher in the sample, faced as he was by the entire spectrum of human thought, could only cope with this diversity by producing a regular written record of his efforts so far. Finding an excuse and a convenient point to do this was a major difficulty ...

" In fact I wrote a paper - again, this is one of the problems of motivation, finding something to write for - I went in for this essay competition run by the Institute of Public Administration. Probably what I was saying was not really practical enough for the audience, because I was trying to get at the roots of the particular area which I'm interested in ... I've got to write a report at the end of all this and know how to put it all together. I've made it practical in the sense of trying to commit myself to writing a thing for this competition." (8)

Adopting this approach also served the latent, though important, function of avoiding familial friction ...

" It's the only way to bring it to a conclusion if it's got to be done by a certain time. It may not get done by that time, but at least it's an excuse for an all out effort up to that time. The household can tolerate it if they know it's only going to last a certain length of time." (8)

Another project which found itself organised around the activity of writing was that of a steam engine enthusiast who had developed a particular interest in 'Sentinel' steam wagons. His intermediate goal of producing a definitive history of this wagon acted as both a motivating and a controlling force in the development of his knowledge ...

" There was an estate that was built near to the old Sentinel works while it was still running and every Sunday I used to go and talk to anyone - old workers and their sons - anybody I could find who'd had some contact with it. That took me twelve years to

collect what information I could, their own memories, books, old records. I'd go for weeks knocking on doors with no luck and then, just when I felt like giving up, I'd meet someone and they'd say 'Our Dad worked there and we've got some of his things in the attic' and they'd open a cupboard and it would be full of all the old catalogues! But for the few times that happened there'd be loads of others when they'd say 'Oh we threw all those out' or 'We burned those old things'. Knowing that they'd been there and been destroyed was worse than just saying 'No'." (19)

This subject did actually publish his researches as the first of two volumes and his current learning activity is again centred around related writing goals; the completion of Volume Two of his history and the compilation of a picture book to accompany the two volumes.

Perhaps the best example of a project in which the production of written work constituted an ever present intermediate learning goal was that of a local ornithologist. Deciding that her local paper was omitting to give natural history the space she felt it deserved she visited the editor's office and presented him with two articles. As a result of her initiative she was contracted to produce a weekly column on natural history and had never missed an issue in the twenty-five years up to the interview. These writing commitments were, of course, self-generated, but a host of external requests for books and journal contributions soon followed. The three subjects mentioned so far thus share the characteristics of having generated and specified their own writing goals and of treating the attainment of those goals as a major element in their learning activities.

Three other enthusiasts (the aquarist, rabbit breeder and dog breeder) had also engaged in personally conceived authorship though these particular subjects did not regard their writing activities as a chief determinant of their learning. For the two breeders, contributing articles on their respective specialisms of Otter Rex rabbits and Cairn Terriers was a way of promoting those particular breeds. If the specialist journals in their fields could be persuaded to feature these breeds their fame would spread, their popularity would rise and breeding standards would consequently be improved. The third subject in this group, the aquarist, had published articles on tropical fish plants for no other reason than the advancement of knowledge in that field. That he sought no fame as a result of his writing was evidenced by his use of a pseudonym.

Finally, writing activities were mentioned during the interviews with four other subjects but these activities were either a function of society secretarial duties which required the submission of regular society meeting reports to the local paper, or a result of requests from editors who had come to learn of the subject's expertise. As such they did not constitute examples of self-generated, goal setting activity.

(2) Collecting Goals

It is debatable whether collecting goals can really be equated with learning goals since the activity of collection per se is one requiring no observational, discriminatory or analytical abilities, merely the

means with which to amass a specified group of items. However, where the acquisition of selected items is undertaken within a context of limited financial means and there is no readily available source of collectable articles, then the seeking out of such items can call into play qualities of resourcefulness, persistence and discrimination and engage the collector in detailed researches. It can also stimulate a wider interest in the objects being collected ...

" It's a funny thing, when you start collecting I suppose there's no reason for collecting it's just the magpie instinct to hoard ... (when I began) basically then it was just the collecting instinct, but since coming to Worcester I've become more interested in the background of the stamps themselves - why they were issued, how they were printed, all this kind of thing."

(10)

This particular individual, realising the constraints placed upon him by finance and availability of resources, had modified his collecting objective ...

" To be complete on any one country now is virtually impossible because you've not got the earlier stamps and you can't keep up with the new issues that are coming along anyhow - some of the older stamps now are just beyond the pocket. What I try to do now is to try and get complete from Queen Elizabeth II, to get all her stamps, I'm trying to get complete on that one in Great Britain ... Your pocket rules it of course." (10)

One enthusiast who had pursued a limited collecting goal at an earlier stage in his life reported a successful conclusion to his efforts. Once this goal had been attained, however, the project was still considered as active; completing a signal finial collection was only an intermediate objective within the wider exploration of the world of railways ...

" When I retired I tried to get a collection of signal finials from all the different railway companies. As I rode round various lines I'd keep my eye open for what looked like non-working signals and if I saw one I'd ring up the local British Rail and ask them if I could have it. Eventually I got forty-eight together and that collection is now in the charge of the National Railway Museum though it's not on public view at the moment." (23)

It was interesting that the one subject interviewed on the basis of his collecting fame totally rejected the philosophy of acquisition which underlay this activity. Despite his having amassed a formidable record collection containing a number of valuable obscurities it was the musical content rather than the financial worth which was valued above all ...

" I certainly don't collect them because I want to have hundreds of records, it is the music definitely. It always has been and it always will be." (12)

In fact, as this subject's previously quoted comments have made plain, his collecting was undertaken in the absence of what most would regard as an essential precondition to such activity; that is, the existence of strictly defined parameters indicating what constituted the 'complete set' or 'final collection' ...

" I don't think I could ever have enough records - I could fill this room with them and I still wouldn't have enough. It's not as though I'm building up a steady collection and I'm going to get all of them like a set of books. It's not at all like that ... it's like breathing, a part of my life ... I can only see it getting wider not narrower ... it's just a continuous thing that gets bigger and bigger seemingly ... I can't see me ever saying 'Oh I've got all the records I want now, the complete lot, I've got the whole set' because it doesn't work like that at all."

(12)

(3) Externally Imposed Goals

Brief mention should lastly be made of a number of projects which were characterised by the pursuit of externally imposed, intermediate learning goals. The most frequent of these (to be discussed in the next chapter) was that of competition success; for those enthusiasts whose activities were focussed on competitive triumph, each show, match, or competition became the centre of their immediate attention, the intermediate end to which, for a period of several weeks or months, all their efforts were devoted. Aside from the factor of competitive participation, however, four subjects admitted to allowing some part of their activities to be externally supervised.

Three of this group have already been extensively quoted at earlier stages in the study; the ornithologist who had participated for some nine years in a British Trust for Ornithology sponsored nest recording scheme, the aero-modeller who had developed his modelling expertise by trying out different magazine aeroplane construction plans and the organic gardener who conducted experiments as part of the Henry Doubleday Research Association investigation into organic gardening methods. The fourth member, a classical music enthusiast, has also received some attention, particularly with regard to the way in which his interest was both initiated and nurtured by radio broadcasts. In this context, however, it is the role assumed by the 'Radio Times' which comes to our notice, especially its responsibility for planning the subject's daily listening commitments ...

" I always used to get the 'Radio Times' and do that very thing - mark all the things I wanted to listen to during the week ... I remember there always used to be a concert on Saturdays on the radio at around 2.15 p.m. They'd have a chamber group play a series of concerts each week - and this will show you the kind of life I led then - I used to listen to the concert, rush out to Goodison Park to see Everton play, and then dash back to listen to the music on the radio again!" (15)

Final Aims

In the discussion during chapter (1) it was pointed out that viewing the twin features of intentionality and planning as necessary conditions of adult learning may be inappropriate in the case of independent adult

learning. If an individual is engaged in the exploration of an unfamiliar subject area, without the guidance of an acknowledged expert, it is in the nature of this activity that he will be unable to specify a terminal goal. It is only as he develops the 'grammar' of the activity, as he comes to realise the standards intrinsic to his subject and the parameters and contrasts of his field, that a definition of final aims becomes possible. It is not surprising, then, that over half of the independent learners' sample were either unable or unwilling to define an end point to their studies. Nine subjects did, however, specify a final aim, though with varying degrees of certainty. Although these aims are subject-specific, an attempt has been made to group them into general categories. Before these are considered, it is perhaps appropriate to examine the responses of those subjects who rejected the necessity of specifying a terminal target at which they were aiming.

(1) The Denial of Final Aims

The frequency of rejection of any kind of end point to the projects surveyed should come as no surprise given the attitudes revealed in chapter (5). Where a learner regards his area of interest as constituting an ever-expanding, limitless vista of knowledge the notion of a final goal becomes irrelevant. Indeed, as chapter (5) showed, the possible mastery of body of knowledge was regarded with apprehension and even hostility. Omniscience was held to be equivalent to stagnation and the attainment of such a state to remove the challenge and the joy of discovery from learning. Again, if (as has been argued in chapter (6))

such activities were regarded as 'Central Life Interests' or if the learner's self-esteem was partly dependent on their successful execution, then these activities were hardly likely to lend themselves to terminal definition. This assertion of the centrality of his learning project received vivid expression in the comments of a record collector who was unable to envisage a terminal point to his activities. Collecting was 'like breathing, a part of my life' and, given the other revelations of chapter (6) on the centrality of learning projects, the surprise is that as many as nine learners should refer to a final aim, rather than that this should be so frequently rejected.

(2) Competition Success

This was the aim which received most frequent expression with five subjects finding in such success a justification for their activity. The aquarist wanted "just to have some of the best show fish in the country" (9), the competition angler calculated that he needed "about three more years ... before I'm satisfied that I can go to any water locally on the Wye, Avon and Severn and say 'Yes, if I draw well I'm going to win' " (4), and the pigeon racer hoped to win a national race in competition with the top flyers in the country. The rabbit and dog breeders were pursuing breed perfection and attainment of this state was interpreted in terms of competition success ...

" I want to win one or two of the Five Star shows, the ones that are held at Alexandra Palace and Doncaster Racecourse, with the 'Best of Rabbits' category. I did win the 'Best of Otter Rex' category at the Alexandra Palace and that was an incredible, a terrific feeling." (24)

" The overall purpose of breeding is to get perfection in your breed and that's what I'm striving for, to get the best dog in the breed, the best Cairn Terrier. I think I'm getting near it and with a bit of luck and a bit of time I'll achieve it." (25)

(3) Contribution to Knowledge

Two subjects engaged in projects of widely differing natures had as their final aim the advancement of knowledge in their field through their personal research. One of these, the apiarist, was concerned with a discovery of a practical kind, the management of bees in the swarming season; the other, with making new philosophical connections between very diverse branches of thought. The crucial significance with which these efforts were invested was reflected in two ways; both subjects regarded the attainment of their final aim as something of a personal crusade and both believed their labours to be so important as to merit publication ...

" To be able to get a breakthrough in swarm management, it's what everyone's hoping for ... What I really want to do is to find a simpler way of managing bees in the swarming season ... that's my real interest ... if bees didn't swarm as a way of natural increase, honey production would be easy and beekeeping would become really popular ... To produce honey is very time consuming and uncertain and a simpler form of swarm management is needed if beekeeping is to become popular." (21)

" I feel that I've got something so important that it ought to be published so that other people can pick it up. I'm sure I can't do everything that's capable of being done on it but I feel a sense of responsibility to at least get it published."

(8)

(4) Miscellaneous

Finally, two respondents referred to such subject-specific final aims that no place could be found for them in the other categories. The classical music enthusiast recalled how his early forays into this new world had been guided by a very clear ambition ...

" To play in an orchestra, there was no doubt that that was my pipe dream - that's why I got the trumpet and took some lessons ... there was no chance, I just had to accept the fact that I wasn't going to be good enough. I did start again with the trumpet lessons when we moved here, but I don't play anymore now." (15)

The fitness enthusiast, after initially denying that there was any final goal he was pursuing, did spontaneously reveal such an aim later in the interview ...

" If you like, you talk about aims, that's my one aim - to stop my headaches ... probably if I had to say what goal I had it would be to overcome that, it really would. That would be my goal, to

be healthy, to be really fit again. I can't remember really being that way, not after sixteen or seventeen. So that's the goal - wanting really good health, mental and physical. Maybe that's the motivation, to make myself as fit mentally and physically as I can. I've never really thought about it before like that, because there have been so many other reasons, but that would be the most important one." (5)

As well as providing research data, the comment above illustrated the point (made in chapter (3)) that an interview can be mutually beneficial through the generation of new learner insights.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to demonstrate some of the planning activities in which independent learners were engaged. Once again, the concept of colligation - the viewing of a series of events as a naturally unfolding process with no need of explanation - has become apparent, as learners strove to remember any point at which they had consciously decided to direct their efforts towards the deliberate pursuit of an intermediate or terminal learning goal. The fact that only nine of the twenty-five independent learners made reference to the final aims of their project certainly gives added confirmation to the attitudes revealed in chapter (5). Even when a final aim was specified it was often accompanied by the expression of a belief in the ever-expanding nature of the field of knowledge studied. Just because, for example, some enthusiasts had set their sights on winning a particular trophy did not mean that they regarded

its attainment as signalling their reaching a state of omniscience. Such competition success would represent an important personal victory and result in the granting of peer acknowledgement, but it would not alter their perception of the vastness of their field of interest.

The case of the classical music enthusiast raises a particularly interesting issue concerning the possibility of redefining a final aim. Whilst in his twenties, this subject had regarded orchestral membership as the end point of his activities, but, as it became evident that he would never acquire the necessary technique, the focus of his attention shifted. He developed a broad appreciation of classical music and used his knowledge to help him open a record shop some twenty years later. It may well be that as previously specified final aims are either attained or obviously denied, so the learner comes to adjust his perspective to take in new possibilities. What seemed like a terminal goal when viewed from a point of relative ignorance may become a vantage point offering new avenues of exploration once it is realised. For those unable to attain their initially specified objective the process of movement towards that very point may reveal more exciting possibilities causing the nature of the final aim to be changed along the way.

CHAPTER NINE

EVALUATING INDEPENDENT LEARNING

The process of evaluation is one which traditionally is regarded as dependent on two complementary constituents; the declaration of previously specified, unequivocal learning goals and the existence of objective criteria against which progress towards those goals can be measured. As has been argued in chapter (1) and illustrated in chapter (8), however, the exploration of a field of knowledge and the development of a high level of expertise can be undertaken by independent learners who have no clear idea of the end point of their studies. Indeed, in their attitudes towards their learning it has been revealed that terminal mastery of a body of knowledge or set of skills is regarded as equivalent to stagnation. This chapter is concerned with the second of the two traditional elements of evaluation, the criteria used by independent learners to assess their progress. The author was interested to discover whether or not some kind of evaluative process occurred and, if so, what indices were applied by the learners to their activities.

Because evaluative criteria were likely to be subject-specific, there was the continual danger that they might be ignored by the researcher who was a layman in most of the enthusiasms covered. There did seem, however, to be two broad approaches adopted towards the evaluation of independent learning projects; these could, in conventional terms, be called subjective and objective. The subjective criteria emphasised such things as the learner's development of a sense of critical confidence towards his field of interest and a belief that his knowledge was sufficiently broad to enable him to call into question the pronouncements of 'experts' in his field. A learner who was able to integrate new insights and information into a systematic framework of

A similarly dismissive attitude towards books in her field was revealed by the rabbit breeder ...

" I don't know a lot of books because there's very few that are any good. Sometimes they're just misleading but sometimes they're really wrong." (24)

When this point of critical awareness is reached, when the subject feels confident enough of his own abilities and knowledge to call into question the published arguments of accredited experts, then new knowledge is received in a spirit of critical interpretation rather than one of passive acquiescence. In a sense, the subject's criticisms of experts in his field could almost be regarded as an objective index of progress; when he is able to articulate his reservations about accepted texts and hobbyists' manuals in the presence of other knowledgeable enthusiasts, this constitutes an external, observable indication of his growing self-confidence. Since, however, the subject's own perceptions of his abilities might not tally with the opinions of his peers on this, such internal feelings must remain in the category of subjective criteria. They tell us of the subject's belief in his own capacities but not the extent to which the accuracy of such perceptions can be verified. It is possible that a learner may feel confident about dealing with difficulties in his enthusiasm but that he might never be sought out by his peers for advice on their problems because of their view of him as inexperienced and ineffectual.

Two other instances of the application of subjective evaluative procedures were contained in the interviews with the budgerigar breeder and fitness enthusiast. The budgerigar breeder described how his

A comparable development of confidence and critical originality was outlined by the philosopher ...

" I think I've developed my own philosophy. I'm able to assess other people's philosophy from a definite standpoint. I've read a few people's philosophies and so assessed them." (8)

In the case of the two railway enthusiasts a remarkable similarity of opinion was expressed regarding the reliability and accuracy of new books on their subject. Both were able to detect inaccuracies in the new texts they reviewed and to offer a corrected version of the events or features under discussion ...

" The people who write the books, quite often they're accepted as experts because they've written the book. But every expert doesn't know everything and they very often get quite a few things wrong. I'm a very disbelieving character, especially where experts are concerned, because I often find that I get a lot more useful information from someone who doesn't profess to be an expert. Someone who makes statements because they are the specialist expert can very often be shot down with very little enquiry." (11)

" I think I know enough about my subject to be able to spot a lot of mistakes in the books I read. When I buy a new book I find I'm making alterations all the time I'm reading it - things I know to be wrong are printed in there. If you look at any new book of mine you'll find the margins full of comments I've made about them." (23)

outside, all antiques dealers probably seem to be roughly similar. I mean there are five or six shops in Malvern and I know nearly all of them and not one of us is doing what anyone else is. So it's hard to compare because businesses are so different." (14)

Subjective Indices of Evaluation

Although objective indices of evaluation were mentioned much more often during the interviews than their subjective equivalent, the latter did receive expression in seven encounters during which the respondents recalled how their attitudes towards their field of study had changed. The clearest indication of their growing sense of confidence and command was the development of a critical attitude towards accredited experts in the field. What had once been a respectful acknowledgement of superior expertise was replaced by a confidence in their own abilities, methods and critical capacities. This change of emphasis was amply demonstrated in the aquarist's rejection of a dependence on the works of a particular author ...

" The Tropical Fish Hobbyist is edited by the world's top icthealogist, Herbert Axlerod. He's had fish named after him that he was the first to discover and introduce to the Natural History Museum in London. I don't keep his books anymore because I disagree with a lot of his theories on tropical fish keeping. I didn't at first - I don't suppose I read anything else by Axlerod and another American named Winkler, but after a few years you start to realise that their idea of fish keeping clashes with your own, anybody who's a thinking person anyway." (9)

knowledge, or who could detect and correct the mistakes contained in new textbooks on his specialism, would thus have developed an awareness of his undeniable expertise.

The objective approach towards the evaluation of progress emphasised above all the factors of peer recognition and peer comparison. When the efforts of an enthusiast were recognised by his peers and reflected in their attitudes towards him, then a justifiable pride could be taken in this indication of his achievements. The learner's developing competence was marked by his being invited to talk to groups, clubs and societies, by his being sought out for advice, or by his being nominated to represent his local club in competitions. His progress could be objectified in terms of the behaviour of his peers towards him rather than his own feelings of developing confidence.

Occasionally the evaluative activity was complicated by the very breadth of interest which was revealed in chapter (5) as such a marked feature of the learners' attitudes towards their learning. Because they had developed a broad appreciation of their field it was much harder for them to find some criteria by which their knowledge could be assessed or compared with that of their peers, than if they had concentrated on a specialist aspect. This was very noticeably the case with the two antiques experts in the sample, both of whom believed that a specialisation of interest would have made evaluation of their activities much simpler ...

" I've got too catholic a taste to really be an expert in the subject. If you want to become really knowledgeable about the field, you've got to specialise in one particular area." (16)

" The field's so enormous and the price range is so different that it's really impossible to keep up with it ... to people on the

developing expertise was marked by his understanding of previously incomprehensible terms and the added knowledge such comprehension released ...

" There's quite a lot of these articles in Cage and Aviary Bird which are on genetics. I used to look at these articles and at the words at the top of them like 'Pseudo-Anamorphs' which when you look at it you think 'What on earth does that mean?'. It wasn't until I actually started looking through these books that, of course, words like that clicked into place. And I was able to read those articles again and gain the knowledge."

(13)

The fitness enthusiast provided a good example of a project in which subjective and objective indices of evaluation were applied. As we shall see in the next section, the progress through a weight training programme could be quantified in terms of the number of pounds he was able to lift or the increase in arm, leg and chest measurements. Subjectively, however, the effects of fitness activities were gauged in terms of his improved mental state. If he was engaged in regular and correctly undertaken exercise, this would be marked by a feeling of confidence and mental alertness ...

" You feel a bit more aggressive in a good sense I think ... aggressive in the sense that you feel full of force, that's the kind of thing I measure it against ... I'd always felt good doing exercise and it made me work better mentally - I could paint better and could put more into my painting if I felt

physically fit with a lot of drive and energy ... Right from the beginning exercise always affected me mentally, I always felt better mentally and more alert ... it made me feel stronger, healthier and mentally more alert ... I can work better at my painting, any mental activity, I have much more energy to carry on with it, much more." (5)

Objective Indices of Evaluation

Into this category fall those evaluative exercises which were characterised by their being based upon clearly observable, measurable indices. The most common objective index was that of peer recognition; the development of a subject's expertise was marked by such things as his being invited to lecture to fellow enthusiasts, by his election to team membership or judging duties, or by the frequency with which his advice was sought by his peers. These were all observable indications of the esteem in which the subject's efforts were held by his colleagues and were likely to constitute a more accurate estimation of his abilities than his own subjective perceptions. Since, however, independent learners who had engaged in a lifelong pursuit of their interest would take a justifiable pride in their achievements, subjective and objective assessments of their abilities were always likely to coincide.

This emphasis on peer recognition as an evaluative index is, of course, hardly surprising; given that the criterion for inclusion in the sample was a recognition by his peers of a subject's having attained an unusual level of expertise, it was inevitable that references to peer acclaim would be forthcoming. The following paragraphs document the forms in which that acclaim was expressed.

(i) Peer Recognition

The mark of peer approval and recognition was bestowed on individuals in six distinct ways ...

- (1) Requests from enthusiasts' journals for contributions
- (2) Fellow enthusiasts seeking their advice
- (3) Selection as team members
- (4) Invitations to talk to clubs and societies
- (5) Conferring of honorary society membership
- (6) Election to judge status

It should be borne in mind, however, that the extent to which such peer recognition was consciously recognised and adopted as an evaluative index was not always clear. Such examples of fellow enthusiasts' approval as were recorded were generally unprompted but their mention may have been the result of a justifiable pride in this recognition rather than an indication of any awareness of evaluative activity.

Requests for authorship were mentioned by three students whose expertise had come to the attention of journal editors - the steam engine enthusiast, ornithologist and apiarist. A fourth subject, the rail enthusiast, had engaged in authorship of a kind when he responded to a request from local societies to set a quiz on railway knowledge. The seeking out of respondents for their advice was mentioned in ten interviews. This ranged from the informal contacts initiated by fellow society members to

the Citizen's Advice Bureau's request that the dog breeder serve as the referral point for all dog problems received by the C.A.B. The extent to which sample members served as local skill models or consultants for their community will be considered in chapter (15). A further three subjects used their selection as team members representing their local clubs as a highly specific self-rating mechanism. This was particularly the case with the bridge and chess players ...

" I'm a reasonable county player - if I was playing in Warwickshire I probably wouldn't be in their team, if I was playing in Staffordshire I probably wouldn't, in Gloucestershire I probably would. I suppose if I could find a reasonably good female partner and could really push it, I'd become a national women's player possibly. If I was in Wales I'd probably play for the national side ... I came fourth in England Ladies players this year which is the first time I've ever played with that woman so obviously if we got together we could do pretty well."

(6)

" I'm an average good player ... I suppose that being county standard I must be classed as slightly above average but I'm not much more than that, I wouldn't class myself as first class ... I was lucky to get into the lower boards of the team, I wouldn't class myself as a top county chess player ... at 135 one wouldn't consider oneself to be a brilliant player but one would be above a normal club player." (2)

It was the election of four subjects to honorary society membership or breed judge status which represented perhaps the ultimate in peer recognition. Attainment of these honours was dependent on the initiative

and decision of a jury of peers and thus constituted a goal not directly obtainable by the direct efforts of the subjects concerned. Only if an individual had repeatedly demonstrated his expertise, commitment and discrimination would he be invited to judge competitions or granted honorary membership.

(ii) Conversation with Peers

Aside from the question of peer recognition and acclaim, three enthusiasts were able to gain some idea of the state of their knowledge through conversation with their peers. For two of these subjects the recognition of their relative expertise came as something of a surprise; they had pursued their interest because of its intrinsic fascination and suddenly found that this pursuit had placed them in a position of relative superiority ...

" While I was working at the railway trust I had to talk a lot to the district engineers and it was while we were chatting that I realised I knew more about railway track than anyone else in Leeds, except maybe for professional engineers." (23)

" The Extra-Mural classes were made up of beginners as well as experienced students and from the discussion I suppose I was more knowledgeable than most others there. I only started to go to these very recently, really all my time's been spent tramping the countryside alone ... On one of the courses I'd say I had more knowledge than the tutor judging from the things she said." (17)

The philosopher had also had a recent acquaintance with Extra-Mural students but this had served to bring home to him his naievety rather than confirm his eminence ...

" I think I felt very naive compared to a lot of them. But on the other hand naivety made me more open. I felt possibly that it was ... it's a question of 'Unless you be as a child' and I'm probably very childlike in a lot of ways so it gives me certain opportunities and it denies me certain advantages."

(8)

(iii) Quantifiable Indices

Apart from the general categories of peer recognition and peer comparison a number of more quantifiable indices of evaluation were revealed during the interview. These were inevitably highly subject-specific and constituted a clear and convenient standard of measurement against which the subject's progress could be judged. The fitness enthusiast was able to estimate his developing strength on the basis of the weight he was able to lift and his increased arm and chest measurements. The budgerigar breeder linked the success of his activities to the fertility of the birds in his aviary; if his management techniques had been successfully implemented a high fertility rate would result. The aquarist and rabbit breeder both adopted an index similar to that favoured by the budgerigar breeder; that is, the survival rate of the fish and rabbits in their care ...

" As far as keeping fish is concerned, most of the fish in my tank have been there five or six years which is as good, if not better, than maybe ninety per cent of the hobby." (9)

" This year's been a good one in health terms, we've done well. If you don't keep your huts ventilated but at the same time know how to keep out draughts, and cold, then you can lose a lot of rabbits. It's not unknown for someone to lose twenty to thirty at one time. I only lost one last year and I've just lost one this year." (24)

Finally, as we have seen in chapter (10), competition success could also be regarded as an evaluative index which was, in a sense, quantifiable. An enthusiast could link his success to the amount of money he won or the number of trophies he gained and a project's terminal point could certainly be translated into terms of competitive triumph.

Self-Assessment

At some point during all the interviews with the independent learners they were asked (if this information had not already been volunteered) to assess the relative level of their own ability. The writer was interested to see whether the learners' estimation of their own expertise tallied with that held by their peers. There was certainly none of the self-denigration exhibited by the subjects in Tough's researches and, at the very least, the learners in the present study recognised that they were above average in the knowledge and skill they possessed. Indeed, it would be hard to imagine any other response to questions concerning self-assessment; given that their efforts involved an extended commitment of time, money and energy, they would hardly have been likely to continue to pursue their studies over a period of years if they had been perceived as unsuccessful. The following comments demonstrate the remarkable similarity of perception on this question of self assessment ...

" Certainly more than average I suppose ... I should think I've got just a bit above average knowledge of music because I've got connections with the pre-release things via Cherry Red, I get things that aren't on general release so I've got that knowledge. I've got various collectors friends who are quite intered in the more obscure records. Then there's the music press and John Peel, so there's quite a good input of information." (12)

" I'd say I was generally well above the average enthusiast with the knowledge I've got." (17)

" Generally I'm fairly knowledgeable. I suppose I'm the most knowledgeable locally about this field." (9)

" Locally let's put it this way, I'm on an average with the club members, maybe a little bit above because I've probably got more into it than most of the club members have." (10)

" I'd back myself against anyone on the general facts of music - who wrote what and things like that." (15)

" I'm a jack-of-all-trades, I know a little about most things, but not enough about anything to be an expert. Being big headed I think I'm most knowledgeable (than other members of his society). I don't know whether that's because I'm particularly knowledgeable or because they're not really very knowledgeable." (11)

" I've read more than most people, in this sort of field at any rate, but then I've not read more than those who are professionals ... I know enough about it to know the sort of things that are going on without being knowledgeable in matters of fact." (8)

" I'm not the most knowledgeable in the country on my breed, but I'd say I was as knowledgeable as the next man." (25)

As well as rating themselves as locally knowledgeable, five enthusiasts placed their expertise in a national context. The rabbit breeder believed herself to be one of the best of the younger Otter Rex breeders,

the tropical fish keeper held himself to be in the top three plant experts in the country, the competition engler translated his success into footballing terms regarding himself as a 'First Division' player, the steam engine enthusiast admitted to being the most knowledgeable in the country on his specialist engine and the apiarist acknowledged his international reputation in techniques of swarm management.

Conclusions

The distinction between subjective and objective indices of evaluation and the predominance of the latter are the major themes which emerge from an analysis of comment on this topic. The emphasis on peer comparison as an evaluative technique is not surprising given that such comparison affords a clear and convenient way of assessing progress. It is much easier for a learner to estimate his own expertise by relating it to that displayed by other enthusiasts than it is for him to express it in terms of a gradual integration of knowledge into a systematic whole or in the command of central concepts. It could also be the case that the emphasis on objective, identifiable indices reflects a belief that subject-specific criteria would be too complicated for the researcher to understand. Certainly the further investigation of this theme of subjective evaluative indices would be fruitful and informative.

Although the use of peers for purposes of self-assessment was frequently mentioned, it was not always possible to interpret such references with complete confidence in the accuracy of such inferences. In attempting to convey the state of their knowledge the learners may have seized on the factor of peer comparison as a quick and simple way of expressing their relative expertise. Sample members certainly took an obvious pride in their achievements and in the public recognition of their efforts by

their peers. They expressed their self-assessment in terms of peer comparisons regarding themselves as 'locally the most knowledgeable', 'above the average enthusiast' or 'in the top three in the country'. Whether such comparisons were made spontaneously and in order to show the extent of their expertise during an interview, or whether they reflected a consistent application of the criterion of peer comparison for purposes of self-evaluation, it was not always possible to determine.

The nature of the different techniques of evaluation and the extent to which they were effectively implemented must therefore constitute an important area for future research in independent adult learning. The difference between self-assessment and evaluation is a particularly crucial one and could perhaps form a useful focal point for further investigation. Self-assessment can be an informal, casual estimation of one's own abilities, usually by reference to one's peers. It need have no other justification or purpose than that it is an interesting activity in itself. Evaluation, on the other hand, is the regular estimating of progress according to previously specified and consistently applied standards, for example the survival rate of birds or the ability to criticise expert analyses. Its purpose and justification are found not only in the intrinsic interest of the activity but in the effect this has on subsequent learning. If the rate of progress is judged too slow the pattern of learning may be altered or the learner may become discouraged from further activity. Alternatively, he may decide to adopt a different set of evaluative criteria. If, however, progress is perceived as satisfactory, then the learner's enthusiasm is reinforced and his efforts consequently increased. Whether the learner's review of his progress takes the form of a casual comparison with his peers or

whether it constitutes a continual application of unequivocal criteria will be a crucial element in the execution of his project. It may even form the basis of a classification system whereby independent learning projects can be placed in categories according to the extent and type of evaluation they exhibit. At the very least, a continuum might be erected which had at its two poles the occasional comparison of one's abilities with other enthusiasts and the regular application of clearly defined evaluative criteria.

CHAPTER TEN

PARTICIPATION IN COMPETITION

The importance of defining final aims in competitive terms has been attested to in the preceding chapter and the general role of competition will now receive extended attention. The pre-eminence of this theme was entirely unforeseen when the research was first conceived yet it emerged as a major pre-occupation of independent learners with some reference to competitive participation occurring in almost half of the interviews. Its significance does not, however, derive purely from this quantitative index of importance but rather from the intensity of feeling which was aroused when this subject was broached. At different times competition participation was extolled as a major learning stimulus, villified as being destructive of the intrinsic pleasure of learning, erected as an evaluative criterion and acknowledged as a source of considerable self-esteem.

Of the twelve subjects who drew attention to the competitive aspects of their activities, only two spoke in relatively neutral terms, the other ten either emphasising their belief in the benefits of competition or stridently rejecting the competitive ethic. Although the positive aspects of such activities were mentioned far more frequently than the negative, the latter merit considerable exposure. In a study as small scale as this no pretensions of statistical validity are possible so to ignore the expression of minority opinions simply because they receive less frequent articulation would be mistaken. The accuracy or the relevance of an insight is not necessarily dependent on the number of times it receives expression and it may well be that one or two people's criticisms of a particular activity contain general truths that are echoed in the experience of others. In the present study, although only two subjects openly rejected the competitive ethic, this was done with

such conviction and clarity that their comments are afforded extended consideration.

Competitions and Learning

Participation in competitions was mentioned in six interviews as a major determinant of learning. In the conversations with the bridge and chess players the development of skills was seen as dependent on competitive interaction; in two others, the rabbit breeder and philatelist, the focus of learning activities was competitive activity. The dog breeder had come to regard his judging of competitions as being of major importance, requiring an extensive knowledge and appreciation of standards to allow for the erection of criteria of assessment. Finally, the freshwater angler was unable to view his activities in anything other than competitive terms and his perception of the importance of competition provides a good summary statement of the feelings of all six subjects on this topic ...

" I don't know why I've taken up the sport as I have to be honest - only that there's the competitive angle and wanting to win. I've got a great will to win at whatever I do, I like to be the best ... if I do a sport or a leisure activity then I like to be competitive. I like competitive sport and if the time ever comes when I can't fish competitively then I'll give it up." (4)

This self-perception was paralleled in the comments of a bridge player ...

" I've always like to do anything as well as I could. When I play tennis I don't just bat the ball about, I play as hard as I possibly can ... if I do it I like to do it as well as I can ... I think, basically, competitive sport is what I enjoy." (6)

It was, in fact, the interviews with these two subjects which first

alerted the author to the possible importance of this theme.

The Development of Game Skills

The two projects which had as their object the development of game skills (chess and bridge) both exhibited an understandable reliance on competition for the improvement of these skills. Although an established literature of strategies and techniques did exist in both fields, the raising of standards to the highest levels depended on competitive experience ...

" You do need to play against better players to improve your own game, there's no doubt about that. All the book learning in the world won't help you, you've got to have practice against better class players." (2)

" It's like any sport, you've got to play against better players to improve ... I played R.G. for about a year before he went up to Cambridge and I probably learned more in that year than I've ever done since." (6)

One particularly interesting feature of these two projects was the way in which they both exhibited a unity of execution in their general development. In both cases the learners deemed it incumbent on themselves to acquire a solid grasp of the strategies, techniques and game possibilities contained in the available literature. This would give them a basic understanding and the grounding they needed to be able to profit from competitive experience. Once this broad appreciation of

their chosen game had been developed, they were free to engage in the practical application of those insights and methods which they had acquired. It was considered possible to develop outstanding game skills only if these followed on from an initial immersion in the literature. The bridge player found one author in particular of great help ...

" I learned from Terence Reece's books. He's an absolutely first class player and has probably been one of the best players in the world. He could write beautifully, his books are very clear ... As far as book learning is concerned, I've got all Reece's books and I learned from them - they're my basic standby." (6)

An even greater emphasis was placed by the chess captain on the need for preliminary research. Without a detailed knowledge of possible game openings, the enthusiast could not hope to sharpen his skills through competitive practice; only after an initial immersion in the literature of the game could the real business of developing an individual style begin.

Competitions as Intermediate Learning Goals

With the chess and bridge players just discussed it was the participation in competition itself which constituted the learning activity. The skills were not developed separately from, and prior to, the contest and then applied in competitive situations; rather, it was intrinsic to the development of these skills that this occurred in a competitive context. Once this element of direct, interpersonal challenge was removed and

competition took place through the medium of birds, plants or animals, then the exhibition, show or match became the final and focal point of the learning activity. Instead of being the only occasion on which the participants had a chance to develop their skills through competitive interaction, it became an intermediate learning goal, an opportunity for the display of the results of the learner's previous labours. Such a role was assumed by the competitions in the projects of a philatelist and rabbit breeder.

For the latter subject, preparation for the next show exercised a total dominance over her learning activities ...

" Whatever rabbits I decide to keep, it's totally because they're going to help me in competitions. Your breeding is really based on how you're going to approach a show. I do keep one or two rabbits out of sentiment I suppose - I've got my original doe and my first ever big champion. But, generally speaking, the ones you keep are the ones with the features you want." (24)

The philatelist had also changed the course of enthusiasm so that the production of 'Nine Sheets' for competitions - an activity requiring considerable research and management of resources - had come to constitute his main learning task ...

" The club I'm in, they run two competitions a year and it makes it so as you want to join in the competition. We have a Nine Sheets exhibition competition where you put together nine sheets of stamps on a theme. You think 'I know what I want to do, but where can I get the stamps, what kind of stamps do I want?' and

you start looking further afield then ... I knew I'd got a basic idea of what I wanted to do so I went to the library again to sort out all the books on transport, on the early days of transport - steam locos and all that, boats, planes, then the man on the moon and space - it's amazing what you can learn and enjoyable as well. It does widen your scope a tremendous amount ... You take a logical sequence of a story and take it right through from its beginning to its end and show that in nine sheets of stamps." (10)

Competition Judging

Finally, competitions functioned as a major stimulus to learning for a select number of enthusiasts whose expertise had resulted in their becoming official judges in their field of interest. Although their role of judge placed them on the other side of the competitive 'fence' and therefore removed them from contests with their peers, this honour had only been attained as a result of regular competitive success. Indeed, the three subjects who had gained accreditation as official judges split their time between judging some competitions and engaging as contestants in others. The horticulturalist regarded this dual involvement as vital to the development of judging skills ...

" It would be no good trying to be a judge if you weren't an exhibitor because you wouldn't know what the judges were looking for." (7)

For all three enthusiasts, (dog breeder, rabbit breeder and horticulturalist), the process of accreditation had required them to submit themselves to close scrutiny by their peers. For the dog breeder,

this took the form of being nominated and then elected to breed judge status ...

" Your reputation develops after you've won shows with your breed and people realise you know a lot about that breed and ask you to judge their local shows. After a while spent judging small shows you graduate through your own breed until a new breed judge is needed and candidates are balloted and then elected. If you succeed in being elected you're placed on the 'B' list of judges and eventually you become a championship judge and then go to judge competitions overseas." (25)

The horticulturalist, on the other hand, was faced with a series of theoretical and practical exams ...

" I entered for the examination for judges of the Vegetable Society to go on their panel. I went up to the Royal Horticultural Society halls about ten years ago and took a written exam on all the various questions that arise in horticultural shows and then you have a practical exam where you go round and judge everything, award points and so on, and mercifully I passed. I thought I may as well go at the Dahlia Society so I went down to Cardiff for that and you didn't have a written exam, it was possibly a bit easier. You just go into a room where there are a lot of Dahlia classes set up and judge all the Dahlias." (7)

Judging styles were clearly defined in these two different fields in the manuals prepared by their respective governing bodies. However, as we have already seen in chapter (6), the dog breeder had evolved his own judging criterion ...

" The Kennel Club does issue a manual for each breed which gives the details of all the features you're supposed to look for in a good example of that breed. That's the basic standard which everyone has to use. I've got my own criterion for judging when I do shows, which is to see how near the dogs come to being able to do what they were originally bred for. A terrier was supposed to go down burrows and drive out the animals that were there so it needed certain physical characteristics. And those are what I look for when I judge competition dogs." (25)

Success and Failure

The emotional significance with which independent learning projects are invested has already received attention at several points earlier in this study but perhaps no more powerful example of this can be provided than the reactions to competition success. For those learners whose activities had been devoted to competitive triumph, attainment of that goal was both a source of great pride and an encouragement to further activity. Competition success thus operated in a self-fulfilling manner; as success was achieved so the subjects' enthusiasm redoubled and their efforts increased, which, in its turn, was likely to bring further success. The angler's comment that he took his fishing so seriously because he was good at it illustrates perfectly the operation of this self-fulfilling mechanism ...

" Success is all important, well for me it is anyway, that's what motivates me ... the only thing with the fishing, the reason why I've taken it as seriously as I have, is because I can be good at it. Rather than working hard to be good at it I know I can be good at it, and so I've taken it up because of that." (4)

In their comments on the pleasure of competition success several other enthusiasts testified to its reinforcing effect. Once the elation following on from such success had been experienced and the peer acclaim had been acknowledged, the learner would most likely devote a substantial part of his future energies to repeating these sensations. The rabbit breeder and pigeon racer paid eloquent testimony to the intensity of these feelings ...

" I did win the 'Best of Otter Rex' category at the Alexandra Palace and that was an incredible, a terrific feeling ... it's an unbelievable feeling to win a big show." (24)

" There's nothing like the thrill of a return after a two hundred or four hundred mile race ... One of my birds called 'Plodder' who was six years old which is old for a pigeon, he won a trophy for a five hundred mile race by coming home within two days. I got a great thrill from that because by normal standards Plodder wasn't much use because he was so old, but he just kept on going and he had his moment of glory. " (20)

So far, the emphasis of this chapter has been placed upon the benefits and pleasures of competition with little reference to its negative aspects. It is perhaps appropriate at this point, then, to balance the positive perceptions of competitive activity with the misgivings of two subjects who shared the view that the quest for success in contest with one's peers was destructive of the innate enjoyment of the activity. Both of these held the position of society secretary in their local enthusiasts' group and, as we shall see, this view of competition was reflected in their society's activities.

The critique of competition offered by both of these respondents was remarkably similar; as soon as participation in competition occurs, the desire to succeed becomes so strong that enjoyment of the activity for its own sake is lost. Competing takes on its own momentum causing all one's efforts to be directed towards triumph over other contestants. In the process the original perceptions of the subjects of one's enthusiasm - as objects of interest and beauty - are replaced by a new frame of reference. Instead of deriving pleasure from their innate beauty they are assessed according to their likelihood of achieving competition success. The initial motivation which caused the activity to be undertaken for its intrinsic interest is buried beneath the quest for rosettes, medals and cups. The budgerigar breeder expressed this critique most forcibly ...

" It's not until you want to start to show that the urge to compete takes you. You're in between two stools here because then you start to examine your motives as to why you're doing what you're doing, you've got another element creeping in here. Originally you started off because you were interested in keeping livestock purely for the sake of it. Taking your enjoyment from the bird, purely and simply. Then all of a sudden this new thing rears its ugly head, which is the need I suppose for one human being to compete against another, and all you're using in this particular instance is a bird, it could just as easily be a dog or a cat or whatever. You come into a new realm there in a sort of way ... You see you may have a bird in your aviary which is probably the most gorgeous coloured bird you've ever owned. But, because it doesn't come up to your high standards of the ideal, you dispose of it. If you're a beginner you should be over the moon - you have a beautiful coloured bird, it's healthy and you've bred it, it's got your ring on it. What more could you want? What else

are you in it for? And then the show element comes in." (13)

Much the same sentiments were voiced by the secretary of an aeromodelling society ...

" I fly for the fun of it, because I enjoy it and it interests me, I've got no desire to break any records ... If I was competing I'd be thinking all the time about how I was doing, how I compared to others. I'd be trying to analyse what was going wrong, why I was losing, and I'd spend all my time trying to improve my chances. I don't bother to compare myself to others - it's for fun not competition." (22)

As well as the doubts expressed about changing motivations once competition becomes uppermost in people's minds, both subjects also pointed out how competitive triumph did not, in fact, always depend solely on the exercise of appropriate skills. In both fields if a competitor had access to unlimited financial means he could buy a good share of his success. Any belief in the equality of competition (such as that expressed by the chess player in the conclusion of chapter (5)) therefore becomes illusory. This was particularly noticeable in the field of bird breeding ...

" As in all walks of life you can say that there are those that have and those that have not and those that have, in a monetary sense, seem to travel a lot faster in the competition side than those that have not. Because those that have, have got the power through the pen to purchase birds which are far outside of what you'd call the range of the common man. You're competing against people who, when they see a bird they want, can afford to pay any amount and this is where the dissatisfaction starts to

come. You're then in the realm of buying and selling, bartering for something you want and you change from being a keeper of birds for their own value to becoming something I can't really define - a conglomeration really of dealer, exhibitor, sheller out of money you can't afford - and in some ways this can be very destructive. A lot of beginners having seen what they may be like in the end tend to give up." (13)

They may also be prompted to abandon their interest as a result of the frustration experienced when realising their own competitive limitations. The high standards achieved at some shows may serve to intimidate rather than inspire ...

" Once you've visited an aviary or a show where there are birds of obviously far superior quality to yours the feeling of disappointment in your own stock is quite great. It's a devastating feeling to come home and think that what you have in your aviary, albeit very beautiful, is not up to the standard as other people with whom you're competing." (13)

Competitions and Society Activities

The promotion of shows, exhibitions and competitions was undoubtedly seen by society secretaries as one of their chief duties. Indeed, in some cases such activities were the raison d'etre of the club and their performance was embodied in its constitution ...

" We exist solely to organise pigeon racing, that's all we're here for. You can't take part in national races unless you're a member of an approved club which means you can use the official rings provided by the Association, the Royal Pigeon Association ... There's about twenty-two races in the season between April and September so you've got at least one a week." (20)

" The purpose of the club is to promote the breed, to keep it to the fore and to get better breeding standards, and this is done mainly by organising shows locally and nationally." (24)

" Let's say that most societies, particularly budgerigar societies, are set up with the aim of improving ... our rules state that we're set up to improve the knowledge of the budgerigar breeder in general, to give whatever help we can, and to improve the budgerigar as a bird. That means by selective breeding. And to promote the shows for the exhibiting of such birds. That is part of the reason why the club is set up, the prospectus if you like of the club, its aims. Of course some of those are conflicting." (13)

Of the twenty independent learners mentioning society involvement, the majority regarded with approval the prominence which the organising of competitions was granted by society secretaries. However, the two enthusiasts mentioned earlier who expressed doubts as to the unalloyed benefits of competition found these views affecting their organising activities. The budgerigar breeder was bound by his constitution to organise shows and exhibitions, but, given his position as secretary and founder of the society, the beliefs he held about the purpose of breeding would inevitably be forced onto members' attention ...

" I think I accept now that as Secretary of the club, having taken on that job, I've got to accept the limitations ... And I have my own limitations and variations and I've come to terms with them insomuch as I keep birds in my aviary which other people might say 'Why on earth do you keep that?' And I say to them 'there's a bird in my aviary which as a show specimen is useless, but because you could stick an elephant under her and she would rear it, she is a beautiful hen as far as I'm concerned'."

(13)

The aero-modelling enthusiast had also been founder and secretary of his particular society and was therefore in a similarly influential position. In his particular case he had succeeded in his attempt to establish a non-competitive basis to his club's activities ...

" The society mainly exists to help people get access to good flying sites where they won't bother the neighbours and get complaints. We have a few special lectures but it's really all down to flying for fun, not to competitions or lectures." (22)

Conclusion

The approval bestowed on a subject by his peers is, as we have seen, an important evaluative index for independent learners. It also constitutes a considerable motivating force and thus increases the intensity of learning efforts. When such approval is gained publicly through the medium of competition success it can be the culmination of years of preparation and represent the zenith of an individual's learning project. In the quest to reach this point the original motivation for beginning a learning

project - a delight in the intrinsic interest and beauty of an object or activity - may be replaced purely by the desire for public acclaim. As we have seen, competitive participation can produce feelings of disappointment, dissatisfaction and frustration just as they do the euphoria of success ...

" It's very, very important personally for me to do well. I get very upset if I feel I've been robbed and sometimes some very odd decisions are made. It's not that I mind if I know I've been beaten by better rabbits ... but if I think it's unfair, it really affects me. But then it's an absolutely unbelievable feeling to win a big show." (24)

It is the Janus like nature of competition which has emerged from the comments of respondents as the most interesting theme of this chapter. Despite the fact that all twelve subjects who mentioned competition participation were examples of highly successful learners there were indications in their comments, particularly in the two cases quoted extensively, that too great an emphasis on competitive success could be self-defeating. This emphasis would most likely receive confirmation were it possible to talk to some individuals (for example the budgerigar breeders mentioned as having given up their hobby) who were examples of unsuccessful independent learners. It is also quite possible that many enthusiasts never contact their local society precisely because of the declared competitive nature of its activities, seeking instead to develop their expertise without society affiliation.

The investigation of competitions and their relation to independent learning activities thus constitutes a fruitful area for future research. Were this to be undertaken it would perhaps be as illuminating to talk to the runners-up and 'also-rans' in society competitions as it would be to interview the acclaimed successes. Would the former group's

motivation for entering competitions, knowing perhaps that they stood little chance of success, be different from that of more skilled contestants? Indeed, were they to experience repeated failure (in competitive terms) how would this affect their attitude, or their commitment, to learning?

CHAPTER ELEVEN

CORRESPONDENCE STUDY AND INDEPENDENT LEARNING

In the preceding chapters attention has centred on the activities of the twenty-five independent learners since the context in which their learning occurred differed so markedly from that in which the correspondence students were working. The independent learners were generating their own intermediate and terminal learning goals, were adopting a variety of learning styles as circumstances dictated, were erecting their own evaluative criteria and were required to locate and assess the resources they needed for the successful execution of their learning. In contrast to this, the correspondence students were working within the disciplines created by an external imposition of learning goals, of subject content, of prescribed reading matter, and of learner work rate. Their efforts were open to continual tutor direction and correction and their activities therefore fall into the category of individualised instruction. The dimension of competition participation which assumed such importance to many independent learners was, of course, alien to the correspondence students' experience, and they were also denied the opportunities for specialisation enjoyed by the independent learners.

It is perhaps appropriate at this stage to spend some time comparing the experience of the correspondence students with those of the independent learners. The chief feature of these experiences concerns the reactions to prescriptive correspondence materials, particularly the extent to which these permitted of individual and divergent interpretations. There are also a number of residual elements in the interviews which afford a basis of comparison between the activities of the correspondence students and the independent learners' efforts that have been discussed so far. Distinctive attitudes could, for example, be detected in the

correspondence students' comments when they were discussing their view of learning. An awareness of the benefits of correspondence study was also displayed and reactions to the planning of their learning by the correspondence institution were expressed. This chapter will explore these themes and it will examine the contrasting perceptions expressed by students towards the correspondence institution's direction of their activities. Such prescription was perceived as both stultifying and desirable, as penalising creative divergence and as offering a much needed framework for the understanding of a new field of knowledge.

Attitudes to Learning

Chapter (5) distinguished three general attitudes towards learning exhibited by the independent learners; the view of their field of interest as a limitless vista of knowledge affording the opportunity for continual exploration and discovery, the emphasis on the continuity of their learning, and the breadth of their interest. With regard to the first and last of these attitudes, a number of connections existed between the perceptions of the two groups of learners. One 'A' level student, in particular, provided a perfect summary of the view of learning as a process of continual discovery ...

" There's a definite feeling that the carpet spread before one is growing larger and larger and larger and there's more and more and more of it to cover ... it's exciting because no-one can ever hope to reach the edge of the carpet, no-one. So you're not alone in that. You try to reach your own point and some people will get much nearer the edge than I will." (33)

A more common reaction to the divergence of subject matter and breadth of interest found within their courses, however, was to emphasize the problems caused by too wide a concentration of attention. Conscious of the limitations on their time, the correspondence students found the breadth of subject matter to be confusing and to result in a superficial and unsatisfactory acquaintance with their subjects ...

" The criticism I would have of the O.U. is that they pack in too much - you know it's hard, hard work. And jumping from one complete subject to another, philosophy one week, literature the next, that I found very 'grasshoppery' and distracting. You just get really interested in a subject and then you've got to forget all about it until the exam ... the Second Level was the same format, great blocks of absolutely diverse material which, when you've got a few hours a day at the most, by the time you get back into the subject, you've finished with it ... they've tried to cram into the students far more than they'd need in an ordinary degree." (26)

" You haven't time to read anything which particularly catches your imagination. You think 'That's an interesting aspect of the question I'd like to read more about that', but you've got your reading list of recommended as well as compulsory reading and you just don't have time to do it. The Second Level course it's pretty wide ranging actually and again you have the same feeling that you're skating over subjects that you'd like to spend more time on." On the Foundation course there is so much material that there isn't time to breathe. It goes at a very quick rattling pace, jumping from topic to topic." (29)

" The problem I had was trying to see the material as a whole because we got this whole wad of stuff early in the course and then we looked at different things from different viewpoints throughout and it was only at the end of the course that I started to realise 'Ah yes, this fits in here', to see how each section is intermingled, that's when the difficulty comes through and it starts to complicate things. And when you're revising for the exams you make lists of quotes and researchers and you start to think, 'Now, was he a psychologist or what, what did he say? Is that an economic point of view?' "

(30)

Despite these difficulties, several students spoke of the 'joy' of learning and the 'enrichment' it gave and declared an (unquenched) thirst for knowledge. Correspondence study might create familial tension and anxiety with regard to tutor expectations (both themes to be explored later) but it also provided a liberating and enriching experience ...

" It's been such a joy to be doing the work and it's been such a surprise to me, a revelation to myself, how much I'd slipped into a rut. The last three years have made such a difference, it's been such a joy to be in a sort of intellectual atmosphere that even when I was doing probably terribly hopelessly and I was really lost and at sea, I still really didn't feel depressed ... the little bit of learning was such a joy." (27)

" Any kind of learning is an enrichment, there's nothing else to say for it, it's a definite feeling of enrichment." (33)

The way in which this innate interest and intrinsic pleasure in the subject matter could become overshadowed by institutional goals and pressures was well summarised by an Open University Arts student ...

" Having never gone to university, there were so many things that they were offering that I didn't know about ... I really wanted to increase my knowledge ... You start off by doing it because you really want to and then as soon as you start to get into something and you've got to do the work to get it finished, then the pressures come on and you think "Gosh, am I really enjoying this?" You can stop at any time and say to yourself 'Leave it', but you don't, you think 'I've got to get this done.'" (32)

The continuity of learning which emerged as such a major theme in the comments of the independent learners was echoed in the experiences of the correspondence students. Their continual study commitment had been expressed through taking correspondence courses, through class membership or through privately organised reading schemes, the particular form depending on circumstances existing at the time ...

" I've always taken some form of correspondence study for the past few years, purely for my own interest. So, when I got home from Canada I looked around for something to occupy my spare time and happened to see the Home Study leaflet in the library ... it's been a continual thing with me, I've always done some non-work study of some kind even if it was done in total isolation." (34)

" ... every year I'd done a course of some sort, every year there was something different ..." (26)

" I've always been interested in religion, I've read quite a bit about it ... I think that is one of the reasons why I took a degree, I've always wanted to write a book about the sort of things that are going round in my head ... I thought there's got to be a scientific way of approaching the investigation of the spirit and along with that I suppose the investigation of religion and morality, and that I suppose is what's given me the incentive and motivation all through my life." (27)

In fact the experiences of the last student quoted exhibit a striking parallel to those of the philosopher in the independent learners' sample. The philosopher was trying to trace some new connections between the various branches of human knowledge and regarded his work as of such importance as to merit publication - "I feel I've got something so important that it ought to be published so that other people can pick it up." (8) A similar intensity of commitment was evident on the part of the Open University student who linked his study of religion to the improvement of society ...

" I feel that if ever I was able to be in a position to make any contribution to society at all it would be through the study of religion. I personally believe that if there is one area where society, present society, is slipping up, it is in the fact that what's actually going to destroy man is his inability to adapt his attitudes to living peacefully together in society. I just have a feeling that on the evidence of past history - and I think that's what you've got to do, you've got to look at our past history - the answer will lie in studying religion. I've always read fairly widely about lots of religions and I think that it is this sense of religion that has been lost ... the thing that I'd like to study, that I'd really like to devote my time to, is the common features of the world's religions. I

believe that by studying that we might find some clues about what society needs, I think that's the area we've got to study." (27)

The Benefits of Correspondence Study

Just as the independent learners developed a range of learning skills during the pursuit of their interest, so the correspondence students professed to have acquired a number of skills as a result of their studies. Since, however, the demands of their courses had been clearly defined at the outset (an understanding of social forces, an ability to assess and criticise the structure of arguments, an appreciation of literary techniques) it was not surprising that they spoke of the development of learning skills in conventional academic terminology. Students referred to essay writing skills, the development of critical faculties and the cultivation of analytical abilities, thus displaying an awareness of their tutors' expectations with regard to student progress. This was in contrast to the independent learners who referred to their learning skills in much more subject-specific terms. They would talk of the need to watch other anglers carefully, the importance of being able to detect poorly budgerigars, or the ability to recognise a good 'buy' at an antiques auction.

Since the correspondence students' awareness of the need to develop learning skills had been affected by the correspondence institution's definition of the need, their responses were bound to be expressed in more conventional academic terms and therefore susceptible to simple classification. Thus, the learning skills mentioned most frequently as

having been acquired were the development of critical faculties (perhaps emphasised by academics as the most revered and desirable of all learning objectives), essay writing techniques and study organisation - all presumably stressed by course materials and course tutors as being essential to correspondence study success. With regard to the development of critical insight, however, it is mistaken to view this as something students saw only in a subject-specific context. Questions as to the 'how?' and 'why?' of things were not restricted to the analysis of correspondence materials but applied to media transmissions, general statistical assertions and architectural principles ...

" I think the Open University has taught me to be sceptical about things - arguments and statistics. An enquiring nature has developed and being critical of statistics and the media generally."
(30)

" Just watching programmes like 'Horizon' I can be much more critical. I'm sure I think differently ... I think I'm probably more critical than analytical - all the courses have been understanding things rather than regurgitating them and I think you've got to be critical to understand them." (31)

" You find you're becoming critical about everything. If I go to look at a building now, a building of architectural interest or even a picture, I look at it with a much more critical attitude and I'm automatically asking questions - Why is that odd bit stuck on the side there? Just what date could this building be?

Which I'm sure I wouldn't have done before, I would have just gone along and thought 'Well, this is nice' or 'I don't like this' but I wouldn't have been asking those questions." (35)

One subject recalled how this newly acquired critical outlook had affected his social relationships ...

" It's made me question things a lot more, it's made me far more sceptical ... It's so easy when you're talking to a group of people and they're saying 'Oh, this is wrong with this and that's wrong with that', and you're probably saying 'Yes, Yes'. I don't know whether it's maturity but you suddenly say 'Well, hang on a minute, where's your primary source?'. That's the great bane of my friends. You start to lose friends when you say 'Where did you get that information from?' and they say 'I read it in the 'Sun' ' ... people generalise - that's a generalisation in itself - the vast amount of people generalise when they're talking without really thinking. I think it's made me far more sceptical of that fact and not to come out with stupid statements, to be more careful. I find very often that if I go and look something up now - if people say something in conversation I'll actually go and find out about subjects to see if they're right about that." (32)

Thus, while it is tempting to regard the assertion of critical independence solely as an example of a self-fulfilling prophecy - students stressing the acquisition of critical insight because their tutors had told them such abilities would result from systematic study - the

foregoing interview extracts cast doubt on this interpretation. Students gave examples of the application of such insights in a wide range of contexts outside their study environment and began to adjust their perceptions of what had previously been 'taken for granted' - friendships, stereotypes and received opinions.

Planning Correspondence Study

Perhaps the greatest difference between independent learners and correspondence students is that the former are faced with the task of planning their intermediate learning goals and of specifying their final aims whereas the latter have these responsibilities assumed by the correspondence institution. Thus, comment about their own goal setting activities was largely absent from the correspondence students' interviews and little reference could be found to any terminal study aims. Only two students in the correspondence learners' sample spoke in this fashion; one, in a passage recalling the section on independent learners' writing goals, mentioned the book on comparative religion he hoped to write as a result of his studies. Another, an 'A' level home study student who subsequently gained a university place to read Sociology, spoke of the intellectual autonomy she was pursuing ...

" I think I've got a lot more to learn about learning yet, because I think learning is a skill ... learning how to put information into practise, how to develop the ideas of your own, how to use what you've learned to develop your own intellect. It's the ability to be original, to find a topic you want to research, to find your own way of researching it, perhaps a new way, try to

find out something which other people don't know ... I want to go out there myself and find out more. I'm very attracted to the idea of being able to make studies on my own account, there's so much more we want to know about everything." (33)

Such references to intermediate learning goals as did occur amongst the correspondence students tended to stress their warm acceptance of the goal-setting functions of the correspondence institution. Faced with a shortage of study time and recognising their own lack of self-discipline, the students regarded the definition of study goals (principally the completion of closely prescribed assignments) and the imposition of submission deadlines as a useful discipline and an important source of motivation ...

" If I didn't have to do it by a deadline I wouldn't do it, I work much better under pressure. When I know a thing has got to be done by a certain time I do it and something else besides; whereas when I've got all the time in the world I don't do anything." (26)

" In the short term, for someone like me, the setting of goals is useful. I'm the type who needs to have something to work towards, even if it's only to get a C.M.A. (computer marked assignment) in by a certain date. I always feel a sense of achievement if I manage to do it." (30)

" I think perhaps I'm a person who responds to having a big obstacle to climb, if it's easy I don't bother. If I've got to screw myself up to do it, well I'm jolly well going to do it despite everything ... I was very aware of having to push myself along and get what was necessary done while I really did feel like it.

That's probably a very good thing for me because I'm not sure I'd push myself very hard in the normal way." (35)

" Presumably, human nature being what it is, if the work load was less programmed and they said 'Try and read this and that' you wouldn't do it! Inevitably, I think any kind of correspondence course has to be fairly structured, I think you've got to accept that. Particularly in the Open University where in effect they're accepting people with no particular qualifications at all at Foundation level, it's got to have a fairly tight form. And I think it works, I think it succeeds actually." (29)

The physical and mental fatigue resulting from inadequate study time and the consequent depressions these occasioned are dealt with more fully in chapter (12)

Correspondence Study Materials

(1) Design

Testimony to the successful design of correspondence units can be seen in the remarkable similarity of perceptions exhibited on this topic. None of the ten students criticised the packaging and presentation of study material, and while three of these simply made no particular comment on this feature, the other seven spoke in terms of the 'superb' production and 'beautiful' clarity of their correspondence units ...

" The units really are superb, you can just sit down and read them for enjoyment ... they really are superb." (31)

" The units are so beautifully produced, when they come they inspire you. They look so nice and they're so nicely set out, they encourage you to look at them, they're so nice to handle and work from." (26)

" The units were so well designed and so beautifully laid out." (30)

" They've always been well presented and it usually comes on time." (28)

" We found the course material very good indeed ... I think the course material they send you is very good." (32)

" Thorough, very thorough ... it was all quite new to me and I appreciated the very thorough approach from the beginning." (35)

" The units were generally related to everyday life and to things I knew about. If they'd been 'airy-fairy' this would have been no good at all, but even when they were dealing with difficult topics I could still relate them to my own experience." (34)

Aside from the features of thoroughness and relevance mentioned in the last two comments above three students laid particular stress on another design feature, the sequencing of student progress. This sequencing and the element of self assessment built into the units were devices which met with warm approval ...

" It's marvellous really, I admire the way they set the questions because you really have got to understand each aspect of the thing before you can really write the assignment properly. That's really good, but it's tough - that's what it's there for I suppose." (32)

" Each section had its own questions that you'd do to make sure you really understood what you'd just read and the time that you should spend on each bit and when you should read things in the set books and for how long ... these were all in the units." (30)

" The units are so well planned, they lead you like a baby really." (28)

(2) Completeness

Once again, near unanimity was displayed in student comment on the completeness of correspondence materials. Although two students did mention perusal of non-prescribed texts, the impression given was that this was an indication of the students' strength of motivation rather than of their dissatisfaction with the material provided. In the first instance, alternatives to suggested reading were sought because of the inadequacy of library stocks ...

" I had further suggestions for reading and I looked around for myself because the suggested reading books were very often not available. So I looked for something else in the library." (33)

The second student, whose divergence from a total dependence on correspondence unit materials constituted a consistent feature of her

learning, did so in order to provide the stimulus of alternative interpretation. Reading critiques of set books in the English Literature syllabus was a substitute for discussion with fellow enthusiasts ...

" I read lots of criticisms. Instead of talking to people, I read a lot of written criticisms. I suppose that was a good substitute for talking to people. I needed the criticisms because I had no-one to discuss the books with. I don't think I would have had very good opinions and it certainly wouldn't have been as enjoyable if I hadn't read the criticisms." (35)

Both of the students discussed above did not perceive their correspondence units as inadequate; rather, their enthusiasm for their course was such that they were prompted to seek additions and alternatives to the prescribed materials. The other members in the correspondence students sample also judged their instructional materials to be sufficient for their purposes. One Open University graduate did find, however, that this very completeness was somewhat stultifying ...

" You can probably get it all from the set books and units, but I always find it so dreary rehashing it from the set books and units." (28)

As we shall see in the next section, any attempt this student made to include non-unit material in her work was penalised by the attainment of lower grades. For the eight students who found the material adequate for their purposes, such completeness was welcome in view of the lack of time for obtaining relevant material ...

" For me, I haven't had time to deviate from the prescribed reading. I've only done what has actually been essential, I haven't had any other time ... if you're writing the assignments then all you really need is the units. You must understand that and more or less regurgitate it." (26)

" With the textbooks provided and recommended, plus the assignment material, this has all been quite sufficient. Actually, the textbooks didn't really give me any more than I could get from the assignments ... anyway, there wasn't enough time to consult any other sources, other than the lesson units and the recommended textbooks." (34)

On the questions of the relevance, design and comprehensiveness of the correspondence material, then, no criticisms could be found amongst the comments of all ten sample members, admittedly, since seven of these ten had all successfully completed their Open University courses it might be argued that they were predisposed to give a favourable verdict on the materials responsible for that success. The 'O' and 'A' level students were interviewed after they had taken their exam but before their results had been published (all were successful) and they too were quite satisfied with the materials received. This remarkable unanimity of agreement on the excellence of teaching materials across such a wide subject area would be almost impossible to find amongst adult students in conventional degree courses or evening classes. It reflects credit on the course design teams and individual authors of such units and casts doubt on the often argued notion of correspondence education as inevitably a "'second best' alternative for those otherwise excluded from 'official' educational pathways" (Stein 1961; 98).

Prescription and Divergence

The design features of completeness and sequencing described in the preceding section do, of course, contain within them the possibility of stultification. McCallick has noted the danger that correspondence teaching "will tend to encourage overmuch the type of convergent and conventional thinking, the correct response to a carefully designed stimulus, which is rightly criticised in so much of our current schoolteaching" (McCallick 1965; 150) and the experienced student will fight against such strict regulation. A student new to a particular subject area, however, may well regard the careful sequencing of his progress and the comprehensiveness of his materials as invaluable aids to his learning rather than restrictions upon it, serving to reduce the time which would otherwise be lost in a series of false starts. Instead of attempting to master textbooks at an advanced and inappropriate level, he finds the central concepts of his subject explained and illustrated and the command of such concepts followed by an introduction to more complex ideas. Such a perception and appreciation of the mode of correspondence learning was exhibited by two subjects, one of whom welcomed the imposition of external controls on an otherwise directionless and haphazard study pattern ...

" I found that when reading unless directed in some direction I tend to read too much as a 'butterfly' reader. I've acquired vast quantities of books which I take out and flutter through, maybe read one or two of them in their entirety but ... I needed direction, I needed some sort of organisation behind it ... I relied very much on the rhythm of the assignments coming in and I relied on being provided with assignments which were

relevant to the syllabus. There was a chart of the work to be done, plans for the syllabus each term, so I had a pretty good idea of where I was." (33)

A further three students rejected entirely any suggestion of an over-prescriptive study pattern, arguing that their correspondence materials allowed, even encouraged, individual interpretation. One science graduate believed that in some courses divergence ensured higher grades ...

" I've only ever had one point where I did diverge. I had one question where I got some books from the library which went into the subject more deeply than I think the tutor understood and I didn't get too good a mark. That's the only experience like that. In fact with the Maths courses if you get a novel answer, the tutors are quite pleased ... The Technology course I did was called 'Systems Behaviour'. This was very wide and you were encouraged to diverge even more if you wanted to, so I didn't find it constricting. With the Open University it's not learning it off by heart, it's understanding it - if you do understand it then you'll get good marks even if you do diverge." (31)

The English 'A' level student also recalled how her study materials were sequenced to develop a critical attitude ...

" There was a very easy start. What I liked about that was that at the beginning when I was analysing a poem or even dealing with a novel, they asked you a whole lot of questions which enabled you to make your mind up. But over the period they stopped asking you questions and had you ask yourself questions, your questions. And one found one was doing this. I fell back very heavily on this method of work." (35)

In fact the most noticed characteristic of her correspondence units was the emphasis they placed on individual interpretation. This was seen as contrasting favourably with classroom teaching ...

" They usually give you their point of view and then suggest you read the criticisms and decide for yourself. But they certainly never suggested anything that would suggest your answer to the assignment, you really did have to think and work out your own interpretations ... That was the super thing about it, that one did have to make up one's mind about it yourself, tick it down on paper and send it off ... I think going to a class spoonfeeds you because you can just take what's given to you and the marvellous thing about this is that you just have to sit down and think and make up your own ideas." (35)

Finally, one of the Home Study Service students had found that new materials could often be understood only if they were related to her own experiences ...

" I always tried to give an individual slant to my essays especially if the subject didn't make much sense to me at first. The only way to get into it was to relate it to my own life and try and see if I could use examples from that. I did get the message though, that it was risky to try that with exams." (34)

Thus far, the prescriptive sequencing of student progress has been either welcomed or denied by the sample members. The remaining five students

(all of them engaged in Open University studies) offered a different version of their reactions to prescriptive direction with academic success being regarded as dependent on the straightforward reproduction of unit materials. Three of this five simply recorded the fact of prescription with no accompanying condemnation ...

" In the Foundation course I found that the assignments were very much a regurgitation of the units, that's what they wanted. They didn't want any original thought - not that you'd have any in a Foundation course - they want you to show that you've actually understood what you've written and what you've read. And the more you regurgitated the units, it seemed to me, the better, the higher, the grade!" (26)

" A lot of them give you quite specific guidance and tell you how an essay should be written ... This guy we've got now was quite specific actually and he wanted it done in a way which I hadn't particularly done before. He wanted, which I thought was unusual, some sort of conclusion drawn in your initial opening, really to give some sort of an indication which way you were going to lead the argument. I've always tended to more or less set out what I think I'm going to say and then say it and draw conclusions at the end but this guy suggested we start that way." (29)

" I remember that our first essay was around March and I wrote an essay which contained a lot of my own ideas on the subject, on migration, and of course I got a 'D' for it. The thing was, I'd thought about the way I wanted the world to be, I'd thought this through already in my own mind and I put this down and

didn't put down any references, any sources. So the next time I did one, I spread the books out in my lap and put things together from them mentioning all the people's names and I got a 'B'." (30)

For these students, learning to survey units and textbooks for relevant information and then integrating this into an assignment answer was equivalent to learning the 'rules' of the academic game. Their comments illustrate admirably the observations made by Bernard Harrison in his paper on Open University correspondence tuition in which he describes the dangers of encouraging a superficial acquaintance with course material ...

" The student may find that it pays him to develop perfunctorily 'relevant' answers to the questions asked of him, which are based wholly on the encapsulated knowledge of the course material; and the tutor is simply paid to check that the rules of the game are adequately followed." (Harrison 1974; 3)

Resentment at the restriction of individual creativity implied by this approach was encountered in the interviews with two students who between them had taken courses in Social Sciences, Arts and Science. The stories of their attempts to offer individual interpretations of unit materials displayed a remarkable similarity. The first ended with the student confronting the tutor about his grade and concluding that the logic of the Open University marking system precluded any attempt at divergence ...

" In my own personal experience, in A100, the work was very closely prescribed. You were given a set text and I found that when answering my assignments I had to stick pretty well to the texts ... I had a feeling that the tutorial instructions that were given to the marking tutors did not give them very much latitude. I found that the only way to appease my tutor was to keep very strictly to the texts that were given at the Foundation level ... The only essay where I put my own opinions in, and at the time I thought they were very good opinions, I thought I'd done remarkably well, it was the only time I got a low mark. When I talked to my tutor it was an unfortunate situation - it was the end of the lesson, I wasn't able to expect much time with him and he merely reiterated what he'd written in my texts on that particular assignment - and there wasn't any real communication ... That was the only time I went against (a) the prescribed reading and (b) the tutorials the tutor had given us. I think it wasn't only a matter of the tutor not communicating with me, I think it was the fact that the sort of answer I gave could not have been marked in the way of the instructions he was given to mark." (27)

The second student had fewer details of individual encounters to relate but confirmed the verdict of course work as 'regurgitation' ...

" I felt I wrote some brilliant essays using lots of texts from all over the place, but because I hadn't used unit material you couldn't get an 'A' more or less. I found it very difficult.

Thinking of one particular course, I sort of re-hashed the units and used very little other material at all - it was all History and Philosophy - and I got an 'A'. Then another essay which I used so many different sources from the library and really struggled with, I got a 'B'. Yet the amount of work and the scholarly material that had gone into that one was far greater than the rehashed unit thing. I think that 'B' essay was brilliant compared to the one that got the 'A' ... yet in the 'Urban Education' I got a distinction in the course, simply by regurgitating the units and getting a small amount of other material." (28)

A further interesting similarity of perception was provided by these students' comments on their second and third level studies. It seems that as the restrictions of Foundation course work are thrown off and materials are either more detailed, more complex or less prescriptive, so the stimulus and challenge of a more individual interpretation is offered ...

" I did find I think that there is a certain amount of more latitude, not a lot, a certain amount of latitude in the second level ... in the Sociological one, in certain areas I was allowed to bring a perspective that was entirely different to the teaching. For example, in my essay on Durkheim they criticised Durkheim on several counts which I didn't agree with and in my essay I did state that. And I think that because I put up a fairly decent argument I got a good mark. So therefore I think providing you are sound in your arguments against, even against the sort of set texts, they'll take that into consideration." (27)

" It's the first time I've done third level Science and it really is difficult. We read research papers and it is difficult, it's far more challenging on a third level." (28)

Conclusions

In contrast to independent learning, the field of correspondence study has received extensive documentation even if much of this has been concerned to record practice as much as to clarify the nature of correspondence instruction itself*. However, such descriptive accounts as have been written have noted the possible limitations of correspondence study and a substantial literature exists which seeks to explore these limitations. Perhaps the most impressive survey of recent times is that undertaken in America by the Correspondence Education Research Project (CERP) which was concerned to catalogue the problems associated with correspondence learning as well as to describe its various manifestations. The authors of this study drew particular attention to the inhibition of creativity and originality which often arose from the prescriptive sequencing of learning ...

" The written syllabus organised into sequential steps does not leave much room for imaginative exploration. The student must follow along the pattern indicated by the text ... rather than to explore the characteristics of various materials or situations." (Mackenzie et al. 1968; 169)

* For an indication of the variety of writing in this field see MacKenzie & Christensen (1971)

A similar warning concerning the dangers of rigid sequencing has been issued by Childs in her paper on the problems of teaching through correspondence ...

" The correspondence learner may be handicapped in learning intuitive thinking. If the study guide is rigid, if he receives one lesson at a time as separate building blocks - he may never see the whole until it is too late." (Childs 1968; 115)

This observation finds an exact illustration in the comments (already quoted in this chapter) of the Open University student who complained about the difficulty of grasping the overall structure of her course ...

" The problem I had was trying to see the material as a whole because we got this whole wad of stuff early on in the course and then we looked at different things from different viewpoints throughout; it was only at the end of the course that I started to realise 'Ah yes, that fits in here', to see how things were related to each other." (30)

Several writers on correspondence education have also pointed out the way in which correspondence materials and syllabuses can become inflexible monoliths, expensive to produce and therefore rarely revised. As the CERP noted, this inflexibility has considerable implications for student learning ...

" A teacher can always readjust at the last minute if he sees that his students do not understand, but a printed text cannot respond to student difficulties ... it is inflexible in adjusting to differences in ability. Once a course has been

printed it is difficult for the supplier to adjust the content to suit the individual capabilities of students. This inflexibility of approach decreases the instructional merit of the method." (Mackenzie et al. 1968; 165)

It is no surprise, then, to find the criticisms of writers on correspondence education regarding the prescriptive nature of this mode of learning echoed in the interviews. Indeed, the surprise is, perhaps, that the overall correspondence study experience was perceived so favourably. As we have seen, all ten members of the correspondence students' sample felt that their materials were quite adequate for their purposes and seven drew attention to impressive design features therein (units being regarded as well sequenced, relevant to everyday concerns, thorough, containing useful self-assessment exercises, attractive, and stimulating). Any use of material other than that contained within the lesson unit was apparently occasioned by a particularly strong interest in the topic studied rather than by a perceived inadequacy in the materials provided. Finally, half of the group either welcomed the imposition of institutional direction or else denied that there was any restriction placed on the individual interpretation of units or on the possibility of divergence.

It is, however, the comments of those students who did challenge what they saw as the unreasonable prescriptive nature of their courses, especially Foundation courses, that have received extended elaboration. As with the numerically small (but deeply felt) criticisms of competitions chronicled in chapter (10), the attempts to engage in

something other than a strict reproduction of unit materials (and the penalties these incurred) constituted an important feature in the interviews. As such, it was felt that they were deserving of separate treatment.

Correspondence study is by nature dependent on the centralised production of standardised materials and the physical separation of teacher and student. The costs involved and the investment of time and energy required for the revision of texts mean that students and course tutors (who are often distinct from course writers) will be working within a well defined framework. The development of flexibility within that framework depends, to a considerable extent, on the attitude of course tutors. The line between helpful guidance and prescriptive direction is notoriously thin and, as we have seen, was undoubtedly crossed by the tutors of two students in the sample.

At present the markers of Open University and correspondence college assignments are likely to be class teachers or lecturers who have possibly never engaged in correspondence study themselves. They will be tempted to transfer the standards, assumptions and requirements of classroom teaching to their correspondence work, ignoring the particular features of correspondence learning. There may be a case for this transfer where correspondence study is treated merely as an alternative route to attaining public qualifications; but there is an equally strong case for regarding the peculiar conditions of correspondence learning as providing an opportunity for the development of critical and creative modes of thought. In the present study, for example, chapter (4) has emphasised the relative insignificance of vocational motivations amongst the correspondence students surveyed and has demonstrated the primacy of the desire for intellectual stimulus and affirmation of self-esteem.

The fact of isolation, of student separation from direct teacher influence and from fellow students, can, therefore, be viewed as a positive virtue in the nurturing of critical originality. Bishop's description of the American secondary school where "The teacher may be the only real learner ... because he is often the only real active participant" (Bishop 1971; 177) is just as applicable to British adult education and finds expression in an example quoted by Rogers ...

" One lecturer used to glow with excitement as he spoke. His enthusiasm was terrific and he was a most articulate speaker ... usually we were lost after the first five minutes though everyone used to enjoy his performance." (Rogers 1971; 158)

It would be wrong to argue for the furtherance of correspondence instruction simply because examples of bad classroom teaching can be found. It is equally mistaken, however, to assume that the feature of student isolation is a wholly negative one and that students enrol on correspondence courses only when classroom alternatives are open to them. The falsity of the latter argument is well demonstrated by Glatter and Weddell's finding that ...

" The most generally accepted reasons for enrolment derive from students' positive expectations about features of correspondence study method, rather than from extraneous circumstances dictating their choice." (Glatter & Weddell 1971; 82)

This observation is supported by Hartsell's examination of correspondence drop-outs at the University of Tennessee where only one student out of 96 surveyed said he had originally enrolled because he

was "unable to schedule the course any other way" (Hartsell 1964; 156). Finally, as this chapter has already noted, the degree of agreement as to the excellence of teaching materials which existed amongst the ten correspondence learners would be hard to find amongst ten individuals drawn from adult education classes covering a similar subject range. Correspondence education was therefore regarded as a valuable medium of instruction in its own right, characterised by well-produced materials and effective (if occasionally over prescriptive) teacher guidance.

CHAPTER TWELVE

PROBLEMS OF INDEPENDENT LEARNERS AND CORRESPONDENCE STUDENTS

The concern of this chapter is the sample members' perceptions of the problems encountered during the execution of their projects. The discussion in chapter (6) on the search for knowledge has already considered the role of problem-solving in focussing the attentions and activities of independent learners and that same chapter documented the pleasures experienced by learners during their search for appropriate answers. The successful resolution of difficulties common to a group of enthusiasts was held to be the key to success by the angler, bridge and chess players, and the rabbit breeder. Grappling with problems intrinsic to his enthusiasm brought an intellectual joy to the aquarist, whilst the model aero enthusiast and philosopher both advanced their knowledge through the resolution of progressively complex difficulties.

When this research project was first conceived, it was anticipated that the learners' attempts to deal with the problems that inevitably would beset them would emerge as a major theme in the interviews. Thus, if a respondent had not volunteered a contribution on the types of problem encountered and the patterns of resolution employed, he or she was asked directly to comment on these themes. One of the most surprising aspects of the study was the apparent absence, or, at the very least, the relatively insignificant nature of, problems faced by the independent learners. On reflection, however, there are several reasons why this absence is, perhaps, not as surprising as first seems the case. Firstly, subjects who felt that a major part of their efforts was devoted to dealing with irritating difficulties rather than experiencing the pleasures of learning would be unlikely to continue with their projects. In addition, it may be that the term 'problem' with its

connotations of blockage and obstruction was inappropriate in the present discussion. As chapter (6) has already suggested, there was evidence to show that the kinds of difficulties a researcher might label as 'problems' were regarded as enjoyable challenges, or interesting diversions, by the learners themselves. The problem of finding a more effective way of managing bees in the swarming season was, for example, the central concern of the apiarist. It was not, however, regarded as a difficulty blocking the progress of his learning, but rather as the absorbing focus of his efforts, a source of continuing interest and enjoyment. The discovery of better swarm-management techniques had become his final learning goal and did not, therefore, constitute a problem in the sense of an annoyance or blockage to an otherwise smooth progress.

Bearing these considerations in mind, the apparent absence of problems becomes more understandable. A total of nine subjects did assert, in fact, that dealing with problems encountered during their learning projects had been outside of their experience. The whole concept of 'problem' seemed to be alien to them and at times these subjects became almost apologetic in their inability to recall any difficulties they had experienced ...

" We really haven't had any. I think that's because we deliberately ducked out of them, we've set the business up for peace of mind rather than making a vast profit." (14)

" I suppose I must have felt a bit frustrated at times in not having anyone to ask about, well anyone else to talk to really about my interests ... But I can't really remember feeling like that, though I suppose it's probable that I did." (15)

" I've never had any problem." (16)

" Basically I've not had a great deal of trouble." (10)

" I can't say there's ever been any real problems, no." (20)

" There's been no real difficulties." (22)

" A lot of beekeepers do give up after two or three years because of swarming or because they've not got the honey they want, but I've not had those kind of problems." (21)

" I've never really had any problems and I've never felt frustrated or fed up with how things are going. Some other breeders find it difficult to get proper premises which are large enough for breeding but far away from neighbours to avoid noise problems, but that's not bothered me." (25)

In those cases where learners did recall difficulties they had faced, analysis of these is complicated by their project-specific nature. However, aside from the group of miscellaneous problems intrinsic to particular projects four broad categories of problem did emerge; those concerned with poor working conditions, with financial constraints, with perceived intellectual inadequacies and with emotional difficulties.

Types of problem

(1) Project-Specific Difficulties

This category refers to those miscellaneous difficulties which were mentioned as being intrinsic to the execution of the project itself.

Some of these, such as the difficulty of diagnosing budgerigar disease due to the problem of interpreting a narrow range of symptoms, of ensuring the continued health of rabbits, or of avoiding injuries during progressively harder physical fitness programmes, have already been recorded. Other project specific difficulties which subjects regarded as being particularly persistent were the arrangement of stage lighting (3) the care of tropical fish plants (9), and the correct procedure for laying railway track (23). This broad category includes such a wide variety of difficulties that generalisation about their nature becomes impossible. As we shall see later in the chapter, however, the sequence of steps followed by independent learners in their attempts to deal with such problems does seem to suggest a general pattern of resolution.

(2) Environment and Resources

Persistent problems concerning their working environment or the inadequate resources to which they had access were mentioned by four students. The lack of a quiet study area was bemoaned by the philosopher in the sample ...

" I can't do it, I can't work in the present physical environment. That's the one thing I liked about Manchester in the old days, the libraries were open till 8.00 p.m. and the Central Library till 9.00 p.m. And they had proper reading rooms which we haven't got here anymore." (8)

In a complaint which found frequent expression amongst the correspondence students' sample, the record collector admitted that the range of his interests and duties did mean that none could be awarded the time they really deserved ...

" The biggest thing I suppose is lack of time because I've got so many other things I want to do." (12)

The steam engine enthusiast was faced with an insurmountable problem concerning resources in that many of the old factory records on which his research was based had been destroyed ...

" I spent twelve years trying to track down whatever information I could on the Sentinel and it took me so long because most records were destroyed, this was my big problem." (19)

Finally, as we have already seen, the fitness enthusiast suffered from a lack of available teachers at a crucial stage in the development of his expertise ...

" You can only go so far with books and then you need, not a guru but a master of some kind. You can only go so far on your own and up until now that's what I've done, I've done it all on my own. I'd be interested in talking to one person about it and seeing where it went from there and seeing what it could do for me ... I'd have loved to have had someone to go to who would have said 'You can't do this with this particular weight at the moment' ... I would have preferred it if I had been able to go to someone and say, 'Where should I start? What should I do?' That's one of the great disadvantages of studying on your own." (5)

(3) Financial Constraints

Although the necessity for thrift in the pursuit of their interest was a frequently mentioned theme, only five subjects regarded such self-

imposed constraint as a problem of any consequence. It was not the ability to exercise such constraint which proved difficult but the restrictions such constraint placed upon the exploration of new areas of interest ...

" It can cost you a fortune in plants. I'm a civil servant and I haven't got the money to keep on replacing either plant or fish stock so I've got to use my head to save myself money. It's a case of learning all the time to try and save myself money." (9)

" Your pocket rules it of course. I've got £2 or £3 this month and when the book comes round, O.K. I'll spend that much on maybe one or two stamps ... Some of the older stamps now are just beyond the pocket." (10)

" I often feel that I can't do all I really want to, I'm not able to because I just haven't got the money. The catalogues and research material take up so much and then the engines of course are really expensive." (19)

" It really is a very expensive hobby and I really had to choose between smoking and rabbit breeding, one had to go because I couldn't afford both. In the end I chose rabbits because I could live without cigarettes but I couldn't live without my rabbits." (24)

" You are limited by money with record collecting, incredibly - and more and more so. It means you have to be more choosy." (12)

(4) Intellectual Inadequacies

The three sample members whose projects involved the greatest degree of abstract reasoning were, not surprisingly, the three who drew attention to the intellectual shortcomings under which they felt they laboured. Because of the perceived inadequacies of a lack of analytical training, slowness of thought and lack of concentration, their ability fully to execute their projects was held to be restricted ...

" I wouldn't be able to analyse the arguments. I can see that something's wrong and I can see what is the right argument. This is a problem with me, I sometimes have difficulties showing exactly why the other argument isn't valid, largely because I've never had time to practice stating things logically and then pulling them to pieces. I've read books on it but you can only do things like this when you've time to practice it. It's like becoming skillful on the piano; you can know how to read music and you can plonk it out but you can't actually develop the skills to do it properly unless you sit and practice and practice and practice. And that's just what I've lacked." (8)

" That sort of lack of concentration is one of my worst points. My worst thing has perhaps been a lack of concentration." (6)

" I can't think as fast as some people and therefore I can't cover as many variations as some people." (2)

(5) Emotional Strains

Chapter (5) has already demonstrated the chess player's dangerously obsessive involvement with his sport and three other subjects mentioned

emotional strains which their learning activities had produced. The most dramatic examples of these strains were given by the drama producer for whom the tensions of production became so critical that her family began to suffer ...

" Toward the end I got very uptight about the whole thing, very worried and almost neurotic about it. Towards the end I got terribly wound up and I made myself ill worrying about it and my family did suffer. I was short-tempered with the children, where normally I'm not. I was irritable toward the end, in fact I didn't know how much I was wound up until after the performance. I came back on the Monday night and went around the house bashing and knocking things around to get it out of my system. I didn't realise how wound up I was until I started to unwind. I was wound right up tight. If you stretch a string as far as it will I was as far as that. I was having sleepless nights, night after night after night worrying about it unnecessarily." (3)

Whilst this subject's role as producer encouraged the full play of her organisational and managerial capabilities, it also trapped her in a particular relationship to the other members of the cast ...

" I wanted to get through to them as a friend rather than just as someone producing a play. I wanted to take this producer's hat off so that they would realise I was deeply interested in them, not just as a producer putting on a play. I didn't want to have this teacher hat because I think that's an immediate barrier between myself and that person." (3)

A similar sense of isolation was experienced by the philosopher, though this was caused by his advanced level of discourse rather than his role as 'philosopher' ...

" One of the difficulties of explaining it to somebody is you can't really explain things until you've got them familiar with some of the background. I feel deeply that the number of people that have got anything more than a superficial amount of background is very limited. The number who have read even reasonably broadly outside their own field of employment almost, is a fraction again. So you've got to have a couple of hundred acquaintances before you're liable to find one that understands."
(8)

Finally, the jazz enthusiast recalled the problem he faced in combatting his internal, self-imposed definitions of good and bad 'taste' ...

" I actually had to fight a battle with myself to let myself listen to jazz because at that time it was definitely not the music to like. I had to fight the snobbery that I'd got about the kind of music that you should listen to and you should like. I went through very much the same thing with my attitudes to pop music." (15)

Patterns of Resolution

As the foregoing paragraphs have demonstrated, independent learners mentioned a wide variety of problems with which they had to deal. Many of these problems were, in fact, incapable of solution and had to be

accepted as an accompanying condition of the project's execution. The philosopher could not hope to create a noise-free study area within his house, not the steam enthusiast to create long destroyed records. Where financial constraints existed these were unlikely to ease and the circumstances combining to produce emotional strain would be liable to only gradual alteration. Finally, various inadequacies were perceived as part of the subject's intellectual armoury and to be accepted as a fact of life. However, in subjects' comments concerning their project-specific difficulties, similarities began to emerge as to the appropriate patterns of resolution.

The following six extracts illustrate the similarity of perception exhibited on this matter. The pattern of resolution is based on the consultation of an increasingly broader field of reference beginning with a subject's personal library and ending with the relevant Royal Society. The intermediate stages consist of the consultation of fellow enthusiasts, of regional experts and magazine specialists. Thus, the typical pattern of resolution which is employed when a project-specific difficulty is encountered begins with a search through personal reference library stock, progresses via the consultation of fellow society members or local experts, continues with the contacting of regional specialists or magazine writers and ends with an application to the Royal Society or National Museum ...

" If I hit a problem? Well, the first thing is, I'd look it up in one of my books. If it's not in the book then I'd ask, if I can't find it from a book then I suppose I ask anyone and then if I don't know then I arbitrarily pick strangers to write to. If I got stuck then I'll write to manufacturers or I'll go into a builder's yard and ask someone. There's someone in the fruit field that I would seek out if I got too stuck, someone living locally who knows a lot about fruit." (1)

" I've got a good reference library of my own and I'd look to that first of all and if that didn't help I'd write to the Royal Horticultural Society. I don't like to write to the R.H.S. though because in my opinion they serve you too well, so I would write to a firm if something was suffering from a disease." (7)

" If it's just a general tropical question like an unidentified fish or problems with a plant then I'd ring up the magazine and have a chat with a couple of the experts there. If I couldn't find it in a book then I'd ring 'Aquarist & Pondkeeper'. If it was a disease I'd ring up Mr. C. at Birmingham University. If the magazine couldn't help me or even Mr. C. with the disease, then it was a case of a letter to the Natural History Museum. Not many people know that the Natural History Museum or the Zoological Society of London can give you all the information you need regarding fish. If I go to a place that keeps tropical fish like London Zoo then I know they've got to have the brains to maintain the aquarium - and who better to approach than the people in the public sector?" (9)

" You sometimes have a subject you'd like to follow through and you might have difficulty finding a stamp to say what you're trying to say and that means working through a Stanley Gibbons catalogue until your eyes drop out. That'll maybe tell you what stamp has been issued to commemorate a death or an achievement. Then for the knowledge you've got to go to the library and find a book on it. If it's not in the library and I don't know where to get hold of it then I write to some of the specialists in this field and get their details from the stamp collecting magazines who have the people who specialise in this kind of work. Anything you want

to get hold of on airmails you contact F. in Sutton Coldfield who's recognised as the man on air mail stamps. Or A. in Cheltenham to do with the early classics, the Victorian era and anything in that field. You get to know through the clubs the people who specialise in which field and anyone with specialised knowledge, they're always glad to impart their knowledge to you." (10)

" If I've got a certain line of enquiry then I'll make for the books first of all and use them as a basis of enquiry so at least I know what I'm talking about when I start asking questions. In my case it's usually a practical problem and I ask around my friends to see if they've got any ideas on it. Where it's an existing railway, I get on to the people at the railway itself." (11)

" If I came across something that's hard to identify then I'd go to my own bookshelf and see if it's in there. If there's nothing there then there'll be someone I know locally that I can ask about it. If they're no help I'd send the specimen to the Royal Botanical Society." (17)

Correspondence Students' Problems

By way of contrast to the independent learners' perceptions of the relatively insignificant nature of the problems they faced, the correspondence students showed a much greater awareness of labouring under particular constraints and limitations. A total of twenty-three separate difficulties was mentioned by members of the correspondence students' sample with some of these complaints voiced in three or four different interviews. The greatest number of perceived difficulties concerned the adjustment to the intellectual and temporal demands of study by correspondence. This does not include the problem of dealing with overly

prescriptive material (discussed in the last chapter) but, rather, the pressures of meeting assignment completion deadlines, of combatting tiredness, of dealing with an intimidating workload, and of developing the required presentational skills. Other categories of student problems include the difficulty of working in isolation, how to arrest declining motivation and the settling of anxieties and uncertainties.

(1) Study Problems

This category comprises three separate elements; the physical problem of finding a suitable working environment the temporal problem of completing an amount of prescribed work in a limited period and the intellectual problem of developing presentational skills appropriate to undergraduate study. With regard to working conditions, the summer school experience of two A100 students had prompted them to draw comparisons between their own working conditions and those of residential, full time students ...

" There is, to my mind, no doubt that you can't replace being and living in an atmosphere of intellectual, high intellectual ... like at university." (27)

" You do miss the atmosphere of a university this way, the comradeship and the group feeling of really belonging that you get in a university. I feally felt that when I went to Summer School." (30)

One student who decided to use the Open University study centre at a local college for private study found difficulty in adjusting to this new setting ...

" I do go to the college library at the study centre but you can't take books out which I think is very unsatisfactory. For coming out a better Biologist you'd be far better off at a residential university because you'd have access to the apparatus every day in the lab. In science you do miss out on handling the laboratory materials and in the techniques; even now when we go into the laboratory we're not very familiar with the apparatus ... After you've got to the study centre you're usually tired and you can only spend one or two hours making notes when it's lunch. So it isn't very conducive to work really. You're tired when you get there because you've driven and not everyone can work easily in a strange place anyway, it takes time to adapt." (28)

Chapter (11) has already discussed the problems associated with too wide a concentration of Open University students' attention; students were unable to discern any sense of continuity or progression in their assignments and broadcasts, they felt frustrated at being unable to pursue particular lines of enquiry and there was no appreciation of a developing overview perspective on their field of study. The difficulty of assimilating a large body of materials was exacerbated by the lack of time allowed for such assimilation ...

" I sometimes felt as if I was drowning in a mass of absolutely unachievable information. There seemed to be too much that I had to know in too short a time." (33)

" There was just no time. Ideally I would have liked to have taken books out of the library on the things we were studying. Each section would finish with a long list of suggestions for further reading and I would have loved to have gone and followed some of them up. But there was no time." (30)

" The worst thing is if you ever get behind. If you're doing twenty hours a week and you miss a week for some reason you've got to do forty hours the next week. That's the worst feeling of the lot ... if I knew I suddenly had to do twenty it used to scare me stiff. I'm sure that's the worst of it. I did tend to feel restricted if I had to go somewhere where I didn't really want to and I'd be thinking of the time I was missing. It's the dread of things getting behind and building up again." (31)

One student was aware of the way in which the need to meet assignment completion dates and to keep up with broadcasts had changed his attitude towards study. From an initial delight in learning for its own sake he had come to develop a more instrumental orientation to work. The fact of completion became the dominant feature of his learning ...

" Let's face it, in a T.M.A. (Tutorial-Marked Assignment) you're just trying to get through it which is probably a bad thing, but you're always up against the time factor. That's probably not a good thing because you embark on your studies to gain knowledge and you suddenly realise you're up against time all the way through." (32)

Pressures of inadequate study time were also held to lead to physical and mental fatigue and consequent depression ...

" You think 'Well, if I start at 7.00 I can work till 10.00 or 11.00 p.m. and in fact you start nodding off. This is one of the problems I face, I'm fresher in the day than in the night. That's the big drawback with the thing actually, working at night when you're tired." (29)

" I think one gets very, very tired and you get more tired as each year goes on, in fact really at the end of last year I was absolutely exhausted by the whole thing and didn't want to go on at all." (28)

" I get worried sometimes when it doesn't seem to be coming out. I must say when I'm struggling, and I do struggle with assignments, when I've spent two or three hours and I'm no further forward with writing the assignment than when I started, I find that a bit depressing. Not depressing but worried, you get worried about that." (26)

That pressure of time could serve as an aid as well as a block to full understanding has already been illustrated by the comments of correspondence students quoted in chapter (11). Further support for this view was provided by the remarks of two Open University students who had experienced a relaxation in study pressures by taking only a half credit course instead of their usual full credit commitment. Both recalled a subsequent decline in motivation ...

" I'm doing half a credit for honours this year which is fatal because just doing half a credit I think 'Well I haven't got much to do I'll push it into the background' and I've got way behind I've slipped this year because the pressure's off." (31)

" I'm only doing half credit this year. The impetus goes completely. I start thinking 'I don't have to send the essay in I can just do the other which isn't really the way to go about it.'" (28)

Finally, occasional difficulties were encountered over students' unfamiliarity with academic conventions and their lack of appropriate study skills ...

" The first year was difficult because I didn't know how to write essays, how much to put in, whether to write every page number."
(31)

" One thing I didn't do was to take notes as I was writing the T.M.A.'s although the tutor had told us to. I think that was because it wasn't oral. Because it was out in front of me on the page, I didn't bother. Then, when the exam came round I hadn't got any notes because all my time had been spent just on writing the T.M.A.'s and the C.M.A.'s. I couldn't get the hang either of the way double negatives were used in the units and I'd have to keep reading those bits over and over again before I could make any sense of them. They really confused me." (30)

(2) Anxieties and Uncertainties

The most commonly expressed anxieties concerned the perceived shortfall between student abilities and those required by degree or G.C.E. level study. In a separate survey of adult study problems the writer has observed how "adults are liable to a particularly low self-evaluation when they compare their own abilities to those of adolescents" and how "fearing that their powers of recall have deteriorated beyond rescue", such students "have the development of these very abilities blocked by their anxieties" (Brookfield 1979; 91). Such anxieties were expressed by several members of the present sample in particular with regard to examinations ...

" Because of my age my memory is poor and that's what I find difficult in the exam. I can't remember things that really I know and afterwards I can remember them but on the spur of the moment I don't ... I find I'm slow, I can't just read an assignment through and say 'Well, yes I know that' and sit down and write the assignment. I've really got to struggle to study it hard and work hard at it before I can do it." (26)

" I'm always worried to death by exams. I go in worried about the knowledge that I've got in my head and I'm thinking 'Well, I didn't do that I left that out'. I go in feeling that I'm not sufficiently equipped to tackle the paper." (29)

" The day before the exam I literally couldn't remember a thing. I suppose it was a form of stage fright really, though I've never been on the stage. At the thought of the exam everything just seemed to drain away from my mind. The questions were often on things which we hadn't really done and I felt very frustrated at having all this knowledge inside me which I couldn't use." (30)

A rather different kind of strain was experienced by one student whose occupational horizons had been widened by his experience of higher education ...

" It's widened my horizons, it really has filled me with the thought that I would like to be doing something more active and more in keeping with this approach. And sometimes I do get a bit depressed when I wonder whether I've left it too late, whether in fact an Open University degree will be accepted if I get it - those are the only doubts when I feel a bit depressed. I'm

thinking that I'd hate to get to the end, get a degree and be all fired up - because let's face it I've got about thirty years of sort of repressed drive in me and suddenly it's been woken up - and then to find that at the end of six years maybe the doors are still closed to me. Sometimes I do get a bit depressed about that." (27)

This case illustrates the "inconsistency between encouragement to achieve and the realities of limited opportunity" believed by Clark to be endemic to democratic society in which "situations of opportunity are also situations of denial and failure" (Clark 1961; 513). Clark's analysis is concerned with the American higher education system and the way it 'cools out' students of little academic ability who "gain admission into colleges only to encounter standards of performance they cannot meet" (Clark 1961; 515). It does, however, strike an interesting parallel with the previously quoted remarks of the student whose expectations had been 'warmed up' by his gaining entry to the Open University. This student showed that he was aware of the possibility that his experience might ultimately effect little real change in his occupational circumstances and this realisation had prompted him to try and 'cool' himself out ...

" I've got to think in terms that although it would be very nice to be able to use my degree for getting another job and out of the factory influence doing some sort of - what's the word? - actualising I think it is, job, with a lot of job satisfaction; I've got to face facts that I'll be nearly 50 by the time I get my degree and it might be difficult to do that. I was not going to base any hopes on it ever getting me anywhere or ever really being able to achieve the sort of things I was aiming for. By doing that I hope to avoid disappointment if I don't make the grade." (27)

(3) Student Isolation

Correspondence study is judged by its critics to be "a lonely and difficult process in which the student is easily discouraged" (Perraton 1973; 20). Correspondence students are held to miss the benefits of "learning together by interchange, co-operation and competition ... the exchange and widening of individual experience" (Cros 1968; 25) and they cannot experience "The desire to excel in the presence of their peers (which) stimulates many students to greater achievement" (CERP; 164). The interviews with the ten correspondence students did reveal a sense of occasional isolation but in no case did such isolation become so acute as to cause a discontinuance of study. It was perceived more as an inevitable annoyance to be tolerated than as a critical defect in the chosen medium of study ...

" I don't think anybody ... as far as I know there's nobody else in the factory, certainly nobody on the factory shop floor, there's no-one I know who's doing Open University work. One of the biggest dangers is that very often you're not aware of your problems. If the tutor hadn't occasionally been there I wouldn't have been aware of how much I was missing." (27)

" This is a difficulty. I'm writing an essay now and I don't mind working hard but when I can't see any way through it, it's very frustrating. I just want a few hints as to where to go. You can ring up friends though there's a limit as to how often you can do that." (28)

" I'm too much aware of the fact that when I'm reading on my own, I'm making my own interpretation and there are very possibly other interpretations which I'm missing ... I also needed to know very

much how I was doing. Because I had no-one with whom to match my progress I felt at a disadvantage." (33)

Four students did complain about the lack of tutor guidance which served to heighten their existing sense of isolation. This was particularly the case with post-Foundation course Open University students ...

" There's nobody at college who can really advise you after the Foundation course which is a great pity because the important decisions are the ones you make after your Foundation year as that really is the least difficult choice they make but after that it becomes very difficult. You begin to feel that once you're in the system the Open University tends to regard you a little bit less as it were." (29)

" When you have a foundation course tutorial every week you start getting into a discussion that you can carry on with next week. When you have a three week gap on a second level course, people have forgotten what you talked about three weeks ago. It's the tutoring that fades as you go on because you only meet occasionally. This course has been going three or four months and we've only met three times. It doesn't gell otherwise when you read something." (32)

Conclusion

The sample members' perceptions of their study problems offer a most striking contrast between the independent learners and correspondence students. To nine of the independent learners notions of 'problems' or 'difficulties' were apparently alien. Their learning experience had been so enjoyable and satisfying that any difficulties that were encountered

were viewed as creative challenges rather than inconvenient constraints. The correspondence students, however, were well aware of the problems they faced and were ready to offer a catalogue of common difficulties on request. Only one correspondence learner declared a total absence of study difficulties; the other nine members of the sample offered a total of twenty-three separate problems between them. These difficulties were perceived as blockages to learning rather than creative challenges, as imposing constraining limitations rather than offering fruitful avenues of enquiry.

With regard to the solution of perceived problems a clear difference also emerged between the two groups of learners. As we have seen, the independent learners had devised tried and trusted patterns of resolution based on the consultation of increasingly accomplished and specialised levels of expertise. To the correspondence learners, however, study difficulties were accepted as a fact of their academic activity permitting of no clear resolution. Their working environment could not be changed nor their study time increased. The amount of work to be completed and the rate of completion were imposed by the correspondence institution whilst the isolation of correspondence study was regarded as an inherent feature of that instructional medium.

It is not surprising, then, that the external imposition of evaluative procedures, intermediate and terminal learning goals, and rate of student progress, should have resulted in a greater awareness of problems on the part of the correspondence learners. Independent learners, on the other hand, assumed the responsibility for devising their own scheme of investigation, for setting their intermediate learning goals, and for erecting their own evaluative criteria. Their pattern of learning was determined by their personal desires, their occupational circumstances, and the resources they felt to be at their disposal. When a difficulty was encountered it was likely to be regarded as an enjoyable challenge

or a focus for future learning. If a problem proved to be insurmountable then attention could be shifted to a more profitable area of inquiry. The correspondence students were denied this option and came to see the correspondence institution as generating constraints and limitations as well as providing external validation of their efforts.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

FAMILIAL SUPPORT

In the discussion of residential education in the following chapter, attention is drawn to the beneficial effects deemed to result from a period away from domestic and occupational concerns. For the thirty-five individuals whose experiences comprise the present study such temporary absences were largely unknown. Correspondence students were able to enjoy the occasional residential summer school when academic concerns would engage their full attention but these constituted isolated interludes in the general pattern of home based study. As a rule, then, learning projects were pursued by both groups of learners against a background of familial concerns and commitments.

Houle's 1963 study of twenty-two lifelong learners recognised the crucial role of marital partners in supporting study activities and led him to venture the generalisation that ...

" no matter how intensely an individual may want to learn, he or she usually does not do so very actively if the marriage partner objects. The cost of participation on such terms is too great a price to pay." (Houle 1963; 43)

This assertion is supported by a recent study of the first year's intake of Open University students where the author concludes ...

" there can be very few students who are able to study in the face of antagonism from their spouse or family. Ineed, one could go further and postulate that active support is necessary for survival since the demands made on the family are great." (McKintosh 1976; 244)

Again, Pauline Kirk's research into women Open University students has illustrated the prejudice and selfishness from within their families with which they have to deal ...

" Such selfishness may become overt obstruction and I have received some very bitter letters describing the domestic conflict which has resulted (if only in part) from Open University Study and in my experience this may lead to withdrawal." (Kirk 1978; 11)

Mindful of all these assertions, the subjects' perceptions of spouse attitudes towards the learning activity became a major theme for investigation. This was one of the most delicate topics to broach in conversation especially when, as was occasionally the case, the marital partner stayed in the room while the interview was in progress or could hear the exchanges from an adjoining room. As far as was possible, no direct questions were asked concerning spouse support; rather, this was approached through follow-up questions or clarification of incidental comments. Thus, a subject who recalled spending whole weekends engaged in his project would be asked 'What did your wife do during this time?' Again, casual mention of a husband's helping out with domestic chores to allow his wife extra study time would be probed further in order to find out whether such assistance was offered regularly or grudgingly provided. The presence of the marital partner was usually a sign of spouse interest, support and pride, and in only one of the five interviews where partners were present was there any indication of spouse resentment.

The succeeding paragraphs will examine the attitudes of spouses in both the independent learners' and the correspondence students' sample. They will also document those instances in which some Open University students attempted to protect their families from the disruptive consequences of study.

Spouse Support

(1) Independent Learners

Twenty-one of the independent learners' sample were married and the majority of these testified to the strong spouse support they had enjoyed. For ten of this majority group of eleven spouse support was reflected in an involvement in activities related to the project. Marital partners would be fellow members (or even officers) of an enthusiasts' society, they would have been responsible for developing the initial interest in the project, or they would have a specialist knowledge of a particular aspect of the project.

" Oh, yes, I mean when I say that I joined this or I joined that, in fact it's we joined." (1)

" I've got him interested now. He has to get interested in the things I'm doing and he's now treasurer for the club!" (16)

" He shares a lot of the same interests in nature and the outdoor life and he was the secretary of the Naturalist Society for seven years after he retired." (18)

" It's a good family hobby and I've converted my husband and daughter to it! They're both in the club - my husband's a steward with me at the Three Counties show and my daughter likes rabbits and hamsters." (24)

" One of the main reasons we did this at all was because basically my wife is very interested and knowledgeable about this. I think she has a broader and better knowledge than I do. She has a much broader interest." (14)

" She's interested. She's been really motivated into keeping fit and strengthening her body, her back particularly, to get rid of this back problem. She does a lot of Yoga and finds that keeps her reasonably supple and fit. So while I'm having my workout, she's having hers. It's a dual thing." (5)

" My wife's very knowledgeable but always pretends not to be you see. Nowadays she more or less confines herself to weeding and doing the cleaning up, trimming and so on. But she is a very good botanist though she wouldn't confess to that. I didn't know one flower from another but my wife was very keen on them and she put me wise on how to tell one from another." (7)

" My wife's always been interested herself. She likes the first day covers and she's always interested in the stories I do for the Nine Sheet competitions and she likes to read them herself when they're finished. She's always encouraged me in that respect, to go along with it." (10)

" I couldn't do it without her. She takes care of all the honey production, the storage, the bottling, the selling so I can leave all that side of things completely to her." (21)

The eleventh member of this group testified to the strength of spouse support in her declaration of the spirit of partnership characterising her marriage and the way this was reflected in a sharing of conjugal duties

" I didn't ask his permission, I just said 'I'm going to do it' and obviously I knew it would be with his co-operation. We've got a marriage partnership; we agree to help each other with any extra-mural activity and we help each other by taking on the burden of the children." (3)

A less committed, more neutral, attitude was adopted by nine of the independent learners' spouses with regard to the projects of their partners. Thus, no direct support was offered to the learner in the form of society participation or subject specialism but neither was there any mounting of opposition. It was as if the subject's enthusiasm was tolerated rather than actively encouraged, regarded with amused patience rather than annoyance ...

" My wife has always been quite happy about the situation I think.

I think she's happy to have me home. I used to go out and play chess maybe two or three nights a week and occasionally at weekends but she's never grumbled or anything like that." (2)

" Her tastes are fairly narrow really. She quite likes jazz but she's not into it as deeply as I am. My really big love is Wagner and when I put it on she has to go out of the room because she says it's too loud for her! I always say you can't appreciate it, you can't really get the full effect without playing it that loud, so it's a case of separate rooms! " (15)

" I don't really feel very guilty because he's always in the workshop pottering. I went away recently for about three days and said hopefully 'Well, did you miss me?' and he said 'Not really dear because I never see you anyway!'. We sort of pass each other in and out of the house." (6)

The remaining member of the independent learners' sample, the philosopher, was the only subject who referred to the existence of marital discord which had resulted from his learning ...

" She gets very frustrated because she can't understand me and can't help me. My work's had an appreciable effect on me and it's had an appreciable effect on the household." (8)

Beyond this brief allusion to the problem of communicating the content of his learning to family members and the unsettling effects of philosophical speculation on the rest of the family, the philosopher was not prepared to go. He did speak of the problems caused by a lack of suitable study space in his household (see chapter (12)) but would not be prompted to reveal the exact nature of the 'appreciable effects' of his work.

The preceding paragraphs have explored in some detail the question of familial support to independent learners, in particular the crucial role of the marital partner. The following comments concentrate not on the degree of spouse interest in the project but the extent to which the children of sample members came to share their parents' enthusiasms. Information on this point was not always obtainable either because subjects appeared unwilling to discuss their childrens' activities or because their children were too young to be aware of the parental interest. The steam engine enthusiast and chess captain had tried without success to interest their children in their projects, not through the strict imposition of parental wishes but by presenting them with evidence of the kinds of activity the project offered. The remaining four subjects did report, however, that their children had come to share their interest. In two of these cases the sharing of interest was openly acknowledged to be the result of parental manipulation. The rabbit breeder 'converted' her daughter (and her husband) to her enthusiasm and the bridge player taught her son the techniques of the game ...

" My elder son I managed to get hooked on it. I learned the Acol system and taught my son from that." (6)

The other two subjects rejected any notion of parental coercion declaring that their children had developed their own natural interest ...

" Well all our sons have followed it. Some people say that if you keep them at the garden too much they'll hate it for the rest of their lives but that's not the case with our sons. My older son lives in Ledbury and people say he's a better gardener than I am and I can quite believe it. He's certainly very, very keen. My next son is always helping me voluntarily with all the digging and hard work while I supervise him. My next son is a chemical engineer and again he is a very keen gardener. My youngest son at Leeds Poly. is studying biology and physics and he's another dead keen gardener. I haven't driven them to it, they just seem to enjoy it." (7)

Several other members of the sample had young families and, in view of the findings in chapter (4) concerning the influence of parental encouragement in initiating learning projects, it would not be surprising to note the emergence of family traditions.

(2) Correspondence Students

The same pattern of spouse support was revealed amongst the seven married students in the correspondence learners' sample. Four members of this group drew attention to the importance of such support in either initiating their studies of combatting declining motivation ...

" My wife encouraged me to take the idea of teacher training seriously. She encouraged me to write off for information from the Open University." (29)

" He was very pleased, I think, that I'd got round to doing something different. He'd sort of say 'Come on, you've got to get up to see your programme' or 'You've only got half an hour left, you better get started on your work'. It's absolutely essential. There was one student in my group whose husband was in the services and he was away a great deal of the time which was absolutely ideal for work then. But when he came home, quite naturally, he expected his wife's total attention and it made it a bit hard for her when she wanted to have some time on her own for studying." (30)

" The family is all very enthusiastic, but life has to go on the same at home. They all want home and they come so the poor old Open University has to get left till the next week or whenever it is. But they are very encouraging really, very encouraging. And my husband is very good, he puts himself out really to make do with a stew or something hashed up the next day. He's good, very good indeed." (26)

The attitudes of the spouses of a further two correspondence learners fell into the 'neutrality' category referred to earlier. In one of these cases the wife defined her attitude on the question of Open University work by insisting it remain strictly a leisure time activity, a view shared by her husband ...

" I think she still takes the attitude which I took myself and which I insisted on taking, that it was a leisure time thing. I think she has taken that attitude that it is a leisure time thing." (27)

The other 'neutrality' category partner displayed an amused tolerance towards his wife's academic excursions which served only to reinforce her determination to complete her studies ...

" I thought at the time I'll have to get through the course or my husband will say 'I told you so, you can't stick at anything long enough'. I was determined I wasn't going to discuss it with my husband in case he said afterwards he'd helped me. His reaction was an amused tolerance to begin with I think. I don't know really, we haven't really talked much about it. He's probably quite pleased I was doing something like that, he certainly never raised any objections to it." (35)

Finally, the wife of one Open University student who remained in the room while her husband was interviewed offered her own verdict on the effects of Open University studies on the family's social activities ...

" I never did anything at night before the children went to bed, I made that a rule. So I didn't neglect the children. We used to play quite a lot of Bridge beforehand which we didn't play at all while I was studying and we've started that again this year.

Wife: You notice he only says the children. I think socially we suffered. You didn't have the choice any more of whether to go out, I think that was it." (31)

The size of the correspondence students' sample is, of course, far too small to permit of any generalisations concerning the effects of such studies on marital relationships. On the whole, the degree level students in the investigation survived their years of study with little apparent damage to their marriages. These were, however, successful Open University students who had encountered few setbacks in their academic advancement through their courses of study. It would be interesting to know what percentage of 'drop-outs' attributed the discontinuance of their studies to marital conflict or spouse opposition, notwithstanding the difficulties involved in making a semi-public declaration to this effect.

Academic and Familial Priorities

If the recognition of potential points of conflict constitutes an important step in their prevention or resolution, then the correspondence students were well prepared to deal with difficulties arising from academic commitments. The explicit work-leisure distinction made at the insistence of one student's wife is a good example of an attempt to avoid possible future conflicts through resolving to maintain a sense of proportion with regard to Open University activities. The making of a deeply felt, private resolution was a recurrent feature of the Open University students' comments on this matter ...

" There was one thing I said to myself when I started the Open University - because one hears of the problems that can spring up - I thought that if it ever really starts affecting the family, I'll give it up and that still goes today as well. I wouldn't hesitate in doing that. Those are very personal reasons, I consider the family to be the most important thing. You can get

carried away with things like that with the Open University and become so insular in a way if you're going away and studying all the time. You've got to keep a balance I find."

(32)

One student recalled the ease with which such apparently immutable resolutions could be broken ...

" I worked it out that I wouldn't use weekends, they'd be reserved exclusively for the family and I was going to do it all during the week, whatever happened. Then as soon as the first T.M.A. came you'd got a deadline and you're working at it all weekend. That's the trouble but I'm afraid that's just the way it goes, something happens or there's something on and we're going out on a weeknight. I had to take a week of my holiday to do summer school so really family lost a week in effect." (29)

In her discussion of Open University study and the domestic conflict this occasions, Pauline Kirk quotes the example of one student who anticipated and tried to prevent conflict by rigidly separating familial and academic commitments. A student she names as 'Sue' admitted ...

" I have tried to keep the work fairly unobtrusive, although this is by no means easy. I have missed units and cut down on reading in order that others in the family shall not become aggravated by my new, absorbing activity." (Kirk 1978; 11)

Similarly, two members of the correspondence learners' sample had accepted certain family demands as an overriding priority and rearranged their study routine accordingly. One determined to keep his work until his children had gone to bed and one allocated her weekday mornings for study ...

" Virtually I had to do the work in the mornings. If it didn't get done in the mornings then it really didn't get done awfully well because there wasn't enough time between clearing up lunch and collecting the children to get the two hours in. You do need to do two or three hours of really concentrated work otherwise it isn't any good. In the evenings the children are around and you're lucky to get any time to yourself. So yes, I did reckon to spend two hours on five days a week working." (35)

Conclusions

At the outset of this chapter reference was made to the assertions of Houle and McKintosh regarding the effects of marital opposition on study commitment. As we have seen, the comments of the twenty-eight married members of the two samples strongly confirm the validity of these generalisations. Indeed, the picture which has emerged is one which parallels that drawn by McKintosh in that it positively emphasises the strength of spouse support rather than merely commenting on the absence of direct opposition. For fifteen of the twenty-eight married subjects the marital partner had played a crucial role in the learning project; through active participation in project activities, through the development of specialist expertise, through the expression of support and through the willingness to perform routine household tasks which would otherwise have distracted the attentions of the learner. A further eleven subjects attested to the tolerance and patience of their partners. In only two cases was there any hint of marital conflict; one concerning the difficulties of socialising and one in which frustration developed over an inability to comprehend the content of the learning activity.

the similarity of response on this theme which was exhibited in conversation with the two groups of sample members was one of the most striking features of the whole research project.

On reflection, however, this similarity of perception is not as surprising as first appears. Apart from the question of whether or not the subjects had been completely open when discoursing on this very delicate topic, the logic of Houle's argument is such that the sample members could not have given any other response. If we accept that success can only be achieved with spouse support (or, at the very least, a tolerance of independent learning activities), then successful independent learners are bound to testify to the presence of such support. Again, given that the median length of independent learning projects surveyed was sixteen years, it is difficult to see how the marital partnership could survive for such a period without an acceptance of independent learning activities by the husband or wife. Any conflicts that had existed would have been resolved much earlier on in the project and could well have been forgotten by the independent learners by the time of the interview. A very different perspective might have been gained had the interviews been with the learners' spouses and not the learners themselves.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

LEARNING GROUPS

The importance of peers to independent learning activities has already received emphasis at several points earlier in the study. Peer contact has been seen to constitute an important source of initial motivation and to offer subsequent reinforcement when the impetus provided by the novelty of an enthusiasm has waned. In the analysis of competitions, the importance of proving individual ability in the public arena of shows or exhibitions (and thereby receiving external validation of this expertise) has been shown to be the *raison d'être* of several projects. As the urge to succeed competitively entered into these projects it assumed a momentum of its own; the enthusiasts then became dominated by, and oriented towards, the attainment of competition success. It was the angler who expressed this competitive ethic most forcefully; it was not enough for him to hold a personal conviction of his own abilities, these had to be acknowledged by his peers ...

" I've got to actually go out and beat them. I've got to gain respect from them because I'm better than, or as good as, they are. So I think it's important - not only the fact that you're good, but that you're seen to be good. That's very important. " (4)

Chapter (9) has also demonstrated the importance of using comparison with peers as an easily observable, evaluative index and the significance of peers was also emphasised in the discussion of sources of information. Learners would mention influential books or magazines but would preface these comments by declaring that their 'real' source of information, motivation and direction was their fellow

enthusiasts. It is this theme which will be explored during the course of this chapter with the emphasis being placed on the educational functions of learning groups rather than their social significance. At various times during the interviews subjects drew attention to the social benefits of society participation and even to the personally therapeutic nature of club membership. In the context of the present study, however, it is the ways in which these social groups served to facilitate independent learning which will engage our attention.

The range of learning groups to be considered is wide. It includes enthusiasts' clubs with no instructional aims written into their constitutions as well as those whose members enjoy a series of educative lectures. The importance of specialist shops as meeting grounds and centres of information exchange will be considered as examples of non-societal learning groups. Other examples of such groups are church-based discussion groups, Open University tutorials and correspondence students' annual summer schools. As we shall see, some sort of affiliation to, or involvement in, a form of learning group was a feature of almost every project. The only independent learner who consciously rejected contact with groups of fellow learners was the fitness enthusiast. In spite of his desire to learn more of kung-fu exercises, participation in a local group was rejected because of the fears about the competitive and aggressive ethos which would characterise its activities ...

" I'd like to learn kung-fu properly, not leaping
around a room with fifteen other people kicking
sandbags and things .. I don't want to get
involved with a group of people because I've got a

sneaking feeling that it would be like body-building clubs, you'd all be testing yourselves against each other all the time - who could lift the heaviest weight or who could kick the hardest. I wouldn't want any of that because I'm not interested in that at all. I've got no intention of going to a club or anything like that because usually you meet the wrong sort of person there anyway, they go because they want to learn to streetfight or something like that. " (5)

Two other members of the independent learners' sample described how the greater part of their projects had been executed without the aid of learning groups. The botanist's preference for solitary rambling has already been mentioned and a similar isolation characterised the efforts of the apiarist ...

" I didn't go to any lectures at all for thirty-five years and the only reason I did start to go after that was because I had a friend who offered me a lift when he went. When I did get there I was amazed at how little the other keepers knew. " (21)

This sudden awareness of a high level of expertise in comparison to his peers was, as we have already seen, paralleled in the comments of the aforementioned botanist. The latter subject's acquaintance with society activities and extra-mural class membership had demonstrated to him the extent of his knowledge to the point where it was deemed to be greater than that of a University lecturer.

The general impression gained from the interviews though is of a high degree of involvement in society activity or in more informal learning groups. Of the twenty-five independent learners surveyed, twenty referred to society or club membership during the course of their interviews and a total of sixty-five different societies was mentioned. Twelve respondents belonged to two or more such groups with two belonging to ten and fourteen respectively. The five subjects who did not participate in society activity consisted of the fitness enthusiast mentioned earlier, two individuals who were engaged in church based activities and two for whom no distinct group involvement could be identified.

Perceptions of Fellow Enthusiasts

Although the title of this thesis is "Independent Adult Learning", this is not to imply the physical separation of such learners from their peers. An individual enthusiast can make use of the pool of talent available within his local society without surrendering the responsibility for the overall direction and execution of his learning. Thus, whilst the members of the independent learners' sample were engaged in highly specific, individually devised learning activities, they could still identify themselves as belonging to a larger hobbyists' community, a group of learners sharing the same enthusiasms, concerns, pleasures and problems. Such a perception of the activities and outlook of fellow enthusiasts did, in fact, emerge from the interviews in an entirely unprompted fashion. Subjects engaged in widely varying specialisms shared a remarkable similarity of perception with regard to their view of fellow learners. They felt themselves to be part of a larger learning community consisting of like-minded individuals who were prepared to share the fruits of their knowledge and their range

of accumulated experience for the benefit of all. In this way, for example, such diverse generalised groups as gardeners, antiques dealers, pigeon fanciers, philatelists and rabbit breeders were described in very similar terms by their individual representatives. Each group of enthusiasts was held to be 'good natured', 'helpful', and 'generous' in sharing their knowledge with their peers ...

" Gardeners are, generally speaking, very charming people.

They'll always give each other stuff and there are very few people that won't help you. If anybody asks me about something of mine I'll always tell them. " (7)

" This business is a wonderful one to be in because your competitors are very, very helpful. Where else would your rivals give you advice free of charge? " (14)

" Any other fancier will always give you ideas to help you except anything to do with feeding which affects performance. " (20)

" Anyone with specialised knowledge, they're always glad to impart their knowledge to you. " (10)

" Rabbit people are all friendly people. " (24)

This bond of common interest and shared commitment was perceived as even stronger between the organic gardener and the record collector and their respective enthusiasts' groups, particularly at the outset of their activities. In both these cases the subjects regarded themselves as being in a minority group, fighting to establish the

legitimacy of their particular interest in the face of more traditional techniques and beliefs. The engagement in organic gardening was, as we have seen in Chapter (4), a direct result of counter-culture identification. Similarly, the record collector felt he belonged to a distinct group of music enthusiasts whose common identity was defined by their taste for 'alternative' forms of music and the exclusion of this music from the airwaves ...

" After Radio One took over from the pirates someone had suggested that everyone who listened to the Peel programme should write in and they'd compile lists and send everybody a list so you'd know that all over the country you'd have people to write to. The big thing that Peel was trying to get going was communication and so I sent my name and address in and got back a list. He got over an amazing feeling in his show as though you were part of a club and I've never found anything else like that. You could write to people anywhere in the country and you might get a postcard from say Skegness or somewhere equally remote, the idea being that you could go and stay with people you felt you knew via the programme anywhere in the country and get to know them better and share the music. It was something important at that age I suppose, it was like being part of a gang, it seemed like a little club really. You felt like you belonged to this and it meant quite a lot. " (12)

Educational Functions of Enthusiasts' Societies

The recognition of the educational value of the activities of enthusiasts' clubs and societies is not a new theme within adult education and

classifications such as Lowe's (Lowe 1970) have recognised that a number of agencies exist which, while not established primarily for educational purposes, nonetheless exhibit an educational dimension to their activities. More particularly, the Russell report paid tribute to the "skill in promoting adult education in a satisfying social setting" (HMSO 1973; para. 119) of the women's organisations, even though their *raison d'être* was essentially social, and this writer has himself published an account of his attempts to promote the more effective use of discussion within meetings of National Housewives Federation groups (Brookfield 1979). It came as no surprise, therefore, to encounter repeated assertions as to the value of societal activities in promoting independent adult learning. Fifteen subjects drew particular attention to the educationally valuable aspects of society participation and an impressive catalogue of society educational functions emerged.

(1) Exchange of Information

This was the most frequently mentioned benefit which was deemed to accrue from society participation and the exchange took place at the level of individual member contacts. Such exchanges occurred in an unprompted, spontaneous fashion rather than as the result of deliberate committee decision. Individual members would come to learn of each other's specialisms and exchange ideas on new techniques as well as offering advice on the solution of problems. These kinds of exchanges occurred in a wide range of clubs from antique collectors to dog breeders ...

" Mostly it was a case of sharing collections, bringing in items from your own collection to discuss and talking about what

you'd brought along at that time. We'd exchange ideas about the things we'd picked up for our own collection. " (16)

" I think the society is very good; you can meet people with common interests and exchange notes and ideas, and quizzes are very good. " (10)

" In the local society you've got people who've been in the hobby a lot longer than you have ... perhaps one starts talking with a champion breeder who's been breeding for ten to fifteen years and obviously during that time he's going to have picked up an awful lot of knowledge on his subject. If he's a winner, if he's a champion, he's got an awful lot to tell you. Having struck up an acquaintance with him you may get an invitation to see the aviary and as such you can see the standard of birds they've got and see what methods they use. This is important, finding what methods they are using to keep their birds. Everybody feeds their birds differently - only fractionally so - but one can pick up pieces from there and put them together and use them in your own establishment. The champions have been in it for a number of years and are members of the society for whom we are very grateful inasmuch as they provide us with a great deal of knowledge and a great deal of contact; because the champion has far greater contact with champions from other areas than perhaps myself as a novice. " (13)

" People bring along their own ideas, they're always airing their tales about their experiences with different breeds and which methods work best with them, how they feed them. "

(25)

The types of exchanges quoted above were, in sociological terms, examples of 'latent', rather than 'manifest', functions; that is, they took place in addition to, and separate from, the official business of the society. The community of common interest and the sharing of mutual enthusiasms meant that individual members could build up their stock of knowledge through the consultation of accredited 'champions' or through discussions with similarly skilled colleagues whose past experience and current specialism differed from their own. Such exchanges can be held to exemplify the 'deschooling' philosophies of writers such as Reimer (Reimer 1971) and Illich (Illich 1973) and the consultation of fellow club members in order to gain ideas on new techniques of breeding or collecting is especially close to Reimer's notion of the consultation of locally available skill models, "people who can demonstrate the skill to be learned" (Reimer 1971; 116).

In contrast to Reimer's ideas, however, contact between club members and the learning that took place as a result was on a much less intentional, purposeful basis. The comments of the narrow guage rail enthusiast illustrate the way in which casual, social encounters could be of direct educational benefit ...

" You may think you know it all then you come across some fellow who you think is an idiot but if you take the trouble to listen, half-wit though he may be, he'll come up with something and you'll think 'Good grief, I wonder how he knew that?'. Everybody knows something that somebody else doesn't know and the more people you know ..." (11)

This kind of casual conversation and accidental discovery is, as has been argued in Chapter (1), as much a part of independent adult learning as the more purposeful and deliberate seeking out of peers in possession of desired skills. The absence of deliberation and intentionality does not reduce the educational value of these encounters since the knowledge and insights gained are integrated into the current stock of knowledge and come to influence future learning. Indeed, a relative novice in a particular field who is unaware of its parameters and therefore unable to define terminal learning goals must rely a great deal on these 'casual' encounters; they help to develop his grasp of a subject or interest to the point where he is able to define future learning goals and specify the skills essential to their attainment. The experience of the antiques collector who regarded her local ceramics circle as being "absolutely vital in helping me to get to grips with the field" (16), illustrates the importance of casual societal encounters in developing an appreciation of the field to be studied. Only when this broad appreciation has evolved can the process of goal-setting begin.

(2) Problem-Solving

One benefit accruing from membership of an information exchange network is the relative ease with which many problems can be solved. Even if fellow enthusiasts are unable to provide a specific diagnosis or remedy they can reduce the time and energy which the novice would otherwise have have spent searching through personal and public library shelves by indicating the type of problem which has arisen and suggesting the sources most likely to provide a solution ...

" One good thing about the club I'm in now is that you've got a problem you can always ring people up, have a word with them and talk over the problem. " (4)

" When you first run into a problem you can get advice from more experienced breeders. " (25)

" It's easy to tell if a bird is off colour because the colour of the whattle at the tip of the beak should be pure white. If it isn't, and if the droppings aren't how they should be, then you've got a problem. I've always listened to the other members at the club and how they've got over their problems and if any of my birds develop problem symptoms then I'll ask them for help. " (20)

The budgerigar breeder in the sample made reference to the value of society members in problem-solving through the exercise of a preventive function. Membership of an enthusiasts' society would reduce the likelihood of costly errors ...

" You would be more likely to make a lot of costly mistakes than you would if you were part of a society .. if you

are part of a society then you may well say to a colleague 'Well, I'm doing this at the moment with my birds' and he'll say 'Don't do that or this will happen'. You'd only find out otherwise that it was wrong when it happened. Without his advice you'll learn by the experience of having whatever disaster he was warning you about actually happening to you .. if I'd gone along to the society after I'd bought my first pair of birds I'd have found out that like most birds they're gregarious and if you only have one pair you're unlikely to succeed because the budgerigar is a flock bird. " (13)

(3) Instruction of Novices

During the parts of the conversations dealing with club and society participation, members of the independent learners' sample were asked to recount any instructional schemes organised by the more experienced members of the society. It was anticipated that where the society was comprised of a number of members with differing levels of expertise there would probably develop a tradition of formalised instruction by which the amassed experience of the more senior members could be placed at the disposal of beginners. Instead of relying on informal, individual conversations as the medium of knowledge transition, club secretaries might be expected to arrange a series of lectures covering perhaps three or four evening meetings during which the experienced enthusiasts would deal with common problems and money-saving techniques.

In fact no evidence of organised instructional schemes of this kind emerged and such lectures as were arranged were for the total

membership rather than a small group of inexperienced newcomers. These lectures tended to assume a level of knowledge perhaps not shared by all members of the society. The chess captain did feel that senior club members were aware of their responsibility to develop the skills of novices ...

" Every experienced player does feel that it's a responsibility to play against novices. As an older player I feel that when we've got new players in the club, I invariably feel that I've got to play against them if I can. " (2)

The pressures of competition chess (in particular the need for continual practice) meant, however, that senior players tended to form an elite group within the club ...

" If you are currently playing competition chess it is not usually considered very good practice to play against inferior players - it does tend to lower your standards if you do that. So you usually find that the top team players, the regular team players, tend to play amongst themselves. It's surprising how difficult it is to get a game in some clubs because the top class chaps are always playing amongst themselves. " (2)

(4) Promotion of Research

Just as most societies showed no interest in arranging systematic instructional programmes for new members, so there was little evidence of any widespread attempt to promote club sponsored research projects in which the efforts of several enthusiasts

would be brought to bear on the investigation of one particular feature. The organic gardener's participation in a Henry Doubleday Association research programme is one exception to this, although here the research initiative came from a national body rather than a local group.

The only example of club sponsored research activity which could be found in the present study was that of a local conservation trust. Since the trust had as its central purpose the protection of wildlife in its locale, it had determined to purchase a number of sites which were outstanding in that they contained a variety of flora and fauna within a small area. As part of this project the amateur botanist undertook to survey potential sites in order to determine their suitability as trust reserves ...

" Recently I've done some survey work for the trust into the wildlife found in particular sites. The trust picks out let's say a copse or the area around a pond, and I try to find out whether there's enough of interest to make it worthwhile as a trust reserve. " (17)

As we have seen in earlier chapters, a number of independent learners were indeed engaged in research projects of various kinds into, for example, aquarium plants, kung-fu, genetics and bee swarm management. These were pursued in isolation, however, and arose out of an individual passion and commitment rather than societal stimulus.

(5) Society Membership as a Condition of Learning

Given that in at least two areas - the exchange of information and the sharing of problem-solving skills - societies were held to

be of crucial importance, subjects were asked whether they felt such expertise as they possessed could have been acquired without societal contact. In other words, was contact with fellow enthusiasts of such significance as to be a necessary condition of learning ? Ten of the fifteen subjects who had drawn attention to the importance of society membership for their efforts believed that isolation would have resulted in many unnecessary difficulties. The other five respondents emphasised participation in society activities as an essential condition of learning. Without the benefit of society services, or ready access to fellow enthusiasts, an individual could not hope to develop his expertise to the point of local or national recognition ...

" You have to go through the process (of club membership) if you want to be really good because there's no way anyone can jump into the open match circuit and hope to win. " (4)

" You don't find out the more difficult parts of the hobby without having several friends, not necessarily a society, where you pool resources and information. No one person can acquire all the information necessary themselves. After the number of years I've been in the hobby, I still have to go to people in our society. " (9)

(Despite this subject's belief that it need not always be formal society membership, such had invariably been his own experience).

" Your first step in breeding is to join a club, which is necessary because the shows are your main interest. Most enthusiasts are members of several clubs. " (24)

" You need other people's views to become an expert and you have to get yourself around other societies and exhibitions to find out what's going on. " (10)

" To get into a club. That's really essential for most people who are wanting to start breeding. When you first run into a problem you can get advice from more experienced breeders. People bring along their ideas, they're always airing their tales about their experiences with different breeds and which methods work best with them, how they feed them. You're also only going to be able to meet other breeders that way for stud purposes." (25)

To these five sample members the serious development of knowledge in their particular field could not be contemplated without society membership. Other subjects opined that society membership was a valuable asset to their learning and that it made the execution of their projects much easier by resolving problems or preventing errors, but the five quoted above regarded it as a necessary condition of learning.

Non-Society Contacts

Although 80 per cent of the independent learners' sample mentioned society participation during the course of their interviews, such involvement did not represent the sum total of learning contacts. Seven subjects mentioned a range of non-societal contacts and for one of this group an eleven year membership of a group devoted solely to intellectual exploration was essential to his efforts ...

" Probably talking about support, I've not really had it so much from work as from outside. About eleven years ago we started a discussion group. It started up with the church Lenten Services; they had a series called 'People Next Door' and we got some parochial discussions going after this and the nucleus of our group has kept going ever since... We meet once a month, basically to discuss all sorts of things depending on how we're feeling. The person who's the host for the evening has the responsibility of finding something if nothing suggests itself. " (8)

This group constituted the most important social support to his learning and it performed the two important functions of reinforcing motivation and providing a source of investigative leads ...

" It keeps up my motivation, helping me keep going. They've helped me to see a lot of connections really that I hadn't cottoned on to before. My colleagues in the discussion group bring things up as much, I suppose, to give me something to chew on as anything else, but I think there is a genuine interest in what I'm saying. Probably in the last year the Deputy Headmistress (in the group) has been particularly helpful. She's got me going along a couple of lines which have been a godsend really. " (8)

The consultation of sales persons was mentioned by Tough (Tough 1966; 36) as a valuable element in the self-teacher's armoury of inquisitional techniques, but the possibility of learning from commercial and business concerns has otherwise been ignored by writers in this area. That real possibilities for this do exist is demonstrated by the way in which three of the independent learners regarded specialist

shops: as a centre for information exchange as well as a source of enthusiasts' materials. Both of the antiques experts recalled how the owners of antiques shops had assisted in the valuation of particular pieces ...

" You can always get a good idea of the price and worth of an article at a good antiques shop if you know how to go about approaching them. " (16)

" I often have competitors valuing things for me (phone rings) You see there's a perfect example of what I mean about help - she's just rung up to tell me that she's getting rid of some of her stuff and asking me if I want to have a look at it. " (14)

An instance of the way in which one particular enthusiasts' shop had come to function as a locally recognised centre for information exchange was provided by the competition angler. Tackle shops could be classified according to the expertise of their patrons and when a shop catered for top competition anglers members of this group would meet at the same time each week to discuss local conditions and recent successes ...

" I probably have to be dragged out on a Saturday morning when there's never less than six or seven people in there always talking about fishing and all with something to say. Some tackle shops are better than others, some are good and some are bad. There are recognised shops where chaps who fish the open match circuit congregate and other shops where schoolboys go in to buy a few maggots or club anglers go. That's the difference between a good tackle shop and a bad

tackle shop...We do a lot of talking in the shop, we go in there and say what won the match at Huxley's on the Avon, and what won the match at Stourport this week. How did friends get on ? What did they do ? How did they fish ? It's as important to know what didn't do well as it is to know what is doing good. " (4)

A remarkable similarity of perception was displayed by the antiques dealer mentioned earlier and the organic gardener in the sample as regards their views on the use of peers for purposes of assistance. Both subscribed to a code of mutual obligation amongst enthusiasts; they were prepared to offer any assistance they could to their peers on the understanding that they themselves could seek advice or help when this proved appropriate ...

" That's part of the business. Since people have always given me advice in the past I think it's a share and share alike arrangement. You help people as much as you can in your turn. " (14)

" I have this arrangement with the world at large that I'll do anyone a good turn regardless of whether they've done me one, and I will ask anyone to do me a good turn - which strikes trepidation into people when I first jump onto them either to do them a good turn or to demand one. It works very well. " (1)

Finally, two subjects referred to the need to consult non-society members for assistance with specific difficulties. In both cases the advice sought was concerned with the diagnosis and treatment of

disease and it was gleaned from an accredited expert ...

" Just talking is important, inter-communication if you like between interesting people. I have acquaintances who are not members of the society to whom I can talk on the phone or write a letter to if I'm having any problems. For instance, with regard to using a veterinary surgeon, Mr G. in Redditch, who's not a member of our society, is somebody you can call up regularly to come down and actually give us a talk on bird ailments. Just recently I went through a spate of losing a lot of birds and I took a bird to him and said, 'Look, I've lost a lot of birds, can you tell me why ?'. And he will actually do a post-mortem for you. And he actually gave me drugs to cure this particular ailment which happened to be a disease of the throat. So you've got all these contacts really outside the society. " (13)

In the case of the aquarist a desire to develop his knowledge of piscine pathology resulted in a series of weekly visits to a University lecturer. The informal arrangement this subject described constitutes an excellent example of the way in which learning projects can involve periods of temporary submission to the direction of acknowledged superiors. Since the period of temporary tuition was deliberately sought by the enthusiast, and, since it did not remove from him the responsibility for the overall direction of his project, he could still be regarded as engaged in independent learning ...

" I get problems every now and then - even with my fish - that I have to go to somebody else to help sort out.

I went up to Birmingham one night a week for six months to a fellow named C. who's the leading autopsy fellow in the country for fish, to get some lessons from him to understand about disease; whereas most people just wouldn't think about doing it. " (9)

Correspondence Students' Learning Groups

Correspondence study is generally thought of as a mode of learning characterised by total student isolation. The correspondence student is deemed to have no personal contact with his tutor, he is denied access to the facilities enjoyed by full-time students, and he is unable to meet with his peers and thereby derive intellectual stimulus and reinforcement. However, as Entwistle has argued "Learning in total isolation seems impossible. The student needs to be able to test out his ideas on a tutor, or at least on other students" (Entwistle 1977;138) and this belief underlies the Open University's policy of supporting correspondence study with occasional group tutorials and annual summer schools. This arrangement has been imitated in a number of similar experiments in which individualised correspondence tuition is complemented by a degree of student-student and student-tutor contact. The National Extension College (N.E.C.) holds residential weekends for students on selected courses and a recent innovation within the further education field has been the growth of 'Flexi-Study' schemes in which students enrolled in N.E.C. courses attend local colleges for tutorial assistance.* Such developments have long been accepted in American University Extension

* For a description of a Flexi-Study scheme see Barton, 1977

where, as Wedemeyer and Childs point out, it is common to find the ...

" integration of correspondence study and conferences to form a complete programme which usually begins with a conference of long or short duration. The conference serves to highlight the area to be studied, to bring the problem into focus, to acquaint enrollees with new developments and to provide a high degree of motivation. " (Wedemeyer & Childs 1961;23)

In the light of these innovations, the aforementioned stereotype of the correspondence learner as labouring in total isolation must be revised. Confirmation of the need for such revision is contained within the present study where eight of the ten correspondence students belonged to some sort of learning group sponsored by the institution organising their studies. It is the students' perceptions as to the nature and functions of these groups which will now be considered.

(1) Tutorials

All seven Open University students had, by definition, the possibility of tutorial participation open to them. The degree of commitment to tutorials did vary, however, between individual students and three of these seven were highly deliberate and selective with regard to the tutorials they chose to attend, especially at post-foundation level. Since Second and Third Level courses catered for small numbers of

students drawn from a wide geographical area, attendance at such tutorials could involve prohibitive travelling time ...

" After the first year I didn't go to the tutorials as regularly as I had been doing. Our study centres were in Gloucester and Bristol and I really didn't fancy the journey from Swindon. For one course there were no tutorials at all, only two day schools. This year I have to go to Coventry for day schools. " (28)

" I think that with the foundation course the students made the college a real centre. When you go beyond the foundation course level then students start branching out and live all over. We have people this year living in Shropshire, Redditch. " (32)

Not surprisingly, tutorials came to be regarded as more or less essential according to the extent of existing student knowledge in the subject ...

" I went to the Psychology tutorials in Birmingham because every phrase was new to me, I didn't know any of the material. Some of the Maths courses I'd got experience of so I felt confident enough not to be needing tutorials. " (31)

As well as being prevented from attending tutorials through his working night shifts, one student expressed an additional, underlying fear of group participation ...

" I always thought, 'Am I going to put my foot in it when I open my mouth?', I was terrified of saying something that didn't sound sensible. I find great

difficulty in sort of breaking into a conversation and saying 'Well, let's discuss this or that'. I think this is partly because of my natural introversion and partly the fact that I have got, I suppose, this sense of inferiority. Because I'm just not used to being in a group of people who are intellectually, well, reasonably intellectually, capable. " (27)

Four broad functions of tutorial group meetings were identified by the Open University students; the sharing of anxieties, the development social contacts, the promotion of a sense of institutional identification, and the exchange of ideas. The first of these, the reassurance gained by students with regard to the difficulties they were experiencing, was essential for the maintenance of morale and motivation ...

" There are about six of us, a group of us in fact who have done the same two foundation courses. We're quite a strong group and we've all been through this (loss of enthusiasm) actually. We tend to support each other and everybody says, 'Oh, you can't give it up now after all you've done' and 'It's just a case of getting down to it'. " (29)

" It was very important, it was a real help for the assignments, the knowledge that you weren't the only one struggling. Perhaps academically it might not have been so essential because you had the work just the same, but it was, from the morale point of view, very useful. " (26)

" It was very comforting to get with the others and find that they all felt the same thing, that they had the same kinds

of difficulties that I had in understanding the material. " (30)

Two of the subjects quoted above had been away from formal education for some forty years and were most appreciative of the chance to share their worries with other students. Without the possibility of regular tutorial participation (and having no vocational necessity to continue their studies) the perception of the difficulties they faced would probably have been heightened to an unacceptable degree. The facilitation of social contact is a common feature of task-oriented group activity and, whilst it may not be a strictly educational function, it undoubtedly has educational implications. For adult students entering the unfamiliar world of higher education, the development of enjoyable social contacts was an important supportive feature of their learning ...

" I enjoy the fellowship, that's very important I find. Perhaps I was lucky in that I did get myself in a very nice group. It's a social outlet in a way. There are a lot of people with like minds and a common interest, we've had one or two get-togethers in people's houses. It is supportive. Although we're all on different courses now, we still keep together. We meet once or twice for a social gathering, it's very nice, rather good. " (26)

" Our group met at the pre-course thing at the local Tech. College. They ran this preparatory course for the A100 course and we all came together via that. We all get together once or twice a year and have a little party. There's a social element to it, undeniably a social

element. I suppose it's not very important but
it reinforces the work, it's a factor. " (29)

Linked to the sharing of anxieties encouraged by tutorial group attendance was the more specific function of the promotion of a sense of identification with the Open University. Through the tutorial system and the holding of annual summer schools the University seemed to have been remarkably successful in creating the perception of a common bond of Open University membership amongst its students ...

" I have found a common bond with the Open University. " (26)

" With the 'Sesame' paper and the study centre meetings you do get a sense of identification with other students who're in the same boat as yourself. Sometimes, as I'd be prowling downstairs to catch the radio programme in the early morning, I'd think 'What on earth am I doing here ?'. But then you start to think of all the other students who're doing exactly the same thing at the same time. " (30)

" I think summer schools help and you're always ringing up someone and saying, 'What did you get on your C.M.A.?' Oh yes, I feel very much a part, just going to the day schools you do. " (28)

Finally, tutorial meetings assumed discursive and evaluative significance for their attendees. They provided an opportunity for students to talk over unit material, to exchange ideas with regard to assignment requirements, and to compare individual progress ...

" We also had a very good group that year which played a very, very important part in the O.U. We had a small group with the D101 course which was very helpful. I think that one of the best ways of learning is by discussing things with other people. If you want to disagree with something then the tutorial's the place for that. And you can put your ideas which I regularly do. If you disagree with something or with a certain interpretation of something then the tutor will throw it back to you and say, 'Well, that's another interpretation'. " (32)

" We'll freely show each other our grades and we'll show each other the work we do .. I wouldn't like to do it on my own, I don't think I'd go on if I was on my own and unable to discuss it with people. " (29)

" Everyone was sort of giving, they shared what they felt and what they thought and had found out. It was very good, very good indeed. " (26)

On the whole, then, tutorials were regarded favourably by the Open University students in the sample of correspondence learners although the emotional reassurance and social contact afforded by tutorial participation were the features which were given prominence in comparison to their purely educational benefits.

(2) Summer Schools

Testimony to the residential ideal finds frequent expression in the literature of adult education and such testimony is based on two assumptions; that "the physical and psychological detachment from family and business matters tends to enhance residential learning" (Lacognata 1961;2) and that "the students can work much more intensively than in weekly classes and in more favourable conditions." (W.E.A. 1960;para.278). Thus, "the experience within the period of residential education is somewhat more intense and the lessons of co-operation, tolerance, leadership, and caring are much more inescapable" (Fraser 1960;223). Because residential periods temporarily remove the individual from his familial and occupational concerns they are regarded as freeing him to concentrate entirely on intellectual matters. A short period of continuous and intensive study is held to be as beneficial as a much longer series of evening classes in opening the student to new perceptions and behaviour. As Thomas argued, "withdrawal and detachment" from one's working life are "the obvious conditions of a purposeful return" (Thomas 1935;104).

Four members of the correspondence students' sample concurred with these versions of the residential ideal as experienced during their summer schools. For the student whose shift work had prevented him attending tutorials regularly, and who revealed himself as intimidated by discussion groups, summer school was a profound and memorable experience ...

" Oh the atmosphere, being in a University. It was at Bath, a magnificent place in my opinion. If I was to say there was one week in my life over the past twenty years that I've really enjoyed, it was my first week at

summer school. Just being in a place where each day people are thinking and using their brains, to my mind it was just my scene. And I enjoyed talking about the things and sort of entering into the debates and I think I pulled my weight. I didn't sort of sit around and listen to everybody else, I did take advantage of it. To have been forty years and then to suddenly go for a week .. I suppose there must have been an emotional part attached to it, but I really enjoyed it. " (27)

Two respondents drew particular attention to the way in which the fact of residence and the variety of teaching methods this allowed served to effect participant change. Involvement in simulation exercises was held to stimulate the diffident and produce a changed self-image, whilst the dependence on small group activity resulted in a sense of group identity and individual member obligation ...

" I think summer school is a tremendous leveller, it's very good at getting people going who otherwise wouldn't come out and do very much. I found that with the war game, you get people who've been mice and by the end of it they're really enjoying it, playing it right up to the hilt. You find this certainly in the female, middle-aged element in the O.U. who've probably not been allowed to say anything at home and no-one takes them seriously. Then they suddenly find that people will listen to them and that must be a tremendous benefit, I'm sure they get a terrific amount from it. " (32)

" Everybody's very enthusiastic at summer school and they put you into groups and you feel, 'Well, I can't let the group down' as it were. This situation develops. " (29)

The insertion of periods of residential study into correspondence courses is not an arrangement unique to the Open University. The National Extension College student in the correspondence learners' sample had also experienced a residential weekend as part of her English 'A' level course. This residential interlude was crucial to her studies in two ways; it reinforced her motivation and it served an evaluative function by providing an opportunity for comparison with peers ...

" After I went on the weekend course in Oxford I never looked back. They fired me with enthusiasm and confidence. I discovered then that I really wasn't any worse or any better than anybody else, we were really all much on the same line. I think it reassured me that my mind was basically working on the right lines, that I wasn't way off tack. That for me I think was the turning point. " (35)

Thus far, the verdict on the correspondence students' residential experience has been wholly favourable but, as we find with other features (such as the independent learners' reactions to competition participation) reservations were expressed by a minority of students. In fact the perceptions of summer school seemed to divide on a subject specialist basis - the students with wholly positive reactions studying Arts or Social Science subjects

and those with unfavourable verdicts engaged on Maths or Science courses. One biologist who crossed the 'Two-Cultures' divide to take an Urban Sociology course was highly dismissive of the level of discourse which took place ...

" The 'Urban Education' summer school was absolutely appalling - a load of sociological drivel - and I got nothing out of it at all. I really thought, 'Well, scientists work one way and others work another way' - I was very disappointed with that. I wasn't the only one who thought that but I was the only one who wouldn't join in. " (28)

In this instance the dissatisfaction with the summer school was focussed on the subject matter rather than on the organisational features of the school itself and a similar criticism was voiced by the mathematician who attended a Technology summer school ...

" The Technology was a dead loss. Perhaps I didn't agree with all the philosophies they were on about all the time, they were trying to formulate all problems down to the same level. It was as though they were trying to give technical terms to things which were common sense really. " (31)

Both science students thus showed a remarkable agreement with regard to the use of academic terminology and a similar congruence of views was expressed on the element of assessment built into the science foundation course summer school ...

" My summer schools were generally unpleasant .. you were assessed as you worked there in the laboratory which was

rather harrowing. If you did badly in the exam that counted if you were in the borderline area - so that was sort of hanging over you, like death. " (31)

" The foundation course summer school was assessed, which meant you couldn't find the time to do anything other than what was marked. I found that an absolute dead loss, it was absolutely pointless. " (28)

These latter reactions were, however, untypical of the majority of the correspondence students' feelings about their residential experience. On the whole, summer school periods were held to reinforce motivation, improve communication skills, open new intellectual horizons and result in an alteration of self-image.

(3) Self-Help Groups

Aside from the tutorials and residential periods which were organised by the correspondence institution, four students in the sample had participated in some kind of self-help group connected with their studies. These varied in their stability and organisation from a group with unchanging membership and regular weekly meetings to an occasional exchange of information on shared problems between two or three colleagues. The latter arrangement was described by a teacher who lived many miles from her study centre ...

" I think all the way through I've usually worked in conjunction with two or three people. The two Heads of Department (at her school) followed me through the three years to the extent of lending me essays - especially the Biology teacher who had been to summer

schools and was able to give me hints. I had a lot on the language course from someone who's interested in Chomsky and we had discussions on that. When I was doing the Education courses there was another teacher who lived about seven miles away from me and we became good friends and we more or less worked together. She didn't have a car so I took her to the tutorial in Gloucester and Bristol and we were able to discuss things on the journey backwards and forwards. " (28)

The more formal self-help groups which met regularly in members' houses were held to aid memory, to promote new lines of enquiry, to provide evaluative comparison with peers, and to offer reassurance and support ...

" We had about three or four of us round here and we'd meet every week and before the exams we'd meet twice a week, which I gained a lot from. I found that I retained more. At my stage in life your memory starts to go, it's not easy to remember things, and I found that by discussing things points come in that stay there. You might have interpreted something differently from the way somebody else has. On the D101 group we had a small self-help group of about three and one was a union shop-steward. I find it interesting just listening to different attitudes. We all have different ideas about the way things should be done and that's part of the O.U. Long may it live! " (32)

" The self-help group was very useful. We did it so one person was responsible each time, they'd sort of put an

idea forward and then the others joined in the discussion. Very useful. Again, not so much academically as supportively, that's the most important thing - that you're working along the same lines as somebody else and know that you are. They'll say, 'That was a stinker' or 'That wasn't so bad' and when you'd been so worried that you were the only one struggling, to find that someone else was is very comforting. It's a reassurance really I think you need. " (26)

A less favourable version of self-help group activity was given by one dissatisfied ex-member ...

" I did try one self-help group on one of the courses and that was an absolute dead loss. There were four of us regularly attending, myself and three women. Two of the women were older women who just wanted to gossip or to know the answers to the assignments. It didn't really help very much, the two older women just sat at the side and talked most of the time. " (31)

(4) Work Colleagues

Finally, a number of correspondence students remarked upon the lack of interest in their studies shown by work colleagues. This did not emerge as a theme of any particular importance with the independent learners and such interest as was expressed by colleagues tended to be supportive. The correspondence students, however, laid special emphasis on their accounts of reactions by workmates to

correspondence study activity, though such reactions were divided. Three respondents found work contacts to be generally supportive and, in the case of the Biology teacher mentioned earlier, colleagues who had already taken the course she was following were instrumental in securing her initial application. In contrast to this, three other students experienced unfavourable reactions from colleagues ranging from incomprehension to apathy ...

" A few of them knew I was studying but they really couldn't care, there was a complete lack of interest. The only reaction I did get occasionally was when they'd be puzzled - 'Why bother to do this when you're not going to get anything for it?' 'Why spend your time studying and doing anything at all ?' " (34)

" They don't take much interest in it and I don't have much opportunity for conversation with them anyway. Most people seem to think that it's rather a stupid subject and that I'm mad to want to study at my age. Friends who are academics or academically inclined give me a lot of encouragement, but all others seem to find it incomprehensible and can only think in terms of what I'm going to do with the degree. They cannot see that the degree itself is not important to me. " (33)

" Quite a lot of the people who know me at work are not really sure what the O.U. is or what it actually does. The few conversations I've had with people convince me that they don't really know what it's all about. They seem to equate it with .. I don't know .. 'O' level needlework or

pottery. I'm quite convinced that very few of my colleagues really appreciate how advanced it is. It's surprising how many of them associate O.U. with things like 'Brain of Britain' or 'Mastermind'. Rather than as a sort of learning area or learning context, it's a sort of gimmicky thing I think in many people's minds. I think one of my big disadvantages is because I'm doing engineering on the factory floor, on the shop floor, I just don't associate with the sort of people who mentally .. it's just not their environment, you know ? They're just not aware of these sorts of things. Certainly on the factory floor, there's nobody I know who's doing O.U. work." (27)

Such reactions as those quoted above were not generally experienced by members of the independent learners' sample whose activities were regarded as legitimate 'hobbies', 'pastimes' or 'recreation' by their colleagues. It is possible that the apparent dismissal by workmates of the correspondence students' activities concealed a hostility to what was interpreted as a rejection of previously unchallenged cultural values and attitudes. The student who commented on the lack of any spirit of intellectual enquiry on the part of his colleagues certainly felt himself to be distanced from them by virtue of his studies and it may well be that such distancing would be interpreted by colleagues as an attempt by the student to attain some degree of superiority. Formal academic study would be regarded as a prelude to upward occupational mobility and improved social status and arouse an understandable resentment. No such threat to their workmates culture was posed by the independent learners' enthusiasms.

Conclusion

In his paper on the educative aspects of voluntary societies, Elsey declared that "The contribution of voluntary organisations towards adult education and the social and cultural life of communities warrants wider recognition" (Elsey 1974;396) but studies of learning networks published since that time such as Fordham's (Fordham et. al. 1979) or Lovett's (Lovett 1975) have tended to emphasise the raising of political awareness and the promotion of community action rather than investigating the development of the individual skills and expertise of members. However, as Elsey's survey of twenty voluntary organisations in Birkenhead demonstrated, the members of such diverse groups as Model Railway Societies, St. John's Ambulance groups and Townswomens' Guilds were aware of learning as a reason for their participation, even if such learning as did occur was "random and casual learning, lacking the same adherence to core educational principles - systematic and sequential learning and conscious attempts to learn - basic to the adult education class" (Elsey 1974;394).

In the present sample of independent learners the number of societies mentioned was sixty-five and, as we have seen, twenty of these learners belonged to one or more groups. In purely quantitative terms the exchange of information was the most important of the four educational functions discussed in the chapter; this was the feature mentioned most frequently and was followed by the consultation of society members to aid in problem-solving. The deliberate, organised instruction of novices and the promotion of systematic research were relatively rare. Five subjects could not conceive of their learning taking place without societal support and another ten regarded

society membership as an important source of information, advice and reinforcement. The extent of active societal involvement did, of course, vary; the steam engine enthusiast who belonged to fourteen societies could not participate fully in the affairs of each but such wide membership assured a continual supply of useful newsletters and journals. The impression gained from the analysis of transcript comment was that society involvement was seen as an integral part of executing a learning project; for the confirmation of the individual's self-image as being that of an accredited, fully-fledged aquarist or rail enthusiast as well as for the learning benefits that would accrue from such membership.

The majority of correspondence students were appreciative of the tutorials and residential summer schools to which they had access and believed such activities to constitute an important element in their learning. One Home Study student whose activities lacked any social dimension expressed the feeling of excitement and the mutual reinforcement of enthusiasm such contact could bring ...

" There's this element of excitement in learning I think. You can get excited reading by yourself and when you are excited reading by yourself - if you're me - you start immediately to want to communicate that excitement to somebody else. To say, 'This is fantastic, what do you think ?' and 'What does so and so say on this ?' and 'Is there another idea, another theory that puts it better?' It's like when you're reading poetry or prose that suddenly strikes a chord and you get the proverbial cold shiver down your spine, you want to share it.

With a subject that is as fascinating and new as Sociology

is to me, I immediately want to go out and share it with others, to feel the flow of enthusiasm if you like. There's a tremendously strong desire to communicate my enthusiasm and to provoke it in others. I want everybody else to see how interesting and exciting it is. I found it so interesting that I wanted to talk about it with a lot of people and I don't know anyone I can talk about it with .. I would have enjoyed attending a class I'm sure. " (33)

There were, of course, occasional reservations expressed by subjects as to the value of group learning. We have already seen the criticism of summer school voiced by the two science students and Chapter (10) has documented the destructive features of society promoted competitions as well as their benefits. One subject also drew attention to the development of cliques which characterised enthusiasts' societies and which could alienate new members who were unsure as to their reception ...

" If a new member does come along he could tend to be overawed by the cliques. Through personality and status, through things you can't define, certain people will group together and form their own groups and you'll find perhaps within the society two or three of these groups existing side-by-side; co-existing together nicely but apartly together if you see what I mean. In our society if we hold a meeting I know who will be sitting by whom, who would be talking to whom, who would be over that side, and who would be talking to whom there, and so on. It's just something that happens through social status, through status within the society,

through educational background, people find they can talk more easily to certain others. " (13)

If there is one overall comment to be made about the subjects' perceptions of society membership and their involvement in a range of other learning groups, it is that such groups provide a focus for independent learning projects. They stimulate enthusiasm, assist in problem-solving, act as a forum for evaluation with peers, provide specialist equipment (though not specialist instruction), and allow a substantial exchange of information to take place amongst their members. From a purely quantitative viewpoint, the length of this chapter testifies to the importance that the theme of societal and other learning group participation came to occupy in the interview transcripts.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

CONCLUSIONS

This section is not concerned to reproduce the chief features of the empirical findings discussed so far; individual chapter summaries serve this function and there would be little point in simply restating their contents at this point. The following paragraphs are concerned more with highlighting some of the connections between independent learning and formal education which are revealed in the interviews, with exploring the contribution made by the independent learners to the cultural life of their communities, and with suggesting ways in which their activities might best be supported.

Independent Learning and Formal Education

The importance of competition participation to several of the projects has already been discussed in Chapter (10) and reference to this theme has been made at other points in the study. The intensity of feeling aroused on this topic, either in emphasising the benefits of competition or rejecting the competitive ethic, surprised the interviewer and recalled memories of the end of term anxiety, pride and pain caused by the public display of examination results and class gradings. In both instances, formal examinations and participation in shows or exhibitions, the learner submits his efforts to the public judgement of an unknown, accredited expert. The decision of the judge or examiner indicates the level of expertise attained by the learner in relation to his peers and with regard to formal notions of competence, and thus serves an important evaluative function. In both situations the awarding of public approval serves to reinforce the learner's enthusiasm whilst an unfavourable verdict implies learner incompetence and results in damage to his self-esteem.

Thus, the perceptions revealed in Chapter (10) suggest a parallel between the experiences and activities of the independent learners and those of students within the formal education system.

A point of comparison between formal educational practice and the pursuit of independent learning activities is also provided by the independent learners' use of learning groups. Participation in society activities and attendance at club meetings could be viewed in the same light as membership of informal student groups. Just as students at a College or University would meet informally to discuss common problems or to explore ways of meeting new demands (such as a newly set essay question), so enthusiasts would use the occasion of society meetings or lectures to exchange information and obtain advice, even if they lacked the specific focus of attention granted to students on a common course of study. The correspondence students acknowledged this most explicitly with the formation of self-help groups; for the independent learners this was a much more casual process. Unlike self-help groups, enthusiasts conversations would have no previously agreed agenda and in this respect they resemble more closely the conversation in student coffee bars or study bedrooms, than the highly deliberate proceedings of Open University self-help groups.

The independent learners' use of more experienced colleagues in the same way as research students might use their supervisors suggests a further parallel between the world of independent learning and the formal education system. Six subjects referred to one particular individual whose judgement they respected, whom they acknowledged

as possessing greater knowledge than themselves, and to whom they would turn for regular consultations and in times of trouble ...

" There's someone in the fruit field that I would seek out if I got too stuck. I met him through the Organic Living Group and he lives fairly locally. He knows a lot about fruit - it's his job and he has orchards, so he knows what he's talking about. " (1)

" At the back of my mind I know that if there's anything left undone he'll put it right at the dress rehearsal. It does ease my burden a bit to know he can work miracles on the last night, which, in fact, he does. " (3)

" I played with R.G. for about a year before he went up to Cambridge and I probably learned more in that year than I've ever done since. He was absolutely first rate, in effect a tutor. " (6)

" It's at the trimming stage when you're adjusting various inaccuracies in construction that a lot of modellers lose interest. I was lucky because I could always turn to B. He was an experienced modeller and would always help me make any adjustments. It's important to a beginner and I had that help. " (22)

" My present superior is very good indeed, very helpful. He's done an O.U. degree in Maths and Computing and he's about ten years older than me. We disagree quite fundamentally on almost everything, but, on the other hand, he's inclined to act deliberately as devil's advocate. I don't always find it easy to talk to him

but he usually gives me something to think about,
which is always welcome. " (8)

" If I got into real difficulties I'd go to J. who
really knows all there is to know about the breed
because he started it. Or I'd ring M., I've known
him since childhood. " (24)

Thus, independent learners would turn to particular individuals for guidance and assistance and use them in the way a student would use a research supervisor or, perhaps, a study counsellor. The major differences between the two situations are, of course, that the research supervisor would be performing a more or less continuous directive function whereas the experienced enthusiast would be consulted only at times of particular difficulty. Also, in the formal education system the supervisor or counsellor would probably be in a position of granting some kind of certification or accreditation to the student whereas the independent learner could afford to ignore the advice of his colleague without risking a public labelling of his efforts as inadequate or incompetent.

This last point has led some writers to characterise independent learners as 'mavericks' flaunting a static and uncreative educational establishment. Independent learning is held to be "the embodiment and implementation of imaginative fascination" opposing "The entire socialisation and training process, which includes our schools and Universities, (and which) aims at producing a typical personality of some specified kind .. it takes courage of heroic proportion to redefine oneself in the face of such invalidation. Such courage is rare and so, apparently, is independent learning" (Jourard 1967;94). For students who are used to prescriptive direction and external

evaluation, "it takes elements of determination and courage to break away from this predictable and comfortable learning environment to enrol in a course of independent study" (Percy & Ramsden 1980;58). This view of independent learning regards the learner as making a deliberate decision to reject conventional educational pathways in favour of individually devised learning strategies. Such a choice is held to make the independent learner some kind of educational guerilla; "Independent learners rock the boat. True education, as opposed to training, is by definition subversive" (Jourard 1967;100).

The members of the independent learners' sample in the present study displayed little awareness of playing an educationally subversive role. Their interests had been aroused outside of the formal education system and the stimulus and guidance derived from books, peers and their own reflections had been enough to ensure the continuation of their efforts. There was, admittedly, little formal educational provision available in many of the subject areas covered by the sample. From the comments of independent learners regarding attendance at society lectures, however, it would be wrong to say that they would have avoided any evening classes or correspondence courses had they been available. It was simply that in the absence of such provision other means of developing skills and acquiring knowledge were evolved. A good example of the readiness to adapt the education system to his requirements was provided by the organic gardener whose memories of school were 'disastrous' ...

" It was disastrous. I was very introverted as a child very shy. I got hay-fever which meant that generally the exams were in hay-fever time and I got poor results.

How I passed the 11-plus I don't know .. my education
- up until the sixth form - in no way fitted me for
anything at all, it was disastrous. It was hell.
People kept hitting me, I was always ill, I made no
friends. It was terrible. " (1)

Despite these experiences, this subject had joined a succession of evening classes on various topics and was, at the time of the interview, negotiating with his local adult education centre to run a series of day schools on organic gardening. Instead of deliberately turning his back on the system and attempting to devise an alternative strategy, he had adapted the system to his advantage and regarded formal class instruction as a useful addition to the range of learning opportunities available.

Independent Learners as Animateurs

The focus of the present study is the attempts of the learners surveyed to develop an acquaintance with a field of knowledge or area of activity; to this extent, the study has concentrated on the learners' perceptions of their achievements and the ways in which their abilities were nurtured. As the preceding chapters have shown, however, independent learning projects are not conducted in an intellectual and social vacuum. Instead, fellow enthusiasts offer new insights and assist in the resolution of difficulties, whilst family members provide emotional support and sometimes share in the execution of the project. Aside from these two groups, there is another body of individuals affected by the learner's enthusiasms in that they are inspired to pursue an interest or engage in an activity which previously had assumed little importance in their lives.

Because of the enthusiast's success in conveying the excitement and satisfaction gained from his activities, these previously disinterested individuals come to share a similar commitment to learning.

This section concentrates on the deliberate attempts of independent learners to arouse the interest of uncommitted non-enthusiasts to a point of active participation. Such attempts were suggested in the first interview of the research programme where the interviewee spoke of his desire to 'spread the good news' regarding the benefits of his hobby. Subsequent encounters revealed a variety of responses with regard to this activity ranging from the idea, held by several enthusiasts, of their being engaged in a 'crusade', to a total rejection of any attempts at 'conversion'. Just over half of the independent learners' sample gave some kind of example of an attempt to arouse greater public interest in their enthusiasm and a readiness to declare the benefits of correspondence study was also exhibited (as we have seen in Chapter (11)), by the members of the correspondence students' sample.

The term 'animateur' is used to describe the enthusiast whose commitment to his learning is such that he determines to arouse the interest of non-enthusiasts to the point where they experience the same excitement and fulfillment he derives from his learning. The noun 'animateur' is derived from the verb 'animate' which is variously defined as being to encourage, to enliven, and to inspire. In the context of this study then, independent learners are regarded as animateurs if they attempt to encourage others to participate in a particular independent learning activity. In French and French-Canadian adult education the term animateur is employed to refer to

a type of community educator who is concerned with "stimulating and providing resources for cultural and recreational activities. It is a professional role midway between that of administrator and teacher" (Jackson 1970;174)*. The sense in which the term is used in this chapter is less generalised; an independent learner functions as an animateur if the satisfactions derived from his own learning prompt him to try and enliven others so that they too can enjoy these pleasures.

Of the fifteen independent learners who in some way attempted to involve outsiders in their interest, six seemed to regard this promotional activity as a kind of crusade; their area of interest or particular concern was deemed to be of such significance as to warrant the arousal of the greatest possible outside interest. They spoke of 'spreading the good word' or 'good news' and of 'preaching' their 'gospel' ...

" I think people assume I've got a fair amount of gardening knowledge and they don't realise that what I'm giving them is information on organic gardening. In other words, I make use of this opportunity to spread the good word and I'll provide an organic solution to their problem. " (1)

" I want to go forth and preach the fact that you can't build castles on sand and there's an awful lot of castles that are built on some very shifting philosophical sand. " (8)

* For further discussion of the notion of the professional animateur see 'Popular Education in France' (Legge 1960)

" I try to play records they don't normally hear, I try to avoid playing obvious things that people hear all the time. I do play more obscure things in the hope that people will hear them and like them. I suppose you could say it is trying to spread the good news. " (12)

The nine remaining animateurs in the independent learners' sample adopted a less evangelical tone when describing their attempts to promote greater participation in their area of interest, but this did not reduce the importance ascribed to such activity. As we shall see, a local enthusiasts' society was often the focus of these efforts with the learner's relative success in promoting his interest gauged by the relative increase in society membership. Some examples of individualised instruction of novices were provided and a number of independent learners also gained such a reputation as an expert in their field that they came to serve as local skill models. Newcomers to an area of interest would be advised by more experienced practitioners to consult the independent learner concerned for initial advice. This is not, strictly speaking, an example of a learner acting as an animateur, since there is no attempt by the expert to arouse the interest of non-committed outsiders. The interest has already been awakened in the enquirer and it is on his own initiative that more expert advice has been sought. Such consultancy duties are included in the present discussion, however, since the initial tentative interest exhibited on the part of the newcomer is often converted to a sustained commitment as a result of the inspiration, animation and encouragement of the expert.

A total of fifteen independent learners could, in some way , be regarded as animateurs. Of the remaining sample members, the great majority declared their willingness to respond to requests for advice though they did not solicit such requests nor attempt to become the resource consultant for their community. Only two respondents firmly rejected the role of 'animateur', with one of these attempting to conceal his whole learning project from the outside world ...

" I don't go out with any kind of missionary purpose.

I'm not here to spread the good word or anything serious like that. " (16)

" Nobody knows I do this. I don't broadcast it and I don't want anybody to know really because I don't want to set myself up as a kind of guru if you like.

I don't want to spread the gospel of anything. " (5)

(1) Society Recruitment

The expansion of societies' memberships was the most immediately apparent example of animateur activity and attempts to build up membership numbers were mentioned by ten individuals. Interestingly enough, seven of this group had been founder members of their respective societies and still retained some official position within its organisation. A genuine desire to share their interest with fellow enthusiasts and to build up its popularity was at the heart of their intentions, but a number of additional, and more specific, reasons were given for founding their societies. A

record shop owner realised the commercial utility of his becoming secretary of a recorded jazz society, an aquarist was concerned to reduce the incidence of sharp practise by tropical fish dealers, a record collector wished to provide access to a wider range of music than that available on the major radio networks, a rabbit breeder was fired with a sense of crusade in establishing a new breed in Britain and a budgerigar breeder was concerned at the fragmentation of interest occuring in an existing society ...

" I started it when I came here. First of all, it was a good way of meeting people and it was also obviously going to be useful to the shop and to building up the business. " (15)

" This is why I formed the society, so that the fish in people's houses didn't just exist, but they actually lived and enjoyed living..about 50 per cent of retailers are there as a job and to make money, and they couldn't care less about the customer once he's gone out of the door. It's up to societies like us to try and reduce the trouble that new enthusiasts are going to have because of ignorance behind the counter. " (9)

" We call the Club a music club now because there's no particular type of music; it's not folk, it's not jazz, but a mixture of everything. I try to get them to hear different types of music .. it's very important to do that because you can become stuck in one style of music, which I think is bad. It covers all types, the whole musical spectrum really. That's what I try to do - you've got a chance of hearing a few things that

otherwise you might not. Some of them are at the age where they can't buy a lot of records and so wouldn't hear them otherwise. " (12)

" The Rex really had no-one pushing them in the whole country, so I was determined to get them known. They needed breeders. " (24)

" During my term of office as secretary I became a little disenchanted with the Cage Bird Association as such, because it was a fragmented society. In those days there were problems as far as I was concerned - the only way to solve them was to create a budgerigar society. " (13)

Techniques of recruitment were relatively informal, through word of mouth and through mini-recruitment drives each time a member gave an invited talk or slide show to an outside audience. In addition, societies were mentioned in directories of local organisations and accounts of their meetings were often included in the local press. The local paper and enthusiasts' societies enjoyed a somewhat symbiotic relationship; society proceedings provided copy for the paper whilst ensuring a source of free publicity for the society. The respective society secretaries were well aware of the potential power of the press in this regard and would write individual articles of a popular appeal, or gain occasional inclusions in the 'Correspondence' columns in their capacity as society officials. The ornithologist who began writing her weekly nature column in 1955 and had never missed an issue at the time she was interviewed is perhaps the most striking example of this; most other secretaries relied heavily on the local press to assist in the initial establishment of their society but thereafter submitted only occasional records of their monthly meetings.

(2) Consultancy

One of the criteria used to determine the composition of the sample for this research was the local acknowledgement of the individual concerned as expert in his particular field. Not surprisingly, such local fame resulted in unskilled newcomers to the field seeking out the expert to request advice on the best way to develop their own talents. It also served to direct relatively skilled enthusiasts to the expert for the purpose of obtaining specific advice or even specialist equipment. In this way the specially skilled learner came to serve as a resource consultant and as a skill model for enthusiasts possessing various degrees of expertise.

Such consultancy duties were recalled by ten independent learners, all of whom mentioned past instances of receiving requests for general information, specific advice or specialist materials. Their ability to meet such requirements successfully had a spiralling effect so that their reputation grew and this, in turn, occasioned more enquiries. Most of the individuals concerned had been consulted on specific problems by a number of other enthusiasts ...

" It's not so bad now, but about eighteen months ago I doubt if a week went by without someone knocking on the door with a load of fish in a bottle or a bag - 'Could I come over?' as they were in desperate trouble. The doorbell never stopped ringing. " (9)

" It does get around at work that I'm interested in stamps, I often get people coming up to me and saying 'I know you're interested in stamps, can you tell me where about such and such?' or 'Where can I get in touch with this or that?' " (10)

" I do get a lot of people asking for advice. A lot of people come to me through the society and from the village as well. " (7)

" Even before I became secretary of the society I used to get people coming to me and asking me for help or some kind of information. I think that was the result of being introduced to the club as someone who knew what he was talking about. The word got around. " (23)

More general consultancy duties had been requested of three learners in the sample. As has been previously mentioned, the pedigree dog breeder was asked by the Citizens Advice Bureau to serve as the referral point for all their enquiries regarding dogs, whilst the rabbit breeder found herself acting as a stock supplier ...

" There's a lot of people from outside the club as well as from the inside who get in touch, especially beginners who're starting up their own breeding with the Rex. They're pretty difficult to get hold of because they're a new breed, so I'm always being asked if I can find rabbits for them. It means I'm a link between those people that I know have rabbits to spare and those who don't know how to find them. " (24)

Finally, the record collector in the sample described how he had come to be regarded as the chief source of information concerning the local musical scene, partly because of his entrepreneurial success in organising local concerts ...

" I'm asked quite a lot about the music club. I suppose I get asked a lot of questions about bands and people appearing at the Winter Gardens, what they're like.

Things like that I get asked about and also albums; people say 'What's this record like?' quite a lot. I don't know if that's because they know I know a bit about records or because they think I might. I do get asked a lot of questions though about the music scene in Malvern. " (12)

(3) Individualised Instruction

A small amount of individualised instruction was revealed during the course of the interviews with four subjects, each of whom operated an informal apprenticeship scheme. These individuals had spent a considerable amount of time instructing novices in the skills endemic to their enthusiasm. Thus, the competition angler was nurturing the development of a teenage beginner, the steam engine enthusiast had supervised a succession of engine 'mates' in the operation of steam tractors, the ornithologist had trained a number of youngsters in bird song recognition, and the chess captain chose to play against new members of his club in order to improve their skills ...

" There's a lad who comes with me now and he will be good. He sits and watches me and he's intelligent, which makes a difference. Also, he wants to learn and that makes a difference. He's been with me today and I find now I can discuss things with him about the way I fish. " (4)

" There's been quite a few mates I've trained on my engine over the years, but just when you get them to work well with you, to be useful and to really get the best from the engine, they leave and buy their own. " (19)

" I've always taken youngsters out with me so they get to know how to see the countryside and they get this love for nature. I can remember meeting various schoolchildren before breakfast and school and taking them off to different sites. Some of them still keep in touch - one's been on a Greenland expedition and another's just got a job with the Nature Conservancy Council. " (18)

" Every experienced player does feel that it's a responsibility. As an older player, I feel that when we've had new players in the club, I've got to play against them if I can. " (2)

In each of the above cases the novice received the individual attention of a highly skilled enthusiast who was concerned to impart the fundamental skills intrinsic to the activity; the newcomer could then engage in the self-directed development of his talents. This resembles very closely the notion of 'initiation' into the 'grammar' of the activity discussed in Chapter (1)

Aside from the three aspects discussed so far, independent learners engaged in a number of other miscellaneous activities which could be regarded as enlivening or facilitating in that the interest of outsiders was aroused as a result. The authorship activities discussed in Chapter (8) are examples of these, particularly where they generated a network of contacts amongst previously isolated individuals, with the author serving as a focal point. The mounting of slide shows for local schools, women's organisations, enthusiasts' groups and other bodies was also mentioned as was the encouraging of work

colleagues to engage in some kind of purposeful learning; the former amongst independent learners only, the latter amongst correspondence students as well as independent learners.

Animateur activities were, of course, accomplished without the benefit of professional help; that is, without the assistance of adult educationalists, public relations officers or managerial experts. The natural enthusiasm of the learners and the conveyance of the pleasures of learning to family and friends was such that outsiders were drawn to investigate the reasons for these obvious satisfactions. Whether professional assistance could result in a more effective transmission of these pleasures is debatable; whilst professional adult educators may be more skilled at the manipulation of communication channels (though the independent learners' success in managing local press and enthusiasts' magazines casts doubt even on this assumption), there would probably be a loss in terms of the conveying of a genuine excitement. Also, testimony to the pleasures derived from project activities which came from the learners themselves was likely to be granted much greater credibility than exhortations from professional educators as to the beneficial effects of learning. Such exhortations would have little influence on adults whose schooldays were recalled with distaste and mistrust and would be regarded as the expression of a vested interest by the educators concerned.

The notion of adult educators as 'enablers', 'facilitators' or 'animateurs' is, of course, at the heart of philosophies of community education as well as those of deschooling. Experimental community education schemes in, for example, Southampton (Fordham et al. 1979), Liverpool (Lovett 1971, 1975; Jackson 1970) and Northern Ireland (Lovett 1978) emphasise the role of adult educators in

facilitating personal and social change through drawing individuals together, aiding them in identifying shared problems, and encouraging the search for strategies of resolution. Instead of engaging in a didactic transmission of knowledge, the adult educator is charged with assisting groups and individuals to recognise and utilise their latent abilities. These experiments have at their centre the notion of community action and the promotion of social change through the concerted action of disadvantaged groups. This is a sense in which the work of the community educator is not paralleled in the current research, unless it be on a very small scale such as organising a campaign for new society premises. The impression gained from the interviews and from casual encounters with sample members was that professional adult educators could add little to many of the societal activities and that they might even have a negative effect through attempts at formalisation. This is not to argue for amateurism as a virtue, but rather to suggest that the individual personalities of the animateurs surveyed, and their evident energy and enthusiasm, were enough to prompt large numbers of non-enthusiasts to engage in learning.

The activities of the independent learners and their attempts to interest their fellows in their enthusiasms can be viewed almost as a submerged dimension of educational activity; encounters and exchanges were taking place without accreditation from, or recognition by, professional educators. It was as if the town in which most of the subjects lived contained a 'parallel' educational universe which existed alongside the officially designated provision sited in schools and colleges. This research thus supports Moore's declaration

that ...

" Below the surface of the public schools and universities, for every youth in the formal system there would seem to be several adults organising their own learning programs, setting their own objectives, pursuing the relevant materials, evaluating their progress, and in all these events seeking out what help they need. "

(Moore 1973;677)

The two systems would occasionally cross as when, for example, a society would hire a room in the local evening institute for an annual general meeting or special lecture. On the whole, though, the formal educational provision would be regarded as largely irrelevant to their needs.

In this regard, it is interesting to note the idea of the 'Invisible University' as propounded by Ronald Gross in his handbook for self-directed learners (Gross 1979). The 'Invisible University' is defined as ...

" the wealth of resources and opportunities available to the free learner. These ways to learn and to grow range from small grass roots groups in the women's movement, through 'learning exchanges' serving whole communities, to major national projects. The Invisible University includes libraries, museums, film, television, and organisations (social, professional, religious and commercial) that offer opportunities to learn on a more flexible, freer basis than colleges and universities usually do. " (Gross 1979;87)

The learners in the present survey did not consciously set out to create an alternative system; rather, their interests were aroused by 'amateur' enthusiasts instead of professional educators and such was the breadth and quality of the help they received that they simply felt there was no need to consult formal adult education provision.

In the most important British adult education report of recent years (chaired by Sir Lionel Russell), the importance of non-institutionalised adult learning was recognised. In their specification of needs for adult education the authors of the report included "Educative social activity, or the opportunity of self-discovery and self-expression in groups of common interest" (H.M.S.O. 1973; para. 58.2.3.). They advised that "the health and vitality of local communities may depend as much on the meeting of this need as upon any other single form of activity" and saw the adult education service as "utilising the total educative resources of society" (H.M.S.O. 1973; para.66). The justification for this integration of formal and non-formal education was as follows ...

" In every community there are great resources of knowledge skill and special expertise, and an adult education service of sufficient range and flexibility can be achieved only by mobilising these .. Similarly, in every community there are resources of voluntary energy, either latent or formed already into clubs and associations. These too are a resource of great value to be drawn into collaboration with the service. " (H.M.S.O. 1973; para.66)

The experiences of the independent learners would seem to suggest that any attempts at 'collaboration' be undertaken with great sensitivity. If the results of such collaboration were to be an increase in the ease of access to specialist materials and personnel by the club or society, then contact would be welcomed as improving the service the society was able to offer its members. If collaboration was equated with institutionalisation or the imposition of professionalism, however, the danger would be that the spirit of voluntaryism and reciprocity - the viewing of other enthusiasts as a common learning community - would be destroyed. It is the possible ways of supporting independent adult learning which will be discussed in the next section.

Supporting Independent Learning

The desirability of encouraging learners' ability independently to conceive and execute learning projects finds frequent expression in the literature of adult education. Thus, Gardner views the ultimate aim of instruction as being "to shift to the individual the burden of pursuing his own education" (Gardner 1963;12) and Dressell and Thompson declare that "the ability to carry on independent study alone or with peers should be a major goal of education" (Dressel & Thompson 1973;2). The increased frequency of these assertions has meant that "considerable attention is now being devoted to the whole process of helping adults of any age to become more self-directed in their learning experiences" (Dobbs 1976;42).

The individual able to learn independently will exhibit "motivation, curiosity, a sense of self-sufficiency and self-direction, ability

to think critically and creatively, awareness of resources and some ability to use them" (Dressell & Thompson 1973;7). In this view, the task of the teacher is to inculcate skills appropriate to independent learning; thus, "an essential objective of teachers in higher education is, firstly, that their students should learn to think and work independently" (Beard 1972;184). A similar conception of the teacher's role is offered by Bruner ...

" our aim as teachers is to give our student as firm a grasp of a subject as we can, and to make him as autonomous and self-propelled a thinker as we can - one who will go along on his own after formal schooling has ended. " (Bruner 1972;161)

The capacity to think independently is also seen as socially necessary by an American writer on individualised methods of instruction ...

" a vital, dynamic society needs people who dare to be different, people who will assert themselves, lead experiment, change .. The exploration of knowledge and the quickening pace of technological advances make it imperative that schools turn out citizens capable of independent action, self-direction, self-propulsion. "

(Keuscher 1970;10)

Self-education is deemed by Selby to have occurred only if the learner exhibits "a demonstrable ability to re-define one's role in relation to new situations and people" (Selby 1973;249) and Rogers regards the acceleration of social change as a reason for placing greater

emphasis on the development of self-directed learning ...

" The aim of education must be to develop individuals who are open to change. Only such persons can constructively meet the perplexities of a world in which problems spawn much faster than their answers. The goal of education must be to develop a society in which people can live more comfortably with change than with rigidity. " (Rogers 1969;304)

Independent learning is also held by a number of educationalists to be more meaningful to the learner than participation in a didactic form of classroom-based instruction. This view is associated, again, with Carl Rogers, who argues that ...

" The only learning which significantly influences behaviour is self-discovered, self-appropriated learning. Such self-discovered learning, truth that has been personally appropriated and assimilated in experience, cannot be directly communicated to another. " (Rogers 1960;69)

Support for this contention is provided by a review of experiments with 'T' (Training) groups, which concludes that ...

" changes in behaviour are most likely to be permanent if the process of changing is seen by the individual to be under his own control. The most effective change method is one in which the individual feels that he, and not some external agent of change, is responsible for the changes that occur. " (Kolb, Winter & Berlew 1968;455)

Knowles believes that independent learners are 'proactive' learners who take the initiative in learning and therefore learn more effectively than class based students; "They enter into learning more purposefully and with greater motivation. They also tend to retain and make use of what they learn better and longer than do the reactive learners" (Knowles 1975;14).

Given this catalogue of arguments for the social and educational desirability of encouraging independent learning, it might be wondered that any teachers still bother to use traditional classroom methods. In fact, as one of the advocates of teaching for independent learning points out, "it would seem that it is not the central aim of by any means all teachers; for were it so, courses and methods of assessment would give additional credit to the capacity for independent study and thinking" (Beard 1972;184).

Such innovatory approaches to higher education are hard to find and documented examples of such experiments are even rarer. In recent years, however, both Lancaster University and the North East London Polytechnic (NELP) have attempted to introduce independent study methods into their curriculum, at Lancaster as one part of a degree course and at NELP by offering Diploma in Higher Education or degree courses wholly through independent study*.

The experiences of both of these institutions demonstrate the effort required of teachers and students in independent study courses with regard to the negotiation of objectives and the evaluation of student progress. In particular, the sense of isolation such students might

* For descriptions of the origins of the NELP experiment see Robbins (1977) and Burgess (1977;147).

experience is well summarised thus ...

" There's no one to talk to about what you've done on this course .. (on other sorts of courses) if you've all got to write an essay or something, you can talk about it; if you've all been to a lecture, you can talk about it and exchange ideas. "

" One thing is, there's no cohesion because there's no common aim whatsoever. It's very difficult to get people together to talk about anything because they think it's not relevant to what they're doing or I think "It's not relevant to what I'm doing" ... Therefore it's a very lonely type of course - this can be very depressing. You get no feedback on anything; you can't judge your work or anyone else's. "

(Percy & Ramsden 1980;21)

It has already been pointed out, however, that the students in the present study were not aware of their participating in a radical educational alternative. They did not consciously seek to pursue their learning only through non-institutionalised means and neither did they advance arguments as to the innate superiority of their mode of learning. Formal adult education institutions had little to offer in the way of specialised instruction or assistance in their field of knowledge and were, therefore, ignored. The independent learners were not opposed to group instruction 'per. se' as the attendance of some of them at monthly society lectures demonstrated. Because they felt at ease with fellow enthusiasts, because these colleagues shared common concerns and spoke a common language and because

problems could be resolved through the consultation of peers, books, or the relevant Royal Society, the idea of attendance at courses never occurred.

If the members of the sample were quite satisfied with their learning why, it might be asked, should public services be concerned with supporting such learning? The answer to this is twofold; firstly, as Chapter (3) revealed, the independent learners were all successful in that their efforts had brought them recognition from fellow enthusiasts. It could be argued, however, that this success was achieved in spite of, rather than because of, their lack of involvement with the formal education system; that they were the exceptions rather than the rule who possessed sufficient determination and initiative to set their objectives and locate their resources entirely without the assistance of professional educators. If, as Percy and Ramsden point out with regard to the Lancaster and NELP experiments, "however motivated or experienced a student might be, a programme of independent study can be fraught with unpredictable problems and inevitable anxieties" (Percy & Ramsden 1980;58) then those learners who lack the institutional support of a School of Independent Study are likely to experience such anxieties to an even greater degree. For the reasons discussed in Chapter (3), it is difficult to assess the numbers of individuals who begin but do not continue an independent learning project *. However, initiatives such as the Open University did not wait until an undeniable market had been established for their wares and any attempts by public services to

* Evidence from studies of Open University pass rates shows that unqualified candidates are much less likely to succeed in their foundation courses than are those students who possess normal

encourage independent adult learning must rest on an act of faith, in particular a belief that many more individuals discontinue their learning activities because of difficulties encountered early on in the project than achieve a public recognition of their success. The authors of the Alexander Report on Scottish adult education certainly believed a body of such adults existed and argued the case for their being deserving of greater public support ...

" There are many adults in all walks of life who have acquired the capacity to maintain the process of self-education through reading and discussion, through selective viewing and listening through travel and by many other means, without the need to participate in any form of organised educational programmes .. It is even more important that the many adults who feel the need to take up self-education but lack the confidence to make necessary contacts be given all practicable direct encouragement and assistance to do so. " (H.M.S.O. 1975; 49)

Secondly, because independent learners at present see little point in using services which, as far as they are concerned, have no relevant specialist instruction or materials to offer, this does not mean that the provision of such assistance is by definition impossible. The botanist's and philosopher's attendance at Extra-Mural lectures, the organic gardener's development of a link with his local adult education centre and the examples of library usage contained in Chapter (7) show that independent learners will use the

* (contd.) entrance requirements (Jones & Williams 1979;20, McKintosh 1976;269)

formal systems if they are seen as appropriate.

Independent Learning and Public Libraries

The community resource which is perhaps the most obvious target for adaptation as a medium through which to assist independent learners is the public library. As a survey of research into the functions of libraries points out ...

" the public library is known to be more frequently visited by a wider range of people than adult education centres and also (that) it is viewed as a neutral area in society and therefore essential in any plan of lifelong learning. " (Dadswell 1978;7)

In particular ...

" Several writers agree that the public library is the type of institution which attracts and is more accessible to those people who would feel disadvantaged in relation to formal higher education or adult education institutions. "

(Dadswell 1978;7)

The American Commission on Non-Traditional Study decided that ...

" Because it was patently impossible for the Commission to explore in depth every type of alternate approach, it chose out of several equally worthy of attention only one to discuss in detail - the public library. "

(Gould 1973;82)

One of its chief recommendations was that "The public library should

be strengthened to become a far more powerful instrument for non-traditional education than is now the case" (Gould 1973;44). The same year the Russell Report urged a greater co-operation between adult education centres and local libraries and stated that "as well as stock holders such (central) libraries should be bibliographical and advisory centres" (H.M.S.O. 1973;para.351) but it did not explore the role of individual library personnel in supporting independent adult learning.

It is in America that experiments in the facilitation of independent learning by public libraries have received the most serious implementation. In 1972 the Fund for Humanities organised a project supported by ten public libraries in which "the aim was to promote and offer a service of individualised information, advice, guidance and programming for would-be adult learners" (Stock 1978;46). This was the basis of the 1975 Adult Independent Learning Project in which nine large public libraries established, as a pilot project, a Learners' Advisory Service for "self-directed adults who wished to study independently outside the traditional educational system" (Dale 1979;85). Here, the role of the librarian was supportive rather than directive; "The responsibility for learning lies with the learner; the librarian acts as adviser and facilitator and provides support by means of information" (Dale 1979;85). In the attempt to assist learning the librarian was charged with two functions ...

"the librarian must a) find out precisely what the learner wants to learn and then b) in consultation with the learner, develop a plan to help the learner achieve his/her goal. " (Dale 1979;85)

During the period of the project (approximately one year) 934 adults embarked on a total of 969 learning projects and thousands more contacted the Advisory Service but did not fall into the category of "individuals using the services of a learners' adviser to determine learning needs and develop a plan" (Dale 1979;86).

Of the two functions outlined above, the first has little relevance in the present study in that many sample members could not have specified precisely what they wished to learn at the outset of their project. The second function does, however, offer one model for consideration as to the possible role of libraries in facilitating independent learning. The librarian assists in the formulation of learning goals and in the acquisition of techniques of retrieving information. Thus, he is taken "from a custodial task with books to a counselling yet not quite a tutorial relationship" (Luckham 1978;342). This development is in contrast to the trend, noted in the report of the Venables Committee on Continuing Education, for Educational Advisory Services which link prospective learners to post-secondary educational opportunities to be situated in local libraries (The Open University 1976;102). Here, the business of the Advisory Service is to assist those adults who wish to re-enter the educational system but lack knowledge of the opportunities available. The service adopts a 'Second-Chance' function and the counsellor discussed with his clients the alternative points of entry into further and higher education and the ways in which career or personal goals can be accommodated in a course of training.

In the context of the present study the independent learners could have benefitted from some assistance in learning how to manage

library resources - how to understand classification systems and use inter-library loan arrangements - but the 'Second-Chance' function of Advisory Services would have had little relevance to their learning efforts. Instruction in the techniques of retrieving information is, of course, part of the librarian's duties at the present time and most libraries have an 'Enquiries' desk staffed by someone willing to spend time locating relevant texts for interested enquirers. Because of staff costs, however, it is impractical for librarians to spend any great length of time with one individual unless that individual has a very clear idea of his particular need. The adult who wishes to know 'where the books on fishing are' and who is a novice in that field will probably be left to himself to judge the range of books available and to select those best suited to a beginner.

There is a clear role here for one member of the library staff to be concerned with assisting novices in a particular field of interest (or, indeed, newcomers to library usage) to learn how to choose the text best suited to their requirements, how to judge the level at which a book is written, how to read books selectively so that only information relevant to the task in hand is extracted, and how to find out what other, more suitable, texts are available. Depending on the staff available, this advisor could be permanently on hand to deal with referrals from the 'Enquiries' desk. Alternatively, he or she could advertise the 'New Interests' surgeries to be held at particular times or the enquirer could make an appointment to see the advisor at a later time. Were only one member of staff available to service several libraries, he or she could become a peripatetic advisor, rather in the manner of mobile libraries, agreeing to be at different libraries at the same time each week.

The aforementioned scheme would be expensive to implement since only a marginal increase in library usage would result from the efforts of the advisor. A less expensive way in which libraries could assist independent learners, particularly beginners, would be to take the responsibility for developing local skill-exchanges *. In these exchanges novices who wished to learn a particular skill would be able to contact people who had developed that skill and who would be prepared to instruct others in its acquisition. It may even be the case that the library need offer only accommodation for such a venture and that the compilation of a directory of skill models and the matching of clients and teachers would be undertaken by a volunteer. Libraries already serve something of this function through their provision of a well placed bulletin board on which local societies can advertise forthcoming events and the address of their society secretary. Thus, one way for a newcomer to a field of interest to come to terms with that field would be to contact the local enthusiasts' society.

As Chapter (14) has noted, however, there will be individuals who feel unsure about approaching a society (such as the chess captain and the budgerigar breeder), or who reject the idea of society membership (such as the fitness enthusiast), or who simply prefer to work in isolation (such as the botanist and aquarist). If these individuals could be referred to a single person who was an acknowledged expert in his field, and who had declared himself ready

* For a description of a number of skill-exchanges see Gross (1977;99)

to assist interested beginners, there would be less danger of their losing interest because of the difficulty of understanding the 'grammar' of their new activity. The directory of skill models could be sited in the library and take the form of a card index or loose leaf folder containing the names and addresses of persons willing to assist beginners in their particular specialism. Users of the exchange would simply be handed the directory, or, if the staff were available, could discuss their request with the librarian. This arrangement would then satisfy Illich's requirement that "the operation of a skill exchange would depend on the existence of agencies which would facilitate the development of directory information and assure its free and inexpensive use" (Illich 1971;92).

Much of the independent learning in this survey was, however, undertaken without the benefit of individualised instruction of this nature. Indeed, were an enthusiast to place himself entirely in the hands of an expert and to attribute to him the responsibility for developing his (the novice's) skills, this would contradict the basic requirement of independent learning, that the overall direction of his efforts be the responsibility of the learner. To use a skill exchange in the context of an independent learning project, the learner would have to enter his contract with the relevant expert with a clear idea of the limited capabilities he wished to develop, and a sense of their place within the overall project. To such an independent learner, the danger of using a skill exchange would be that of developing a relationship of total dependence on the expert who would then be charged with setting the learner's goals and assessing his progress.

concurrent with Illich's advocacy of skill exchanges is his notion of 'peer matching' which lets "each person specify the activity for which he sought a peer" (Illich 1971;93). This idea is closer to the spirit of independent learning than that of skill exchanges in that the participants are, by definition of equal status. In fact, as Chapter (14) has recorded, independent learners often needed no formally established peer matching service, they merely contacted their local enthusiasts' society. Illich himself acknowledges this; "a good chess player is always glad to find a close match and one novice to find another. Clubs serve their purpose" (Illich 1971; 94). Any peer matching service established under the aegis of the local library, therefore, would be directed at those individuals for whom no appropriate society existed. The library would record the details of enthusiasts who wished to meet others engaged in their field of activity and would make this information available to interested enquirers. These enthusiasts could, of course, use the 'small-ad' columns of local papers or national enthusiasts' magazines to advertise for like minded partners; the rabbit breeder's founding of a National Otter Rex Club was undertaken through an advertisement in 'Fur and Feather'. The peer matching service of a local library would, however, be permanently on offer and therefore more likely to result in a successful contact than a 'one-off' advertisement in the local or national press, particularly if a beginner was trying to contact other novices. As with the skill exchange, the service would involve minimal expense, merely occasional publicity designed to attract participants into the service and to advertise its presence locally, and someone to update the directory and hand it over to interested enquirers.

In all three of the aforementioned schemes - the Learners'/New Interests advisor, the skill exchange and the peer matching service - the library is respecting the spirit of independent learning in that the responsibility for the initiation and execution of the learning activity rests with the individual learner. There is no attempt to absorb the learner into the formal education system and no establishing of a scheme of accreditation. Assistance is available but, when requested, offered without entailing obligations on the part of the learner who remains free to ignore the advisor's suggestions, to reject any skill model offered, and to withdraw from a peer matching relationship.

Final Comment

It is, perhaps, as well to note that this research was not undertaken with a view to suggesting practical alterations in the form of public adult education provision. Some teachers would no doubt feel threatened by the revelation of a large amount of independent learning within their communities and would seek to accommodate such activity within the formal adult education system. Others would simply refuse to acknowledge that learning activities characterised by such initiative and persistence could take place in the absence of 'professional' supervision. It is to this latter group that the contents of this study are directed; in one small town it has been shown that a number of individuals have achieved high levels of expertise (judged by the acclaim received from their peers) without joining adult education classes or attending courses of instruction. They have used enthusiasts' groups to good educational effect, employed a number of

different learning methods in the development of their knowledge, and prompted others to engage in similar activities. As their appreciation of their field of interest has developed, they have evolved evaluative criteria and learned to set intermediate (and sometimes final) learning goals. They have learned to use a range of human and non-human resources and become adept at resolving problems which occurred during the execution of their projects.

Recognition of the extent of this learning does not, from the researcher's viewpoint, necessarily imply a greater involvement in its supervision by professional educators. It has been the concern of this research to indicate the possible extent of independent learning activity in our society, to demonstrate the strength of the learners' commitment, and to explore the ways in which such learning occurred. If the recognition of the validity and importance of this learning leads to the sensitive provision of support by the formal education system, then the research will have helped to ease the strains besetting those individuals who attempt an independent exploration of a new subject area or field of interest. The evidence of this study suggests, however, that whether or not such support is forthcoming, the efforts of adults to take on the challenge of independent learning, in ignorance of the educational establishment, will continue.

APPENDIX (1) INTERVIEW REPORT

PROJECT : RABBIT BREEDING

Interview Date : 20th March 1979

ORIGINS OF INTEREST

Three stages in the development of her interest:-

- (i) Childhood - spent 5 years in her childhood breeding, largely a result of father's influence. Father a chinchilla breeder and then, after attending a rabbit show in Malvern, began to breed rabbits. Six months later subject began breeding and joined Malvern Rabbit club, serving as juvenile on committee.
- (ii) Adolescence - stopped temporarily due to social activities
- (iii) Adulthood - after marrying and starting a family resumed her hobby. Converted her husband daughter to hobby - a 'good family hobby'

"It's a good family hobby and I've converted my husband and daughter. They're both in the club; my husband's a steward with me at the Three Counties show and my daughter likes rabbits and hamsters."

LEARNING ACTIVITY

Learning Goals - competitions as intermediate learning goals

Final Aim - seen in competitive terms; i.e. to win one or two 'Five Star' shows. Such success acts as reinforcement...

"I want to win one or two of the 'Five Star' shows, the ones that are held at Alexandra Palace and Doncaster racecourse with the 'Best of Rabbits' category. I did win the 'Best of Otter Rex' category at the Alexandra Palace and that was an incredible, a terrific feeling."

Importance of Competition

- (i) Very important personally for her to do well. Upset if she feels she's been robbed (some odd decisions are made) though not if beaten by better rabbits. An unbelievable feeling to win a big show. "It's very, very important personally for me to do well. I get very upset if I feel I've been robbed and sometimes some very odd decisions are made. It's not that I mind if I know I've been beaten by better rabbits .. but if I think it's unfair, it really affects me. But then it's an absolutely unbelievable feeling to win a big show."
- (ii) Competition determines breeding activities - which rabbits are kept (though one or two kept out of sentiment e.g. original doe, first big champion.).. Whatever rabbits I decide to keep it's totally because they're going to help me in competitions. Your breeding is really based on how you're going to approach a show. I do keep one or two rabbits out of sentiment, I suppose - I've got my original doe and my first ever big champion. But, generally speaking, the ones you keep are the ones with the features you want."

(iii) Competition participation means you don't share certain information (e.g. curing sore hocks)...

"I think taking part in competitions means you don't share certain bits of information with others. For instance, if you get something like a cure for sore hocks, that means you'll be in with a much better chance of doing well - so you wouldn't spread that around."

(iv) Financially remunerative? - No. On a good day just clears entry fee but with food bills and entry fees it means her hobby costs her money.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Importance of other breeders - breeders, competitors and society members are best sources of knowledge. Breeders are especially useful and she often consults a Billericay breeder who was the first to bring the breed into the country and is the most knowledgeable.

Importance of oral transmission of knowledge.

'Fur and Feather' - vitally important information source for enthusiasts. Show dates, judges, diaries of events, correspondence.

"'Fur and Feather' really is a must because it's the main source of all the show dates and judges. There's a diary of events and anyone who wants to start a new breed writes to the correspondence columns to let other people know

"and to see if anyone else is interested. I wrote to 'Fur and Feather' suggesting a national Otter Rex Club and several people got in touch, so we all met at the Alexandra Palace show ... it's the most important magazine for breeders."

Books - owns very few. Thinks pet books are misleading and even sometimes wrong.

"I don't have a lot of books because there's very few that are any good. Sometimes they're just misleading, but sometimes they're really wrong."

SOCIETY ACTIVITIES

1. Importance of Society Membership - first step in breeding is to join a club as this is necessary focus of interest. Most enthusiasts belong to several clubs - Malvern, Kidderminster, Worcester, Hereford, Cradley Heath. Second step is to join national club of the breed in which you're interested so you can meet new breeders to share information ..

"Your first step in breeding is to join a club which is necessary because the shows are your main interest. Most enthusiasts are members of several clubs."

2. Secretary of National Otter Rex Club

(1) Formation - after writing to 'Fur and Feather' suggesting a national club, several others responded and they all met at the Alexandra Palace national show. Began with twenty members but now over fifty and still growing, with members from all over country - Billericay, Chelmsford, Doncaster, Carnforth. Holds three shows a year.

(ii) Purpose of club - to promote the Otter Rex breed and reach breeding perfection. Promotional activity seen as a crusade ...

"The Rex really had no-one pushing them in this country so I was determined to get them known. They needed breeders."

Overall function to keep breed to the fore and to improve breeding standards.

(iii) Club Activities - mounting three shows per year
- developing social links between enthusiasts she has known twenty years and the two families are now very close friends.

(iv) Perception of other enthusiasts as friendly ...

"Rabbit people are all friendly people"

SPOUSE SUPPORT

Husband shares her hobby, really a joint activity. He spends an hour every night feeding the rabbits and she gives the afternoon feed and cleans out the hutches once a week - division of duties. Both stewards at Three Counties show.

ANIMATEUR

1. Writes regularly to 'Fur and Feather' to try to encourage new breeders - a crusade to develop and strengthen the breed.

2. Functions as stock supplier and link between beginners who are looking for new Otter Rex stock to start up their own breeding activities and those breeders with surplus rabbits. Many requests for information from people outside national club as well as members...

"There's a lot of people from outside the club as well as from the inside who get in touch, especially beginners who're starting up their own breeding with the Rex. They're pretty difficult to get hold of because they're a new breed, so I'm always being asked if I can find rabbits for them. It means I'm a link between those people that I know have rabbits to spare and those who don't know how to find them."

EVALUATION

1. Self-Assessment - "one of the best of the younger Otter Rex breeders"

2. Objective Index of Breeding Success in Survival Rate of Rabbits...

"This year's been a good one in health terms, we've done well. If you don't keep your huts ventilated, but at the same time know how to keep out draughts, and cold, then you can lose a lot of rabbits. It's not unknown for someone to lose twenty to thirty at one time. I only lost one last year and I've just lost one this year."

3. Objective Index of Expertise in recognition by peers - elected by local club to be a member of their panel of judges; husband also elected to judge status.

PROBLEMS

1. Financially a very expensive hobby - had to choose between smoking and breeding rabbits...

"It really is a very expensive hobby and I really had to choose between smoking and rabbit breeding; one had to go because I couldn't afford both. In the end I chose rabbits because I could live without cigarettes but I couldn't live without my rabbits."

Limits their stud to a few superb rabbits to keep down expense.

2. Minor Health Problems - infectious running eyes
- bugs picked up at shows

Illness generally prevented by keeping huts well ventilated but without draughts since these can kill more than cold.

Source of Aid in Difficulties - vets aren't too good, therefore turns to older and wiser enthusiasts (both already mentioned) - J. in Billericay and Kidderminster friend she's known since childhood..

"If I got into real difficulties I'd go to J who really knows all there is to know about the breed because he started it. Or I'd ring M., I've known him since childhood."

The following extract comes from the interview with the tropical fish enthusiast (aquarist). This portion of the interview was chosen because it covers many of the categories which figure in the completed thesis; evaluation, attitudes to learning, learning methods, problem-solving, 'animateur' activity and learning groups.

"I lived on my own until I was married, from when I was about 15 years old. I didn't have other people to do things for me, so I just got used to planning everything myself not have to go to somebody else to help sort out. Nobody, in that sense - and this is the beauty of our hobby - it doesn't matter how long you kept fish, you'll never know everything there is to know about them. There are new species appearing that are new to the Natural History museum, new plants, new equipment, new chemicals, new cures, new foods - the lot. It's a continual process of learning, the hobby. In fact if I did get to a stage where I couldn't learn anything else, I think I'd pack it in. I'd be bored to tears.

. ATT.

Limitless
vista of
knowledge

I kept marine fish at one time, I was the first one in Worcestershire to keep them and while I was having trouble with them - losing them with disease, and not knowing what the disease was, and why they died, and how I could stop them getting it - I was loving it,

PROBLEMS

as
challenge

"it was great! Then I was given a book by an author named Risley called 'The Natural System' and he explained how he'd kept marine fish in a natural system without any filtration or aeration or anything, just heat. Well, I started out again with the idea of a completely natural system myself and it took eighteen months before I had the courage to turn off the filters and, 'Lo and Behold', they survived. And two years later I still had exactly the same fish. And with marine fish you need so much more surface area per fish and with the cost of them - the cheapest fish in the tank when I got rid of them was around £12.50 - I got so fed up with seeing the same faces night after night, I sold them. The marine hobby at that time had stagnated - there were no new types of fish or no new equipment coming along on to the market and the price was so high that I couldn't afford to set up a new tank to carry on the marine hobby - so I got rid of the lot and went back to my tropical fish. Quite a few people in Malvern are now keeping marine fish, maybe five of them and I think my knowledge has gone into setting up every one of their tanks. I set up four of them for them and gave them all the knowledge I'd learned from my four years in marine keeping. And then one of them helped one of his mates set up a tank on the same system, although none of them have had the guts to go completely natural without any filtration or anything.

Eg. of problem solving

ANIMATEUR developing pool of helpers

Question : Do you get a lot of people coming to ask you for help like that?

Yes. It's not so bad now but about eighteen months or two ANIMATEUR years ago I doubt if a week went by without somebody knocking on the door with a load of fish in a bottle or a bag - 'Could I come over they were in desperate trouble?' It's not so much nowadays because there are three or four member of the society who are reasonably knowledgeable and who live near them, so they can just go round and knock on their door instead of coming to see me. I don't mind, but the doorbell just never stopped ringing. As long as some fish are living happier because of my visit, that's all that worries me. This is why I formed the society, so that fish in people's houses didn't just exist, but they actually lived and enjoyed living.

Question : So you actually formed it yourself, you founded it?

Yes, eight or nine years ago. I went to a local society meeting of some kind and a fellow came from Bishop's Formation of Society Cleeve to talk about marine fish and the idea of a local society was mooted by the speaker. The chairman, Mr. C., said we could use the college premises if anyone would like to form a society so I shot round to my mates who I knew were keeping fish and said 'How about it?' They said 'Yes' so we got together, went up to the college and they gave us a room. We started off with seven original members and it built up to twenty and got too big for the room so we moved down to the cricket club. It went up to thirty and got too big for that so we moved up to St. Joseph's Hall and it's still going great guns. I was chairman, secretary, treasurer,

"vice-chairman, all rolled into one for the first four years. I was determined that I was going to make this society a success and it has been. We have our own open show now and this last year we had well over three hundred entries and we've got £100 in the Building Society and about £50 or £60 in the bank, so we're on a fairly firm footing now. I'm hoping that in about five to ten years we'll have enough money to have our own headquarters - buy a massive pre-fabricated building, rent some ground off some body and set it up ourselves. Then we can have all our open shows and everything without any expense.

Evidence of
determination

Planning
of
club goals

Question : You said on the phone that you'd tried to give it up a couple of times. Why was that - expense?

No, it was when I was moving. When we first came to Malvern we had a flat and I thought I'd sell all my fish and we'd have a dog instead. I sold them all up and we bought a rough collie. We were only there a month before getting another fish tank! Then we moved again and I gave it up again and lasted six weeks that time. But it's like cigarettes, it's a hell of a job to give it up. Fair enough, you've got television when you're relaxing in the evening - average entertainment, enjoyable I suppose - but you miss having something living. Even after all these years I still spend as much time watching them as I do watching T.V. in the evenings.

Abortive
attempt to
give up
interest

Maintenance
of
enthusiasm

Question : I suppose you hit a lot of problems when you first got the marine fish?

Yes. When I first started keeping marine, it cost me and my wife a fortune in replacing stock. When you see a marine fish

"in the retailer's shop, to all intents and purposes they're perfectly healthy. But when you go to buy a fish you should always ask if it's feeding. This is the only thing you can go by. If a fish doesn't feed in a shop then one just doesn't buy it. But, at the same time, a fish can be feeding reasonably well but still be suffering from being caught when shocked by explosives. So you get it for £10 to £15, you get it home and carefully look after it but if it's caught by poison or shock the chances of it surviving more than two or three months are pretty remote. So you've got to find out who are the wholesalers the retailers are dealing with, and the exporters the wholesaler deals with, and then the methods the exporter was using to catch the fish - explosions, shocks etc. It takes a long while and you've got to know friends who are in the hobby or in the business. You generally find that the shops which stock fish caught by shock or charges are the cheapest ones.

L.A.

Developin
know. of
retail/
wholesale
circuit
reliabili
of shops

I was in one retailers one day and a girl was being served who said her fish had got whitespot in her newly set-up tank. I heard the shopkeeper say 'Leave it a week and if you've still got it come back and I'll give you some treatment for it'. Now, although whitespot is a disease, you can cure it easily in forty-eight hours, but if it's left that long it can infect the stock so you lose every one. Anyway I caught her and told her to come round and I'd give her some whitespot cure. I'd rather give the stuff away than see someone who's new in the hobby being fleeced like that. Retailers can set up shop that know really nothing about fish - I think I've forgotten

"more than he's ever likely to learn. That girl is now a member of our society. This is the biggest problem we have to face; about fifty per cent of retailers are there as a job, to make money, and they couldn't care less about the customer once he's gone out of the door. It's up to societies like us to try and reduce the trouble that new enthusiasts are going to have because of ignorance behind the counter.

Missionary purpose of Society strongly defined

Question : What happens when you do hit a problem - who do you turn to, how do you solve it?

Well, in the past if I couldn't find the answer in a book, then I'd ring up the monthly magazine 'Aquarist and Pondkeeper', or if it was a disease problem, I'd ring up Mr. C. of Birmingham University. If it's just a general tropical question like an unidentified fish or problems with plants, then I'd ring up the magazine and have a chat with a couple of experts there. If they couldn't help me, or even Mr. C. with the disease, then it was a case of a letter to the Natural History Museum or the Zoological Society of London. But not many people know that the museum or society can give you all the information you need regarding fish. It's only that if I go to a place that keeps tropical fish, like the London Zoo, then I know they've got the brains to maintain the aquarium. And who better to approach than the people who are in the public sector? And the Natural History museum has got to be the best as far as identifying fish are concerned because they've got specimens of every fish in the world. If they haven't got the actual

Problems - resolution
(i)
(ii)
(iii)
(iv)

body then they've got X-rays of it. So you don't need to go any further than those two.

I'm fairly knowledgeable, but I might come up against something that I'm at a loss for whereas somebody else in the Malvern or Worcester area would know the answer just like that. It's a hobby you can't know everything about, it's like all of nature; especially when you take nature out of its natural environment and set up a controlled eco-system like that. Nature just doesn't follow the rules, let's put it that way. There's two fish in my tank now I've been trying to identify for about three years now. I suppose I shall have to wait for one of them to die and send it down to London to find out what it was!

EVAL.
Self-
assessment

ATT.
limitless
vista

Question : Could you become knowledgeable without belonging to a society or do you think all enthusiasts tend to need to belong to societies?

You could become reasonably knowledgeable, yes, but you don't find out the more difficult parts of the hobby without having several friends - not necessarily a society - where you pool information and resources.

L.GPS
- membership
as condition
of learning?

No one person can acquire all the information themselves - after the number of years I've been in the hobby, I still have to go to people in our society.

I've got a fair number of books and I get three monthly magazines because I get one and two of my mates get two

SOURCES
- Mags

others so we get access to three magazines for the price of one between us. There's the 'Aquarist and Pondkeeper', the 'Petfish Monthly' and 'Tropical Fish Hobbyist' which is an American magazine. The TFH is edited by the world's top ichtheologist, Herbert Axlerod - he's had fish named after him that he was the first to discover and introduce to the Natural History Museum in London. I don't keep his books because I disagree with a lot of his theories on tropical fish keeping. I didn't at first, I don't suppose I read anything else but Axlerod and another American named Winkler, but after a few years you start to realise that their idea of fish keeping clashes with yours, anybody who's a thinking person anyway. So now I keep books of just general authors.

EVAL
Critical
re.expert
(Subjecti
Index)

Comment : I suppose you get more confident about your own abilities and your own knowledge to be able to question what they say.

Question : How skilled do you think you are compared to most people in the hobby?

It's a difficult answer really. But as far as plants are concerned, let's put it that way, there's only maybe two or three in the rest of the country who are better at growing or keeping plants, or who have knowledge about the individual varieties and who could name them any better than I can. As far as keeping fish is concerned, most of the fish

EVAL
- self
assessment

in my tank have been there five or six years which is as good
if not better, than maybe ninety per cent of the hobby. But
this is what I've aimed for as I said - to have a hobby that
I can enjoy, and, if they do die, it doesn't cost me a lot
to replace. To be able to keep them as long as they normally
would in the wild. And the fish in my tank are probably
living longer than they normally would in the wild."

Objective
Index
- surviv.
rate &
life span
of fish
(Quantitative)

APPENDIX (3) Provisional Interview Schedule

Questions to be asked selected from this schedule are a support to the interviewer. Where possible, interviews should encourage spontaneous interviewee comment and new questions should be based on previous responses.

ORIGINS OF LEARNING

Could you say something about the beginnings of your interest - When/Why?
Was any one person particularly helpful in those early stages?
Have either of your parents an interest in this area?
If so, do you think they tried to develop your interest?
Did you think your learning would be of any help in your job/career?

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Do you regularly read any magazines or journals on ...?
Do you belong to the public library?
Ever taken out books on ...?
Ever asked for help from an assistant to find out some information on...?
Do you regularly watch or listen to any programmes dealing with...?
If so, which programmes?
If I asked you to name one source of information or help that had been more important than any other, what would you say that was?
Have you ever been to a local college or school for help with...?
If so, what kind of a reception did you get?
Who was the last person to whom you talked about...?
In what connection?
Do you regularly talk to this person about...?

CONTACTS WITH FELLOW ENTHUSIASTS

Do you have any kind of contact with others who share your interest?

Are any of your work colleagues interested in...?

Do you belong to any clubs or societies related to your interest?

STRUCTURE OF LEARNING ACTIVITY/PLANNING

Do you try and plan ahead at all?

If so, can you give me any examples of things you've aimed at in the past?

Have you learned anything new recently?

If so, how did this come about? Was it deliberate or accidental?

Do you have an idea of some kind of final towards which you're working?

Where do you buy your books/equipment for...?

How do you decide which is the best buy - books, magazines, friend, sales assistant, own judgement?

ANIMATEURS

Has anyone ever asked you for help with...?

What kind of help were you able to give?

Do you see yourself as spreading the word about your interest?

Or introducing people to it - trying to get them to share your enthusiasm?

EVALUATION

How do you know when you've really learned a skill/understood an idea?

Do you keep in mind any kind of yardstick against which your progress can be measured?

If I asked you to tell me how you'd decide that you'd finally learned all you could about ... what would you say?

When did you feel you'd become an expert in this field?

Was there any point at which you felt 'Now, I'm really getting to grips with this?'

How do you think you compare with other people who share your interest - in terms of your knowledge and skill?

SELF-PERCEPTION

Do you think of yourself as a resourceful or determined kind of person?

What kind of person would you say you were?

Do you think other people think of you in the same way?

SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

Did you get any help from school in guiding your interest?

Did you enjoy your schooldays?

Do you feel that by becoming interested in ... you're filling any kind of gap in your education, or your previous life?

SPOUSE/FAMILIAL ATTITUDE

How does your husband/wife view your interest?

Has your husband/wife ever been involved in your project?

Do your children ever talk to you about ... ?

Do you think they'll take it up in the future?

Do you ever feel worried about the amount of time you spend in ... ?

PROBLEMS

In your hobby/interest, do you often come across a particular topic you find it difficult to understand or a skill you find difficult to master?

How do you try and get over this difficulty?

What are the main problems you've found in following your interest alone?

Would you recommend your way of learning to other people?

What would you say were the advantages of learning independently - if any?

I expect there are times when you feel fed up or depressed with the lack of progress you're making - how do you get over these times?

Do you get much new knowledge from solving problems?

APPENDIX (4) DATASHEET

Project : Tropical Fish Breeding (Aquarist)

Interview Date : 12th June 1978

ORIGINS OF LEARNING

1. Spouse encouragement
2. Supplementary chance reasons - interest fired by birth of fish soon after tank set up
 - availability of shops and cheap equipment (London)

LEARNING ACTIVITY

- | | |
|--------------------------|--|
| Attitude to learning | - engaged in continuous learning project/
constant updating of knowledge |
| | - breadth of interest: limitless vista of
knowledge/continual interest and surprise |
| Learning Methods | - role of chance acquisition of fish in
directing search for knowledge |
| | - problem-solving as enjoyable challenge;
intermediate goals |
| Learning Goals | - organisation and planning prominent - for
development of society - for preparation
of lectures |
| Learning Skills employed | - importance of systematic investigation |
| | - use of microscope for detailed observation |
| Final Aim | - specified in terms of show success |

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Personal library

Magazines - 'Aquarist & Pondkeeper', 'Petfish Monthly',
'Tropical Fish Hobbyist'
Has contributed to 'Aquarist & Pondkeeper'
(under pseudonym)

EVALUATION

Self-Assessment - generally fairly knowledgeable
- in most knowledgeable two or three nationally
re aquarium plants
- better than 90% of hobbyists re fish-keeping
- locally the most knowledgeable

Objective Index - contest success: a pleasure and therefore a
reinforcement

Subjective Index - development of critical attitudes regarding the
pronouncements of experts as his own knowledge
and confidence develops

PEER CONTACTS

General need for peer assistance in solving problems and gaining
knowledge.

(i) Society membership

(ii) Particular individuals - Birmingham University researcher
- enthusiast expert on plants

ANIMATEUR

1. Talks on filtration and plants to societies across country
2. Founder and current secretary of local society - missionary zeal
to improve the lot of fish and prevent newcomers being cheated by
shops
3. Stimulus to local enthusiasts and resource consultant

PROBLEMS

A source of enjoyment; pleasurable challenge

Minor problems of finance - plant and equipment costs

Pattern of Resolution - consult personal library)

- ring magazine) for identification
- Birmingham researcher) of unknown fish
- National museum)

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