

LEARNING LIVES SUMMATIVE WORKING PAPER NO. 1

LEARNING THROUGH LIFE

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Introduction

This Summative Working Paper develops one major theme in the Learning Lives research, namely, the nature and significance of learning through life, and the relationships between such learning and identity and agency. The paper also presents 13 stories drawn from the Leeds sample in the project. That sample was intentionally skewed, in ways that balanced foci in the other qualitative research samples. In Leeds, we focused mainly on the lives of older people, and on people who were actively engaged in either formal education or formal adult guidance provision at the time when our fieldwork started. (The Brighton sample focused on migrants; Exeter on family and community; and Stirling upon employment.)

We have written elsewhere about some of the issues, such as retirement (Hodkinson et al., in press) and engagement with formal education (Hodkinson et al., 2005) that differentiate the Leeds sample from some of the people in the other sample groups. Here, we concentrate on working with the Leeds data to explore issues about learning through life that concern all the Learning Lives subjects, and indeed, the lives of all people.

The working paper begins with an examination of formal and informal learning, exploring the range of learning found in peoples' lives. This section of the paper shows that informal learning is ubiquitous in people's lives, that formal learning can be highly significant for some people at some times, and that when people engage in formal learning, this is normally integrated with other informal learning. We go on to argue that though learning is ubiquitous in people's lives, that learning varies enormously in its significance.

This is followed, in section two, by a detailed consideration of the relationships between continuity and change in relation to people's learning. To do this, we analyse learning, continuity and change in routine periods in a person's life, and then do the same for turning points in those lives, where one or more life changing events results in significant shifts in circumstances and/or identity. We show that learning is present through both types of period.

Having explored the nature of learning, we next turn to examine some of the factors that influence and are influenced by that learning. In section three, we consider the relations between learning and positions, the self (including identity) and agency. Each of these themes is developed separately, drawing upon the stories already presented in sections one and two. We conclude in section four by showing some of the complex interrelationships between all these factors, illustrated by two further stories.

Section 1: Formal and Informal Learning

In English language literature there is a strong tendency to treat formal and informal learning as separate and different. In general terms, 'formal' learning means planned learning within educational settings, often involving direct teaching, syllabus specifications and, these days, assessment. 'Informal' learning means learning from everyday life, in work, the home, or local community. However, as will be explained later, these rough definitions are problematic.

The development of these two ways of thinking about learning relates to the increasing dominance in educational literature of research about 'formal' learning in educational settings. This brought a backlash, as other researchers made the claim that different forms of learning regularly took place in other aspects of life. The result has been the continuation of two distinctly different literatures on learning – one focusing on the formal, the other on the informal. Where the differences between the two are directly addressed, it has normally been within the informal learning literature. As Colley et al. (2003) show, much of this work defines formal learning and then treats informal learning as everything else. They also show that different writers define formal learning differently, and that there is no agreed difference between formal and informal learning. They go on to argue that even within educational settings, a lot of informal learning takes place, for example as students learn how to participate in school, and as some learn that they are failures.

Following the Colley et al. (2003) analysis, we are not concerned here with distinguishing differences between formal and informal learning. In the rest of this paper, we use the term 'formal learning' as a label for all learning on planned education and training courses, including much learning on such courses that would have been classed as informal according to many definitions (Hodkinson and Colley, 2005). We use the term informal learning simply to mean learning outside such education and training provision, even though Billett (2002) argues that all learning in the workplace is formal to some extent.

As with the life history work by Anitkainen et al. (1996), the Learning Lives research shows that for many people, informal learning, using our definition, is more significant than formal learning. However, for many of our sample, both types of learning are important, and they are often interrelated. The nature and significance of both formal and informal learning can be illustrated through three case studies.

Derek Hutchinson was born in 1944, into a family with a tradition of building work. He did well at school, but had to leave to earn money, and entered the building trade himself. Since leaving school, he has had very little formal education or training, but has learned informally all his life. Much of the learning he talks about relates to his work, as a joiner and carpenter. Like many of his generation, he took great pride in doing a first class job, and continued to learn throughout his working life, as he encountered new techniques and new challenges. This included working on listed buildings, where

specialist skills were required for renovation. He is critical of formal training in the building trade, which he thinks is responsible for a significant drop in standards of work.

Derek has also learned informally in relation to his hobbies, of postcard and stamp collecting. He is something of an expert, being invited to give talks to collectors clubs, for example. This leisure activity has recently led to learning to use the computer and the internet, and Derek runs a small business, selling cards and stamps. He has also got a deep interest in the local area where he has always lived. Many of his postcards are of that area, and his card and stamp collecting led to a growing interest in local history. His growing historical research has also been learned informally – from books, from others, and simply from working with records himself.

Derek is also a family man, and has learned informally how to be a husband, parent and grandparent. In recent years, illness and disability have made it impossible for Derek to continue working in the building trade. He has taken a series of part-time jobs, but one of those also proved to be too demanding, as his condition continued to deteriorate. As our research ended, he was working happily as a delivery driver. Throughout this period, Derek has been learning how to cope with his changing health. This has been partly a matter of learning through experience, and partly from expert help and advice, both medical and related to career changes. Now in his 60s, Derek continues to learn, but still possesses no paper qualifications. (A fuller version of Derek's story can be found in Hodkinson et al, 2006).

Derek's story illustrates the importance of informal learning. As with many men, the main focus of learning in his interviews is on learning related to work – as a highly skilled carpenter, and later in relation to his forced job changes. He has very strong views about the superiority of learning on the job, as opposed to college courses, when related to the building trades. However, he is constantly learning informally in relation to his leisure activities, and his family. In ways that were not uncommon for his generation, Derek's formal learning ended at the age of 14, despite the fact that he did quite well at school.

Joe Pryce's family moved from the West Indies to England in the 1960s, but Joe stayed behind with his grandmother, eventually joining his parents when he was 13. He was put in the bottom stream of a secondary school and was appalled at the low standard of work compared with what he was used to. Joe worked his way up to the top stream and took external exams, but never got his results as the family moved to another city.

Joe's father was determined that his son should train for a skilled manual occupation, and Joe started an electrical apprenticeship at an electrical installation company, where he made rapid progress. "...after 3 years, working on the tools, doing different sites, I think at 18 or 19, I had an apprentice working with me! [laughs]... I was wiring multi-storey buildings! I was doing all sorts."

Unlike Derek Hutchinson, Joe valued both on site and college learning. He has described the process whereby he learned from other workmen, developed that learning through his own practice and experience and used what he learned at college to further his work.

I was placed with a qualified electrician ... I was able to gain experience from the industry how to actually carry out the job practically and I think the college actually gave me their own opinion and knowledge and theory behind it, so basically I was able to understand how electricity was generated whereas I wouldn't have got that in the actual workplace. I was able to understand how to carry out calculations to determine the type of cables to use for a given installation and for the current rating and all that type of thing. These types of calculations wasn't in the 'on site' [training]. ...

There is numerous ways of wiring a house, and you might, as an apprentice be taught certain specific ways or you might be taking on ways in which a particular individual might see things, but as you progress you have developed your own way of actually ... I think I would have learned to do the job without the college, but in order to go beyond just the basic practical wiring, understanding how to design lighting and how to estimate and to do those type of things I wouldn't have been able to do those, so both [college and on the job learning] is essential.

Joe had to change jobs in order to return to college for the final two years of his apprenticeship to gain higher qualifications. He passed all his college courses with credits and distinctions, and completed the five year apprenticeship with flying colours.

Joe had learned to play the guitar from workmates and formed a band with friends, performing semi-professionally. When his band was offered the chance to back a famous singer, he took the opportunity, left work and set off for London. After a year he came back home, settled down with his girlfriend and returned to electrical work, whilst continuing to perform locally.

Over several years he worked his way up to senior supervisory levels and then set up his own business. He had already learned many of the skills he needed. He eventually got plenty of work and expanded into property development. For many years he was very successful, but in the late 1990s a disastrous investment meant he lost all his money, and believed he had let people down. He had a personal breakdown. He attributes his recovery to God, and would have devoted his life to the church. He did not want to return to his former occupation, which had led to so much distress. He was put on a retraining scheme for the unemployed and sent to college to pursue vocational courses. He enjoyed classroom learning again and started taking a more positive attitude to life a whole.

Whilst in college he was spotted by a former colleague who suggested he should not be studying, but teaching a course. He began teaching apprentices at the college. The help he got at work was minimal, but all college tutors in England now have to undergo formal teacher training and he was relieved to be able to do this. The college provided funding and a day a week for him to do the basic trainers course and then a teaching certificate at a local university. Joe is achieving success in his new career and his return

to college in his 50s has reignited a passion for reading and learning. He has continued at university studying for a part-time degree.

Joe is of the same generation as Derek, and shares Derek's concern with doing a good job, in which you can take pride. He also was succeeding at school, despite some major setbacks when he first came to England, but also left without any qualifications. However, in contrast to Derek, Joe has had several periods of engagement with formal education, and consistently values both formal and informal learning. In relation to work, he sees them as different but complementary. His story illustrates a significant finding from the Learning Lives research: that for many people, what can be termed formal and informal learning are deeply inter-twined. That is, learning within formal education and learning within everyday life interpenetrate each other, and often have common purposes. However, even when, as in Joe's case, formal and informal learning are both important in a person's life, informal learning remains more diverse and more widespread in its significance. This is because informal learning takes place in every aspect of a person's life. Often people are not really aware that they are learning. For example, Joe does not describe his rediscovery of God as a learning experience per se, but part of that cathartic process was a relearning about who he was, and about how he saw the importance of moral and religious principles in his life.

Formal education, on the other hand, is often more focused and limited in its purposes and in its reach in relation to a person's life. However, this point should not be misunderstood. As Jane Eddington's story illustrates, formal educational courses can also serve multiple purposes, and may have far-reaching impacts upon a person's life – way beyond the acquisition of a qualification and the learning of content specified for the course.

Jane Eddington's father worked in the Air Force. He had been in the liberation of Italy in the war, and 'adored Italy'. The Italian language and Sicily became a lifelong passion for Jane. Her family moved to Malta when she was very young. Her school there was good, and she learned some Italian, informally.

When her family moved back to England, schooling didn't go as well. She failed her 11+, passing at 13+. She describes the atmosphere at that new school as a bullying one, and feels her depression in later life started there. However, one of her A-levels was influential:

*You're obviously very interested in Mediterranean history –
... I've always liked history. And we did this particular A-level syllabus,
Basically – you remember it because it's extremely well-taught. And - but I've absorbed a lot of it. – you just go to the place and – and you just absorb the atmosphere. ... I mean the stones are still there. The culture's still there.*

After school Jane was accepted on a course at a College of Art and Technology, with a specialist paper in the History of Art. She failed two subjects, and had to leave. She embarked on a series of short-term jobs, and

I thought, 'I could learn shorthand'... So I rang up the speed writer people ... and I went rushing down on a Saturday morning, and I bought a course of books. And I did practically the whole course ... over the weekend. And I went in and I started taking dictation on the Monday morning.

She tried again at education:

[Office work] becomes very mundane after a while ... And I met another girl who was a graduate. ... So I applied to [named] University and I got a place in ... 1973. ... So there I was, a student again at 23. ... I was doing Ancient History, Archaeology and Italian.

In her first summer vacation she inadvertently took LSD at a party and had a bad reaction, failing to concentrate throughout the next term and dropping out the following Easter. After a complicated interlude and a difficult relationship she set off on her own for Istanbul, thrilled to be experiencing first hand the topics of A-level course.

The collapse of the Roman Empire in the West, ... Byzantium, and the crusades ... And I'm there! In Constantinople!

Six months later, back in England, she found she was pregnant. After attempting to establish a relationship with the father, she came to London on her own, with her young son. This was a bleak time, but she threw herself into learning. Childhood ambitions had included acting, and now Jane found a Company where she could study.

I knew I had found the emotional fulfilment that I needed, because when you learn the proper breathing that calms your nerves as well. And you learn to fit the sound onto the breath. And then you learn that you have to actually think about each word.

This continued for a few years, alongside jobs in offices and retail, but she forgot the final component of the assessment, and turned up too late to take it.

Jane had to abandon her training, as the pressure to earn money became too great. After her son left home her health deteriorated, then she lost her home, through a personal crisis. Her intellectual energy was undimmed.

I went abroad [again] a few years ago. ... I was speaking, and it was coming very easily, and I've been back a few [times]. I'm saving now to go back. I love Sicily... You know you have these wonderful cities, all this merge of these cultures and everything, Greek.

Emerging from a period of depression, Jane took a helpful back-to-work programme; but her hopes were dashed by its sudden closure. When she tried later to get her certificates from the course, the organiser told her that she had lost the records. Jane continued with further courses. 'And then ... I thought I might be interested in teaching English – I started getting interested in the literacy skills, you know? Teaching literacy skills.' This looked like a promising career development for someone in her fifties, but Jane's poor health intervened and she missed two interviews for an ESOL course that she had found. By then her ambitions for that career seemed to have faded. The local Age Concern drop-in centre proved an intellectual life-saver:

I did some drop-in sessions at Age Concern, and I do a little bit of volunteer help there as well. I just mostly use Internet and I'm learning to use ... Photo Shop, where you can actually take backgrounds out of pictures and alter them and the artistic stuff.

Jane has always been an avid reader, she learns from the Internet, from the radio, from public lectures, from looking around her, grudgingly from television, and from other people. Jane is learning from life:

I can handle myself a lot better. ... by raising a family, whether you're two people or one people or single parent, man or woman, you develop management skills.

By midway through our project she was learning to manage her depression:

I find the best way sometimes is to fiddle around with some plants or if you've got a little garden or do a bit of cleaning. ... and [it] takes your mind off things you know.

In 2007 Jane was directed, by the local Job Centre, to a course, which trained volunteers to provide advocacy support for people with disabilities. Having developed the confidence to challenge on behalf of others, she was now rearranging her own travel plans, pursuing a past difficulty over her finances, and preparing for her own hospital visits by briefing someone to come with her. Jane has negotiated her own re-housing into sheltered accommodation, and started pouring her learning into creative writing.

Jane's story is a good example of a person where formal and informal learning seem to be almost completely integrated. There are two aspects to this. Firstly, like Joe Pryce, Jane's learning related to work and the need to find employment involves both formal and informal dimensions. She does on job-related courses, including the early example of distance learning how to do shorthand, but she also learns through doing the jobs. In relation to work-related learning, this is a very common and often repeated pattern (though so is Derek's experience of almost entirely informal learning). Secondly, what makes Jane relatively unusual (though not unique in our sample) is the way that formal and informal learning are completely intertwined in relation to her prime interests in life – the love of Eastern Mediterranean history, culture and languages, and her parallel and overlapping love of the creative – art, drama, and now, creative writing. Her story also illustrates that formal courses can be of immense value, even if no qualification ensues.

The varying significance of learning

Thus far we have shown that informal learning is ubiquitous in all aspects of a person's life, and that for the majority of those people who experience both formal and informal learning, the two are intertwined and inter-related. This finding supplements the argument of Colley et al (2003). For even if we choose to think of formal and informal learning as distinctly different types of learning, they are not separate in the ways in which they are experienced in people's lives. We go on to show that the significance of learning (formal and/or informal) in people's lives varies widely.

When people think of their own learning, or when researchers focus on learning in people's lives, attention is naturally drawn to learning that is perceived to be highly significant. This can be seen in Derek Hutchinson's learning to be a skilled carpenter, in Joe Pryce's learning to construct a new life after the crisis of his bankruptcy, and in Jane Eddington's ever-present love of things Mediterranean. But much of the learning in everyone's life is of less central significance. Derek Hutchinson values learning to use a computer, to aid his stamp collecting hobby and small business, but this is a relatively small addition to his life, of less direct significance than his lifelong development as a skilled craftsman. Other learning is much more trivial still, and often completely unnoticed and unreported on. One example would be the way in which Gladys Dean (see below) learned about the university office where we interviewed her. She now knows things about that office, but that knowledge is hardly of significance in her life.

The varying significance of learning can be illustrated in another way. Learning is normally something that occurs either because a person happens to be doing something else, or when a person focuses on learning in order to achieve something fairly specific. Thus, Joe Pryce learned the drawbacks to life as a member of a professional backing group, because the job opportunity came up, and he wanted to have ago. Playing the music was what mattered, not the learning that went with it. On the other hand, Jane Eddington chose to learn shorthand, because she wanted to improve her employment prospects. However, for a minority of our sample, the learning becomes an important process in itself – learning becomes a significant part of a person's identity.

We have argued elsewhere (Hodkinson, et al, 2007a) that both Derek Hutchinson and Jane Eddington fall into this group of people for whom being a learner is part of their identity. Though he does not call it 'learning' Derek's life shows a continued commitment to taking on new challenges and projects – to learn to do something better, or to do something he has not done before. Jane simply loves learning in all its forms – through reading, travel, frequent formal courses and in many other ways. Whilst Derek's learning is often practical (though, triggered by his stamp and postcard collections, he is becoming more and more interested in local history) Jane's love of learning is arguably much more related to intellectual curiosity. She is always seeking out new understanding and new knowledge.

Whilst neither Derek nor Jane would describe themselves primarily as learners, Anna Reynard (see below) has said to us, on more than one occasion, that 'learning is the leit motif of her life'. Her love of learning is directly related to her lifelong engagement with formal education, as a student and a tutor. For other people, there are periods of their life where learning takes on this sort of central significance, compared with other periods where it does not.

Tony Wilf had a negative experience of secondary school, followed by many years as a manual worker. There was much learning in his life through that period, related to work and to his family, but it was incidental to living - simply an often tacit dimension of his life. However, after the death of his wife and the loss of his job, he went through a

personal crisis. For originally practical and pragmatic reasons, he signed up for a course in computing. This then led to a course in adult literacy, and other courses followed. Now, for Tony, attending community education classes became a central part of his life. They helped him organize his time, helped him make new friends, and the process of engaging in learning was progressively opening him up to new interests and possibilities. For people like Jane, Derek and Tony in his later life, learning is an important part of their self-identities. As we have argued elsewhere (Hodkinson et al., 2007a) it is part of their sense of being.

Even for such people for whom the significance of learning is so great, much trivial learning also goes on. Tony, for example, really enjoyed being shown around the Leeds University campus, and learning more about the history, geography and architecture of the university – but this was relatively insignificant, compared to his community education classes. Of course, deciding whether learning is significant or insignificant is a matter of value judgment and, as such, is always contestable. The judgement may also vary from person to person. There are no clear categories of ‘significant’ or ‘insignificant’ learning. Our point is that however such judgements are made and by whom, the significance of learning varies between people, and within the lives of any individual person.

Section 2: Continuity and Change in Learning through Life

Continuity and Change

The Learning Lives research confirms two fairly self-evident features of learning through life. The first is that over the whole life course, the nature and significance of learning change. The second is that, even when considered over the whole life course, some aspects of learning and of a person's perceptions towards learning and participation in it stay the same, at least for long periods of time. Our research suggests that these two truths are not opposites, and certainly not mutually exclusive. Rather, one way of understanding learning across a life course is as a complex changing interrelationship between both. This section explores some of the dimensions of this relationship, as revealed in our data. In what follows, we begin by describing some of the patterns of continuity and change revealed in our data.

In many people's lives, there are periods that seem to be dominated by continuity, and others by change. This is not just true of people's learning, but of their lives more generally. Strauss (1962) was one of the early researchers to focus on the significance of this pattern. He termed these two contrasting types of living as 'routines' and 'turning points'. For him, a routine period was one where life continued in similar and partly predictable ways. His prime interest was in the notion of career, so a period of routine was one where a career continued largely on track. On the other hand, a turning point was a short period in a person's life when their career changed significantly. Strauss argued that often such a turning point was only identified through hindsight, and his central interest was in a person's self perception of such a turning point. However, as Strauss himself recognized, and as Learning Lives data confirms, seeing routines as about continuity and turning points as about change is only part of the story. For even in periods of routine living some changes take place, and even in the most dramatic turning points there remains some continuity. We next examine the relationships between continuity and change in learning through life within routine life experience. This is followed by an examination of continuity and change within turning points.

Continuity and Change in Routine Periods

By definition, routines are periods lacking in obvious or dramatic change. In this section, we begin by showing the significance and nature of change within such routine periods, before briefly discussing the relationship between such changes and the more obvious continuity. One of the problems that the Learning Lives research faces, is that whilst turning points are clearly apparent in people's lives, both to the researchers and to our research subjects, much routinised living and learning is taken for granted. More especially, changes within such periods are taken for granted. Our subjects tend not to talk about it much unless we probe, and we researchers can often also miss the significance of learning and change in routinised living. Within the parts of interviews concerned with people's on-going learning between one interview and the next, this is especially apparent. People found it easy to talk to us about significant changes since the

last interview but, when asked what had happened in the period since we last met, a first response was often ‘nothing’ or ‘nothing much’. This difficulty is compounded by the fact that we took a predominantly life history approach. When trying to make sense of a whole life (thus far) patterns of routine and turning point are easy to establish, and an obvious and important focus is on understanding and explaining those turning points. It is much harder to do justice to issues of minor change within fairly long periods of routinised living.

If we take the broad view about what counts as learning advocated in Section 1, including informal as well as formal learning and the trivial as well as the significant, then learning is ubiquitous within people’s lives. Even when lives remain broadly the same, learning takes place, and some changes are apparent. We illustrate these issues first through the story of Elsie Sayer.

Elsie is an active healthy woman in her late 70s. When asked what she had been doing recently, Elsie always started off by saying “Oh the same as usual, nothing special.” However, she determinedly emphasised that she was always learning, every day.

Even before she retired Elsie had joined a small walking group, and now there is a group of 5 or 6 over 70s who go out every Tuesday when the weather is kind, “not pushing ourselves”. On these walks they go to different places and see different things.

She said she was getting a lot out of holidays. She went on coach holidays in the UK usually with a friend, and enjoyed finding out about new areas, and working out what were the best deals. She liked to go out for part of most days, but really enjoyed day trips, mainly by bus. She had a good understanding of where she could get to in and around Leeds by public transport. She liked visiting country houses in Leeds, the region and beyond and picked up a great deal of social history from these visits. She saw the differences in different seasons, especially in the gardens and parks. She liked visiting any site or town with some kind of history, or even just to see the scenery and notice the changes.

A few years after retirement she started attending an adult education class every year. She went to English first wanting to confirm her prejudices about the poor English used by radio and TV commentators. Having thoroughly enjoyed that, for ten years she found a course that appealed and fitted around her other activities. She learned what sociology was. She learned to use local archives to research local history and confirmed stories and rumours from her childhood about the area where she lived. The last two courses she attended proved less interesting, and she decided she’d had enough of doing courses until or unless something catches her attention.

During the last few years, Elise’s life is one where continuity predominates. However, this has not stopped her learning, and there are many minor changes in her life – going to new places, taking new courses, or deciding not to do any further courses, at least for a time.

There are many circumstances where people's lives and learning undergo gradual rather than dramatic change. Such gradual changes can be identified in almost every story from the project data. Here we illustrate this aspect of learning within periods of routine, with three examples.

For about 20 years, from the early 1960s until the mid 1980s, Stephen Connor's life was broadly stable. It was a period of routine, without any major turning points. This was a broadly happy time in his life. He said "early 60s, when I were starting to drive, right up to mid-80s, I had a fantastic life. Fantastic life. [Heavy Emphasis, thumps on table]". However, during that time, Stephen's life did not stand still. We can illustrate his learning in two areas – his family and his work.

Stephen enjoyed his own childhood, where within their means the family did as much as they could for their children. Importantly this involved giving them time, playing games, taking them on outings. Stephen tried to put this into practice for his own children. Family holidays were important. At first they went to Butlin's, which proved to be important for allowing his wife to have a break from responsibility for the children. When the boys were six or seven they got a little caravan, joined a caravanning club and regularly went off for weekends in the countryside. Stephen had to learn to tow the van – not too difficult because driving a van with no rear view was part of his job. As they became established members of the club, Stephen who already had an interest in scouting, became responsible for organising varied activities for all the children. These holidays continued until the boys left home in the mid 80s, and even after that, though less regularly.

After completing his apprenticeship Stephen moved to work for a national TV rental company and worked for the company for 20 years. Stephen describes his own progress at work over that period. "After I left [apprenticeship firm] and I went to [nation TV rental firm], which were in about '64, it wa'n't long before I were always sort of in management [supervisory role].... I were one of them that was sort of – when colour TV come out, I were t' first to go [on the training course... . Whenever anything new come out, they always sent us away on the course to do it, and then we'd come back and it were up to us then to – to show them."

The TV industry moved on technologically and Stephen had to learn to deal with those developments – at the same time becoming a senior supervisory employee responsible for taking on board the new information in long training courses [a week every few months over several years, then come back and put it into practice between courses], and passing it on to others both directly and by helping out when they had problems. In his supervisory role he took responsibility for the men who worked for and with him. He believes that at that time in the '70s every body helped one another, kept one another out of bother, an ethic which fitted his upbringing. He took it a stage further by personally taking responsibility for problems his workers found. He carries that forward to today where he and his wife spend a lot of time helping out friends and relations who have greater problems than themselves.

In the late 80's TVs became much more reliable and renting became less common, the company eventually had to close down. "Fizzled out in the end, yeah. But it were – it were a lovely firm to work for."

In this period of Stephen's life, continuity is the dominant feature, and changes are relatively minor. However, as with Elsie, there have been many minor changes in his life and learning during this period. However, as his children grew up and home and as his work career developed, we can also see progressive changes to Stephen, over this period. Furthermore, as is shown in the final paragraph, much more substantial change was on the way. Work changes were also important for William Moore.

William was an expert in a specialist branch of textile design. He produced designs and also did the necessary setting up for the machines. This primarily entailed adapting the computer software used by the manufacturers. William was self-employed, working for several large manufacturers, in Spain and Italy. Throughout his working life, William had to adjust periodically to changes in technology in the industry, and especially to new computer programmes. He kept himself upto date by working part-time for one of the firms.

By the late 1980s, progressive changes in the industry and in William's personal circumstances put pressure upon his work. There was a gradual but progressive move of manufacturing from Europe to the Far East, which resulted in a lessening of demand for William's work. He had also lost the opportunity to work part-time for a major firm, so that when a new very expensive software programme became the industry standard, William could no longer do the setting up work, and had to rely on selling designs only.

Over at least a ten-year period, William had to learn to deal with the reduction in a market for his work. He carried on working as best he could, but had to search for other sources of family income. As part of this process, he went to an adult careers guidance centre. As well as learning more about the process of career change and the sorts of opportunities that might be open to an older man, he also learned how to apply for a job, and how to write a c.v. At the same time, because of his advancing years, William was learning to change his work-life balance, by working less, and giving more time to other interests. This meant that when he was offered a job using his textiles specialist skills in China, he turned it down. He says that earlier in his life he would have jumped at the chance, and even now, approaching 60 years of age, he seriously considered it. William eventually took a job working part-time for a sheet music company, drawn upon abilities learned through playing in a brass band, together with his knowledge of dealing with customers. Though he has initially intended to take part-time work alongside continued textile designing, he now gave up the textile business, and moved into a significant new phase of his life.

Within William's story, we can see strong elements of continuity – for example in his persistence with the same line of work for several years in increasingly difficult circumstances. Even his radical change of paid work – from self-employed to being employed, and from textile design to shop work, showed significant elements of continuity, in his continued work with customers, and in the ways the job built on a long-

standing interest in music. Outside the arena of paid work, much of his life, such as family and leisure, stayed broadly the same. Even here there were some changes, as his changing attitude to paid work impacted on family and leisure, and vice versa.

In William Moore's case, the gradual changes in his working circumstances and his increasing age resulted in an eventual turning point, to use Strauss's terminology. For Anna Reynard, progressive change followed a turning point, when she ceased working fulltime.

Anna was nearly 70, when our fieldwork finished. She went through a major turning point in her early 60s, when problems at work led to what she describes as a breakdown, and she gave up fulltime work as a teacher. Part of this change related to the opportunity to do a PhD fulltime at a local university. A few years before our project started she completed her PhD and the book based on it, and her husband of 35 years died. She had to take time out, but the PhD gave her life purpose during his illness. Since then she has had no further paid employment, but has become deeply involved with U3A as organiser, volunteer teacher and student. She leads an active life pursuing this and other hobbies and interests. Her activities have provided the social networks where she has found new partners. She still lives in the family home.

This last seven years have been a relatively stable period of her life. There have been significant further changes events. Her new partner and one of her brothers have died. She has found a second new partner, and her first grandchild has been born. However these do not appear to have had a significant effect as tuning points in her life, which has remained on a steady track.

The PhD, finishing in 2000, was Anna's last paid involvement in education. At the time of her first interview she expressed envy of the researcher's position and would clearly have liked a job in educational research. However having spent the next three years enjoying a life where she could pursue interests, visit relatives & friends, and take holidays as and when she wanted, by her final interview she was no longer interested in taking on any serious long term commitments that would restrict her flexibility.

She was still happy enough with her commitment to U3A, and does like the fact that its (short) teaching terms provide some sort of framework for her life. It is very important to her that she should still be doing things which help other people. However she says she recognises that it is time to pull back a bit and not get involved in major emotional battles where things are not going how she would like them to. The deaths of people she was close to have, she thinks, made her aware of her own mortality and the need to get on with things she wants to do for herself. She is also trying to take even greater care of her own health. Over the whole period she has attended exercise classes and dancing classes in term-time, and organised a walking group. Now she has found a class that continues right through. She has recently recognised that her blood pressure is seriously affected when she becomes emotionally involved where she sees things being organised in ways she sees as inappropriate, also over group and personal relations in her classes.

She is making a deliberate effort to try to be less concerned over things that do not go her way, and to prioritise the battles that most need fighting.

The need not to get too emotionally involved also relates to her teaching and teaching groups. U3A has given her the opportunity to teach as she has always wanted to, applying principles she has always believed in, which did not work as she had hoped with unwilling pupils. She is however continually adapting her basic methods and materials to suit particular groups, according to the responses she gets from them.

Over the period of the research she has developed two hobbies which have involved a lot of learning. Both are long term interests but only now is she giving them serious time. Firstly she is exploring her family history, following on from some work done by another relative. The BBC book provided initial guidelines on how and where to start to look. She has found valuable websites. She has physically visited libraries and record offices and gained extra help from other searchers. She has visited places where her antecedents may have lived and read social history about the periods and places. This has inspired her in speculation about her family. She found the research skills developed for her PhD meant she had a good grounding in ways of working.

The second interest is in porcelain. She has been reading about the particular type she likes, visited museums, and auctions where she now feels she knows enough to occasionally risk a bid.

The Learning Lives research project itself has been a learning experience for Anna. As her life has been changing gradually outside the project, research interviews provided her with a way to analyse what is going on and sometimes to make changes. She has carefully analysed the transcript of each interview before the next, assessed what both she and the researcher had said, and decided what needs to be changed or challenged given hindsight. She has actually reflected on some principles that have governed much of her life, deciding that she has perhaps been too much of an idealist in some circumstances and that at times what she has been attempting to do has not been practical. She believes there were times when she should have listened to advice which did not seem to fit her principles, and hopes that in future she will do so – though there is less need now.

Taken together, these three stories show that even in stable and routine parts of a person's life, where continuity is dominant, some changes happen. They also show that learning is ever present even in periods of routine, even though it is not always explicitly recognized. The stories also show that the complex interrelationships between agency and identity are integral to that learning. We will return to this issue, which is an explicit focus for the Learning Lives research, after dealing with the interrelationships between continuity and change, around what Strauss termed turning points, or what might more loosely be described as life changing events.

Continuity and Change through turning points

In almost all of our Learning Lives stories, there are relatively short periods of significant change – turning points, in Strauss's (1962) terminology. These life changing events, or often combinations of events, are significant periods of learning, as people learn to deal with changed circumstances. However, even with the most radical changes, some continuity is also discernable.

The relationships between continuity and change and between learning and turning points are complex. Here we present four different stories to illustrate some of that complexity. We begin with Wafa Jabeen.

At the time of the research Wafa was in her mid 30s, a married woman with one child. She is of Pakistani descent and a committed believer in a peaceful Muslim religion. She wore Salwar Kameez and a headscarf.

Her early childhood was spent in her nuclear family in the south of England where her father was a postman. When he developed a long term illness he decided they should move north to the city where most of his extended family lived. He took a great deal of interest in his five children, taking them to the library, playing games with them and pushing them hard at school. There was a hope in such a family that at least one child would become a doctor. He succeeded in encouraging his daughters to do well at school but his sons resented the pressure. Wafa says she always enjoyed school, but had the additional incentive that if she didn't do well she would be married off at an early age, which she perceived as no longer being her own person. She didn't do well enough to study for medicine, instead taking a BEd locally. This she enjoyed very much, liking the mixed age company, the study and the practice. She started teaching near home until she got married.

She married a cousin who had studied in London and was now working there. They lived as a young couple in London with their own flat. Wafa enjoyed work as a primary teacher and life in London with theatres and cinemas. However after five years,

I became pregnant and we both thought it best to move back, because we had family over here, and there our lives weren't suited for a family upbringing – to bring up a child. ... we didn't have many relatives that we went to see or other people that we knew outside work, so to bring a child up we both felt that it should be around family, he should have that. And basically because life there [London] is a lot more faster moving, and for a child we thought it's better to be here, where it feels a bit more laid back.

Wafa moved in with her husband's extended family – mother, brothers, sisters and their families. This was quite normal for someone in her situation and she was quite happy to do it. However although she had lived in the same neighbourhood as the extended family before, she had not lived with them. She has described the following six months (while

her husband remained in London to sell their flat) as the worst experience but also the biggest learning experience of her life.

...learning about real life and real relationships and real human nature, that was a big turning point in my life, I think that was the biggest learning so far I have had. Most significant maybe. It affected my life the most and it's actually changed me.... It changed me a lot in my way of thinking, my way of looking at things and especially looking at people's behaviour. I think I'm more able to judge a person by their behaviour than I was before. Or maybe I'm more judgemental, more... I don't know but it's made me more aware rather than before, I don't know whether I was naïve or too trusting but I would always look at the best in people and ignore the bad, if they did anything that was unsuitable or inappropriate I would ignore it...But I've changed my view of that now and I think I'm a bit more cynical now. I always look for double meanings in things. I find I'm a better judge of character now. That's the biggest learning I've done, it's not academic but it's important...Yeh, so far to date I would say that has had the biggest impact on my life, you know family and everything.

Instead of receiving the family support she had expected, her experience was a very unhappy one.

There was a lot of family politics going on, - that I wasn't aware of, because I've never come across it before. ... at first I couldn't understand why people were behaving as they were, towards me. I found a lot of their behaviour very hurtful... She [mother-in-law] treated me very badly, and his brother and sisters, ... now, thinking about it, I know why it was, it was all a sort of a control thing. It happens a lot in Asian families, especially extended Asian families. Especially those where the people have come over from Pakistan. ... when my son was born – when they treated me badly, I didn't really say anything, and I – I let it go, because I thought I'm not gonna get involved in this – I thought it petty. But when ... my son was born, ... they actually started picking on him. And that really hurt me. Even thinking now, I'm getting a lump in my throat. That really hurt me, and I couldn't – I couldn't understand why they were doing it, and it used to upset me. And, although my mum just lives down the road- I was just - staying at my in-laws' house, because I just had a baby and everybody was gonna come to see the baby and I had to stay there....And it wasn't just one person, they were all sort of like ganged up, and ... talking about it now, it seems as if it's – you know, it's just a made up story, ... but at the time it felt really real. And even the young children, they sort of groomed them, brainwashed them that, you know, we have to – ... that we've got to get both son and mother under our control

She saw her parents during the day and told them her troubles but though they listened and sympathised they seemed to expect her to accept the situation. Her husband came up once a fortnight but did not really accept what was happening because of the love and respect he had for his mother. Months later when he moved back north (he'd been away for about 12 years) he did see what was happening but has never been able to repudiate his family's behaviour to his wife.

At the time Wafa could not do much about the situation because she had been brought up to respect her elders and not to question them, though now she saw that they were not always worthy of respect. Fortunately, as soon as the London flat was sold Wafa and her husband bought their own house and she could escape. The “bullying” of herself and her son has continued but she has minimised contact with her in-laws.

She very gradually came to recognise that there was a whole control issue going on and that she, with her independence and small family background had failed to submit in the ways that were expected. She also recognises now that there were jealousies because she had a bonny pale skinned boy, at the same time as the daughter of the house had a thin, darker skinned girl – much lower status. A third specific factor was that she was a good wage earner and they would have preferred her to go on earning. They considered anything she earned to belong to the family. She decided to stay at home and look after her son. She now wanted to be personally responsible for his upbringing, she came to value the freedom from work commitments, and she wanted to avoid quarrels over money. An important part of this new life was attendance at a series of formal courses including Islamic studies. These were a way of keeping her mind active and of continuing with her earlier love of education. They fitted in well with her family routines, including taking her son to and from school.

She feels she grew up very rapidly at that time in her late 20s, losing her naivety about people, because she was for the first time in close contact with people who were not well meaning towards her. She has gone on learning about people and relationships progressively since, developing through observation and experience her ideas about the problems that are arising in a lot of families within her culture and community. Seven years later she continues to avoid her in-laws except on big family occasions, but has now developed a more laid back attitude towards them – necessary to her mental wellbeing. Coincidentally she attended a counselling training course at the local community centre where her father now works. She went to keep her sister company, but found a lot of what she was taught applied to her own situation. She felt it helped her to return to ‘normal’ five years on.

She has a great awareness of family problems, especially young women’s problems in her community, and an awareness of the problems as well as the strengths of a strong extended family. She does not like the attitudes of families from Pakistan, which she saw as money grubbing and hypocritical. She would like in the future to work in some way to help others with problems like hers. She found solace in reading the Koran where she liked what she saw there about honesty, peace and reconciliation, in contrast to some of what she saw around her.

Wafa’s story illustrates one type of relationship between a life changing event and learning. In her case, the move north and the birth of her son dramatically changed her situation, and that change resulted in important but some times painful learning. That learning was largely informal, resulting from her difficult experiences living with her in laws, and with the reactions of her parents and husband to her stories of those experiences. However, as she developed her life as a non-employed mother living with her son and husband in their own house, formal learning became important also. The

formal and informal learning merged in her Islamic studies and the counselling course. Her turning point was a period of time, which extended well beyond the event of moving to live with her in laws. During this period her learning became an integral part of the change process. That learning was not entirely positive. As we have seen, much of it entailed developing a better understanding of why her in laws were behaving badly towards her, in her view. Later on, after she had moved into her own house, the learning becomes more positive, as it helped her develop a new fulfilling identity as a non-employed mother. Though Wafa's turning point entailed significant changes in herself, her position and her learning, there were clear and equally important continuities through her life before and after it. Her gender, ethnicity and faith were important before and after, as were her relationship with her husband, her love of academic learning and her belief in a more Western balance between responsibility to others and freedom to take control of one's own life and one's own thoughts. For Wafa, learning has been important in reconciling the opposing pressures of this desire for independence with the traditional Pakistani (her word) culture of control. Her understanding of the Muslim religion has had been important in achieving that reconciliation. Wafa's story shows clearly the complex interrelationships between identity, agency and learning. We will return to these issues in a later section of the paper. Next we consider a turning point in the life of Jim Huzzar.

Jim Hussar was in his mid 70s during the research interviews. One of the first things he said when telling his life story was that the worst day of his life was the day he went into the army and one of the best was the day he came out. Nevertheless, in a later interview he picked his experience in the army out as one of the major learning events of his life. 'The major learning, obviously, were when I were in the army, because it took me out of one environment to something that I'd never been used to.' 'I didn't like it one little bit but, in all honesty, it taught me how to look after myself. You'd got to do.'

Jim grew up on a council estate. As a young child he saw little of his father who was away in the war. He developed a very close relationship with his mother, and talks enthusiastically about the things she taught him to enjoy which have lasted throughout his life – particularly reading and classical music. He left an understaffed catholic school aged 14, and after a few casual jobs settled into an apprenticeship as an upholsterer. At the age of 18 he was called up for national service. Up to this point his mother had "done everything for him" and he had never been outside Yorkshire. He didn't hang around to say goodbye to his mother in case he should cry.

The experience was an immediate shock to his system. He spent two weeks in a big camp in the south of England. He had thought he had had a strict upbringing and was shocked by the strictly enforced and sometimes apparently irrational discipline of square-bashing, uniform, barracks. Even more shocking was the realisation that the purpose of the rifle with which he had been issued was to kill people. He was in an environment to which he did not wish to adjust, and was very homesick.

He next moved back north for four months training for the army catering corps. Here he encountered serious bullying. There were two Yorkshire lads and all the rest were Glaswegians who ganged up on the 'outsiders'. They had to do many extra duties and

were beaten up if they didn't. Jim admits to having learned a prejudice against all Scots which now he recognises is unreasonable. His friend suffered worse than he did, once these Celtic supporters discovered that Jim was a Catholic. It wasn't all bad, however, as he found that he really enjoyed learning to cook for large numbers.

Life was not quite so bad either when he received his posting as a trained cook to Preston. It was a relatively small base, he was able to get home some weekends and he could enjoy life outside the base. He found the people in local pubs friendly and liked going to football matches. His next posting was south again. He couldn't get home, and didn't like the way the whole area was dominated by the forces. However he took time out to visit the local sights, like Stonehenge and Salisbury Cathedral, met some girls, but generally preferred quieter places preferring to drink in the smaller, nearer cheaper town of Amesbury.

Although he made a few friends, he never settled to liking the army way of life, camaraderie etc. However there are things he learned there that have stayed with him for the rest of his life. He cannot go out looking untidy, has a weekly routine of shoe-cleaning, still enjoys cooking but still does some things the way he was taught in the army. He always scoops the scum of vegetables. He carefully cuts vegetables to the same sizes so that they cook evenly. He and his wife now share cooking duties, with Jim doing most of the preparation and her the actual cooking. He learned to do a number of things he'd never have learned if he stayed at home. 'You learnt independence, how to look after yourself, how to sew a button on, and hundreds of things that I'd never ever had to do for myself before.'

He came home an independent young man, who went out most evenings with his friends, met girls, etc – things he had only "played at" before. Between the ages of 18 and 21 he would have grown up anyway but he feels he came out of the army a different person.

One other effect was that he didn't continue his apprenticeship. The industry had gone into too much of a decline for it to be worth his while going back. He desperately wanted to work and the labour exchange found him a heavy lifting job in a flour mill. For the next ten years he shifted jobs frequently following whims or a little bit more money – until he got married and settled into a semi-skilled engineering job for 17 years.

Like Wafa, Jim's learning in the army was a response to a major event – being called up for National Service. Like her also, his learning through this two-year turning point was mainly but not entirely informal. In his case, the planned army training, around neatness in appearance and cooking, for example, played a major part. The disciplinary training in the army can also be seen as formal, but his learning from this part of his training was largely negative. From the army's perspective he did indeed learn to be obedient – but a personal level never lost is resentment of what he continues to see as an unnecessarily harsh, unpleasant and partly irrational set of procedures.

Jim always knew that there was a fixed and finite limit to his army days. He always knew when he was going to come out. What Jim had learned from that army experience

changed him in ways that continued right up to the present day (50 years later). There are parallels between Jim's national service and Wafa's time spent living with her in laws. Both resolved their unpleasant personal circumstances by moving elsewhere: Jim back to 'normal' life, and Wafa into her own house. Thus, turning points often involve changed circumstances - an alteration in the social/economic/geographical positions of the person and/or the conditions in which they live.

Just like Wafa, there is much continuity in Jim's life across his turning point, such as his young white working class masculinity. National service changed him, but not completely. Whereas problems caused by changed circumstances were eventually resolved by both Wafa and by Jim, this was more difficult for Sergei Semenov.

Sergei Semenov was born in Estonia in 1953, of Russian parents. Much of his story is shaped by the political events in Eastern Europe in the 20th century, and it demonstrates the high price paid for them by some individuals and their families. In addition to dramatic historical changes, the personal damage that resulted meant that any intervening periods which might have provided some continuity were interrupted by more private losses and upheavals.

The events at a public level included the second world war and the USSR's policy towards the outlying republics, which is why Sergei's parents were sent to Estonia in the first place; the break-up of the Soviet Union and Estonia's independence in 1991; and Estonia's entry into the European Union in 2004.

Against this backdrop, Sergei's father was sent from Russia to Estonia in 1945 as an engineer in the power station; his mother was a primary school teacher. Sergei was born in 1953, and the first upheaval of his early life that we know of was his mother's suicide when he was eight. His father then remarried and had another son with a woman with whom Sergei never got on. Sergei studied mining engineering, and after national service and a period at university in Leningrad he worked in a local coal mine for 23 years, until 1998.

During that time Sergei married and had two children and then his marriage slowly fell apart partly due to the cramped housing and difficult living conditions of that period. They separated in 1990. When he left the mines it was for health reasons and he had trouble finding other work. Sergei decided to leave the country, originally planning to go to Germany, and had started to learn German with that in mind. But a friend called from England and suggested he tried London instead, so on the spur of the moment in 1999 he changed his plan. Once in London he was told he might qualify for asylum, and he filed an application.

Then he was eligible for training and accommodation in his new country. He learnt new skills as an electrician and had some English language tuition, and worked for two years in a hospital maintenance team until the head of the team, himself an immigrant, complained that Sergei's asylum-seeker status made him ineligible and he was dismissed. His application for asylum (long delayed because the Home Office mislaid his papers)

was turned down and he was advised to appeal. He slid into London's grey economy, doing agency work when the employer was not to choose about papers, supplementing it with the modest asylum-seeker's allowance. However once Estonia was within the European Union it was hard for helping organisations to understand his predicament. His appeal, together with his entitlement to housing and benefit, was lost.

He then saw his only option as dodging beneath the UK radar. He first slept on the floors of a series of acquaintances and by the end of the project he was squatting in a lock-up garage. His health has deteriorated and he has developed almost complete deafness in one ear. He lives largely off fruit and vegetables salvaged from street markets. However, by the end of the fieldwork he was largely contented with his situation, happy with his independence and proud of the ways in which he had been able to do up the garage.

Sergei's story helps show how important social, informal learning is either to survive regime change in your own country or adapt to a completely new one. He has been an active informal learner in relation to specific subjects, including history and natural history. This started during adolescence

'Is very – very interest age, very – everything's new in my home, was new. Everything investigation [laughs]. Er, discovering everything. Books. Books in library, articles in newspapers, story from my parents, from my grandparents. Grandparents was soldiers, three wars.'

Sergei is not a natural linguist, which was a serious drawback. He grew up speaking, and only needing to speak, Russian, a language that cut him off socially and politically in the new Estonia. His difficulty in learning either Estonian or English has exacerbated all the other problems associated with each transition he has had to make.

Sergei seems to learn well in formal settings (his initial formal education in Estonia and his retraining as an electrician once in the UK), but our two examples occurred in times of relative continuity and security which have not been characteristic of his life. His first years in London were also a time when he voraciously visited museums and found ways of going cheaply to films and opera. But as he drifted further away from mainstream English life, he seemed to rely more and more on the London Russian diaspora for social interaction, which perhaps can be seen as a loss of energy for new ideas, reverting to things he knows.

As with the others, Sergei's turning point is a lengthy period, not simply the event of moving to Britain. This turning point began well before the actual move, with his changing circumstances in Estonia. It continued once he had arrived in England, where there are two stages. The first was largely positive, but the second more negative, as he reacted to the failure of his asylum application. Despite the radical changes, there is continuity through this turning point, including Sergei's sense of not belonging, either in Estonia or Britain, and his difficulties in learning a language other than Russian.

Like Wafa and Jim, Sergei's learning through this turning point has been mainly but not entirely informal, and has been both positive and negative, from his point of view. His story shows that learning is closely related to the relationships between position, identity and agency, and that difficulties in a person's position and/or in the relations between their position and identity cannot always be resolved by learning. However, to a research team of educators and guidance experts, there remains the frustrating perspective that different learning – for example focused on other possible options for Sergei once his asylum application was turned down. We now conclude this section of the paper by looking at the story of Gladys Dean, which is much more clearly positive.

Gladys Dean was a lady in her early 70s, during the research. She grew up in the West Indies and had minimal education, spending her time instead working in the house and on the farm. She never learned to read or write, but to cook and sew and wash and garden and care for animals. She had two children before following her husband to the UK after he had found work. Although she now feels completely British and that the West Indies is a foreign place, initially England with its cold climate and smoky cities was a big shock. They started life in England cramped in a room in a shared house and Gladys was sent out to work straight away. She worked long hours in a series of low status jobs until she was 60, taking only short periods out when she had her other four children. Her children have all done well and have good careers ("proud of myself for that"), but she herself has been completely unable to read or write for most of her life. Her husband took responsibility for all such matters while he was alive, so that she was very dependant on him.

Gladys's life has not been easy. She has always had to work hard, in the house and to earn money to help support family here and back in the West Indies. Her marriage was initially happy. Dudley was caring and provided well for his family. Within a few years they were able to buy a small house, and as the children got older they moved to a "better" area so that the children would avoid the worst schools and street company. However over time Dudley became unfaithful and abusive to Gladys both mentally and physically. He denied her a social life beyond the home. When he died 15 years ago, Gladys was grief stricken, but relief was an even stronger emotion.

Her financial situation was adequate, as the house was paid for and Dudley had a pension, but she was not confident about many aspects of living on her own and depended a lot on her grown up children to show her what to do. The younger daughter, who lives nearby, came round regularly to deal with the mail and other paperwork. Two of her sons meanwhile tended to exploit their mother. She minded their children for free, reducing her own working hours in order to allow them and their wives to work. She enjoyed her grandchildren but resented the way she was taken for granted. In later years she had worked as a hospital orderly - a job she enjoyed. However changes in the NHS altered the job, denying her any contact with patients, and she was glad to retire at 60.

Gladys's illiteracy has long been something she was ashamed of - so ashamed that she was afraid to do anything about it. It became a bigger problem once her husband was no longer there to deal with paperwork. Her children, especially her daughters have

willingly spent a lot of time helping her. But Gladys's fear of being "shamed" meant they were not able to persuade her to go to literacy classes. Then, in Gladys's words...

My daughter in London came up for holiday and this leaflet drop in the letterbox, and she pick it up and she come in and she start write up. I say, 'What you doing now?' She said, 'I find some place where you can go, Mum'. I say, 'What!' She say, 'You're going to college'. And I remember I laugh after her. Said, 'College!' She said, 'Yeah'. And she write it up, and she ring – she ring straightaway. And I said, 'Oh, I'll have to get bus', and then my daughter find out it's not too far from me... And I were dreading it the whole time, for the 6 weeks that come up 'til college open in September. ... And I go, the... day before school open. You go... see the tutor there. And I book up and Joan [tutor] ... Joan and Margery's face, and just the face alone said I were going to be ok... I can't read, and I'm so old. I mean I started... I was 62, somewhere there. And so I said, 'everyone going to say, "oh this big old lady can't read and can't do nothing"'. Put it like that. ... I can cook and I can do that, oh yes, but I can't read. I can't write. And I meet up these two face, and another lad what were a student there, and he come over and said, 'you'll be ok'. You know, 'you'll be ok'... And I were alright from that, you know.

She had very nearly turned back before reaching the door, but having finally been brave enough to enter, taking on these classes resulted in a big change in Gladys's life. Previously she had one great achievement, bringing up her children well, but she seems not to have recognised that fully and remained a withdrawn person, dependant on others, who saw herself as of little worth. Her progress in reading and writing has not been fast but she feels it has made a big difference to her life, and she is totally committed to making more progress. The literacy class twice a week is of central importance. But she enjoyed going to classes so much that she took on several others, doing basic maths (where she already had some practical ability), and a couple of courses using practical skills which she already had – dressmaking and cookery. All the tutors and students are very protective of her, and hugely supportive. Importantly it is not only Gladys's literacy which is improving. The knock on effect of gaining skills and being in such a supportive environment is that Gladys is becoming a happier and much more confident person. Apart from the big improvement in the practicalities of dealing with written material in everyday life, Gladys believes she now understands much better what is going on around her and is able to talk about things better and explain them better. She no longer feels oppressed. "Literacy. Going back to that, I can't tell you the burden what lift off me. I don't have no more burden. It's so light."

She said that she was now fully happy for almost the first time in her life. She lived in her own house with good neighbours around. She had grown up children whom she was proud to have raised. More importantly she felt independent for the first time. She was able to do things she enjoyed and was eager to do more, and that was largely down to going to college, where staff and students all supported one another, and that had allowed her to flourish. She also had regular support from some of her children and grandchildren who rang her up to find out what she had cooked today or what new word she had learned.

The best life I have is now...I really love going to school... What I'm learning now is for me, you know. What I were doing, it were for the children. ... Now, it's for me. Everything I do now is for me. So that's why I go to college, you know. ...It's not I want education for do a job, it's just because, er, I – I want to be – know something what I didn't know. Read something what I didn't read, you know.

In the three years of the fieldwork, we have seen Gladys grow in confidence and recognition of her own self worth. Her reading and writing had improved only slowly, but her enthusiasm for it had grown fast. She could manage her mail, only needing her daughter to confirm important documents. She came to the university for interviews without qualms. She made her own decisions, about things which she would previously have left to others.

As with the other examples we have given, there remains much continuity in Gladys's life, but the changes following her enrolment in an adult education literacy class have been profound. In this case we are talking not about learning because of a dramatic change in circumstances. She had been coping on her own for several years, before her daughter finally organized her course application, Furthermore, in her case the learning associated with this turning point had a sudden and precise beginning – there was no lengthy period of preparation and anticipation, prior to attendance at the literacy class. Gladys's formal classes in a supportive environment provided the trigger for a personal change and growth. Illiteracy was something which Gladys was ashamed of. She tried to hide it in her daily life, avoiding numerous situations where she would have been shown up as "stupid". It was a factor in her husband's domination of her. The classes provided her with a new social setting, which she needed, and with growing skills and the enthusiasm to be able to use them. She no longer believes she is "stupid" or of little worth. There has been a strong knock on effect, which has allowed her to become confident and more independent. For example, she has refused to take on any more regular baby minding for her son. It would have meant she had to give up her classes. Her son had to recognise that she had a life of her own. This turning point in Gladys's life has been a lengthy process, lasting well over three years, rather than a simple event – important though that initial event actually was. There is much about agency and identity in Gladys's story, to which we will return in section three.

Integrating routines and turning points: living and learning

Thus far we have used Strauss's (1962) notions of routines and turning points as a way to explore continuity and change in people's lives and learning. The distinction is heuristically useful, because without it, there is a risk of overlooking the significance of what can be lengthy periods in a person's life when nothing dramatic appears to happen. However, as many of the stories in this section show, the division between routines and turning points is at best imprecise. As Strauss himself argues, turning points are partly subjectively recognized, and often only with hindsight. Though some life changing events are almost certain to result in personal change, such as Sergei's move to England, others may or may not. Wafa did not realize in advance how significant for her the move

to life with her in laws was going to be. Next, as we have seen, change can take place without any significant turning point being identified. When this is combined with the fact that turning points are themselves lengthy processes, there is not always a clear break between a turning point and the periods of routine that either precede or followed it. As we have seen, a turning point is often associated with one or more significant life changing event, but the event itself is not the turning point. Rather, the turning point is a period of change, partly through changed circumstances, and partly through learning. Exactly the same can be said of some periods of routine.

Central to the foregoing analysis, and clear in many of the stories of our subjects that have been shared, lies an implication that is important for the Learning Lives project. For as learning is ubiquitous in people's lives, so that 'People simply cannot avoid learning' (Saljo, 2003, p315), then learning is but an important dimension of living. People live through learning and learn through living. Put differently, change and continuity in living and change and continuity in learning are largely synonymous.

This integration of living and learning does not mean that the relationships between them cannot be analysed and better understood. However, it does call into question some previous attempts to do that. For example, when Bloomer and Hodkinson (2000) wrote of students' learning careers in Further Education, they focused only on formal learning, largely ignoring the informal. This enabled them to see the lives of the students as separate from their college learning, and to show how those lives influenced that learning, in ways that were largely unacknowledged by policy makers and educators. However, as we have argued elsewhere (Hodkinson et al, 2007b) part of the usefulness of the learning careers thinking disintegrates when informal learning throughout life is included in the mix. One valuable way of understanding the relationship between life and learning is to focus on the central concern of the Learning Lives research: learning, identity and agency. To these we add a fourth, which we actually deal with first: positions.

Section 3: Learning, Position, Identity and Agency

Position and Learning

What can be usefully be termed position can be seen in our data to influence learning in three overlapping ways. Firstly, people occupy what might be termed positions within the social structure of society. All the stories presented here illustrate the significance of such structural positioning on lives and learning. For example, gender, social class and ethnicity (including white British ethnicity) are all important, and other factors associated with social positions are important to some – as in Wafa’s Muslim faith, which interacted with her female gender, her ethnicity and her largely middle class social position. These socio-structural positions influence life and learning in complex ways. Their significance can be seen if we try to envisage a life in which one of these factors is radically altered – if Wafa had been white British, if Anna Reynard had been a man, if Derek Hutchinson had been middle class, etc. It is immediately obvious that their lives and learning would not have been the same. That is, though social structures do not determine learning, learning lives are always socially structured lives.

Secondly, position can be historical and geographical. Place is important in all our stories, though it is often taken for granted, except when someone, like Sergei, Gladys or Wafa moves location. For Derek Hutchinson, place matters a lot. He strongly identifies with the small market town where he has always lived. By historical position, we mean that each person’s story in the Learning Lives data is a story of its time. Some of the similarities between the stories of Derek Hutchinson and Joe Pryce relate to the fact that they are of the same generation, and their working lives were lived in parallel through the same historical period. As with what we have termed structural positions, it is easy to see that if we move any of our people to a significantly different geographical location, or transpose them to a different historical period, then their lives and learning would be different – at least to some extent. This is not to claim that geography or history determine lives and learning, merely to assert that their influence is ever-present. The strength and significance of those influences will vary from person to person, from time to time and from place to place, and may also be more or less significant in different parts of a person’s life and learning. However, they can never be completely transcended.

The third way in which we can understand position in relation to learning concerns the places where people learn. There is an extensive literature which shows that learning is situated. That is, in Lave and Wenger’s (1991, p35) terms,

“learning is not merely situated in practice – as if it were some independently reifiable process that just happened to be located somewhere; learning is an integral part of generative social practice in the lived-in world.”

Hodkinson et al. (2007) argue that the best way to understand the situations in which learning is embedded is as ‘learning cultures’. That is, any place where human beings live, such as family, local community, leisure organization, employment, school,

religious community, holiday, garden etc., can be seen as having cultural practices which influence learning. It follows that which learning cultures a person participates in also influences their living and learning. Several of the stories already given show the importance of family, work and education, as locations where there are cultural practices through which people learn. For Derek Hutchinson, stamp and postcard collecting entails another set of cultural practices through which he learns. For Jane Eddington, trips to the Mediterranean can be understood in that way. However, it is not just a matter of which learning cultures a person participates in. What is also important is their position within such a culture. This can be most easily illustrated in relation to family and employment, though is holds also for any other culture. In the family, for example, Gladys's position as an oppressed mother is crucial in understanding the limited affordances that family culture had for her as a learner. Wafa's story also illustrates the significance of position within the family, in relation to her time living with her in laws, and now living within her own house, but remaining part of that extended family. In employed work, the same sorts of concern are also apparent. Most workplaces are hierarchical, and a person's position within the hierarchy will influence his or her learning. Stephen Connor's learning at work relates to his longtime position as a leading repair worker. These examples show that structural positions, like gender, class and ethnicity are significant in influencing positions within some learning cultures. The examples in this paper also show that power relations matter within learning cultures, and are related to positions.

We have already seen that these three different ways of understanding position overlap with each other. One valuable way of conceptualizing these overlaps is through Bourdieu's concept of 'field'. For Bourdieu, a field resembles a field of force in physics. '...a field may be defined as a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions.' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 97). Though a field may have boundaries, they are often imprecise and blurred. Field as used by Bourdieu is a way of taking a relational view of complexity, rather than seeing each part of that complexity as somehow independent of the other parts.

To think in terms of field is to think relationally. ... I could twist Hegel's famous formula and say that the real is the relational: what exists in the social world are relations - not interactions between agents or intersubjective ties between individuals, but objective relations which exist "independently of individual consciousness and will," as Marx said (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 96-97).

The dispositions and actions of individuals, their interactions and inter-subjective ties all contribute to the relations in a field. Bourdieu's point that the field is not determined by these issues, nor are they pre-eminent. Nor is the field an external context, with which people interact. The determining influences on any field are a combination of positions and relations of force, and people are integral parts of any field in which they participate, whether they will it so or not. The first sentence in the quotation is also of fundamental importance. Field is a way of thinking about situations or locations. Hodkinson et al (In press) argue that learning cultures are best understood to operate as fields, which can be understood a variety of scales. Put differently, history, geography as social structure are

part of each and every learning culture, interpenetrating more local or even context specific practices.

Within any learning cultures, learning is an integral part of the practices of participating in that culture. The nature of any learning culture and its practices will enable some learning, making it more likely, and constrain and even prevent other learning (making it more unlikely). However, exactly what and how any individual learns in any learning culture depends also on the position of the individual within that culture, on their approach to that culture, and on their actions within it, always in relation to the many other factors influencing the field. Thus, we can theorise the complex ways in which position influences learning, in ways that are multi-faceted, non-deterministic, and fully cognizant of power relations and inequalities. What remains to be said is that the effect of learning cultures on learning and people is not one way. People are part of the learning cultures they participate in, and as such, contribute to the on-going reconstruction of those cultures.

Dispositions, self and identity

If positions and learning cultures influence learning, so do individuals. In considering how and why, it is helpful to think of the person in three different ways: dispositions, the embodied self, and identity. Following Bourdieu, we begin with dispositions.

Dispositions

Bourdieu argues that every person has a habitus – a battery of enduring and often tacit dispositions towards all aspects of life. These dispositions develop through life, and are strongly influenced by a person's position. Bourdieu is primarily concerned with social class, but our stories show how all the other facets of position analysed above influence a person's dispositions. Dispositions in a Bourdeusian sense are embodied. That is, they are affective, emotional, practical and physical, as well as cognitive. They influence all aspects of a person's life – including but not limited to their conscious thoughts. Being embodied, dispositions include biological influences, as well as the psychological. Importantly, they are fundamentally social. Put differently, dispositions are a result of the integration of nature and nurture, but with the emphasis on nurture.

Bourdieu is primarily concerned with the influences of social class on dispositions, and in the ways that dispositions contribute to the reproduction of social structures. For this reason, some writers accuse him of structural determinism – a view that can be superficially reinforced by his claim that habitus represents social structures acting through the person. However, Bourdieu himself is very clear that the dispositions which make up a person's habitus can and do change. The Learning Lives data not only empirically confirms this view, but also show some of the ways in which a person's dispositions do change. One of the ways in which we can make sense of continuity can change in learning is through continuity and change in a person's dispositions. Our research also supports the view that learning is one mechanism whereby dispositions do change. In Wafa Jabeen's case, for example, her change in position (to living her

husband's family whilst being a young mother) results in learning, the result of which is a change in her dispositions towards her community, in the ways she thinks of people, and in her views about herself. Gladys Dean's recent participation in a range of adult education classes is transforming her dispositions towards herself, and towards some of the situations she faces. At the same time, learning often results in consolidation of existing dispositions, as can be seen in the ways Jane Eddington's love of things Mediterranean has sustained her through numerous life changes and problems, and been reinforced by her continued learning. Whether they change or not, a person's dispositions at any one time will enable and constrain their learning. That is, how we orientate ourselves towards life and its various positions and practices, will influence what and how we learn.

It is clear, then, that dispositions influence learning, and that learning influences the nature of a person's dispositions. In practice, these two reciprocal influences are not separate. It is possible and sometimes necessary to focus more on one than on the other, but any such separation is artificial.

When we integrate this understanding of the relationship between habitus and learning with the concept of field, it shows a double influence of position on learning. Not only does position directly enable and constrain learning through the nature of learning cultures, but it also influences the habitus, which itself enables and constrains learning.

This sort of relational thinking is supported in the Learning Lives stories, and gives a valuable battery of related conceptual tools to think about the significance of learning in the lives of individuals. Hodkinson et al. (2008) developed this line of thinking in some detail, in attempting to solve the theoretical problem of integrating individual and social or situational views of learning. However, the learning lives data also shows that thinking of an individual purely in terms of dispositions and positions is not enough. To illustrate those shortcomings, we next turn to the individual as an embodied self.

The Embodied Self

There is more to a person than habitus, and more of a person than habitus influences learning. The nature of identity and its relationships with dispositions and positions will be discussed next. Before that, we wish to draw attention to two further aspects of the self that can be seen as important in the stories of Learning Lives subjects. The first is the physical body, including the mind. Bodily and mental attributes, including size, strength, agility, dexterity and many forms of intellectual ability and creativity influence human activity and therefore learning. For example, Stephen Connor had the opportunity to be apprenticed to a professional football club when a boy – an opportunity which was related to his physical prowess as well as to positional and dispositional factors. Also, lives can be dramatically changed by illness or accident. This can be seen in many of the stories told by older people, such as Derek Hutchinson, who has had to progressively adapt to his declining physical capabilities.

We have already made clear that dispositions are embodied, and this can partially explain some of these issues. For example, Stephen's footballing ambitions can be understood as

dispositional, when a key part of those dispositions involved his physical football ability. However, the situation of illness or accident is less straightforward. Here, sometimes rapid physical change may not be paralleled by equally rapid dispositional change. Put differently, there are times when a person's physical condition and dispositional approaches are at odds with each other. Derek Hutchinson has gradually had to learn that he can no longer be a skilled woodworker on building sites. He has had to learn to adapt to his changing body, in the same ways in which he and others have had to learn to deal with changed external circumstances. We have other examples of situations where people have to adapt to mental and emotional stress in similar ways. It is these sorts of situation which make it clear that dispositions and body are not synonymous.

The second example of the need to go beyond the relations between dispositions and positions is the significance of learning through reflecting upon life: what Tedder and Biesta (2007) term learning from life. This sort of personal reflection often occurs when a person is faced with a life-changing situation. As we have already suggested, learning through a turning point often entails some such self-reflection. However, there are also some people who are naturally self-reflective. In Goodson and Adair's (2007) terms, they are constantly theorizing their lives. Such reflective learning and/or theorizing about oneself is an activity that is essentially located within a person's dispositions, and that can either change or reinforce those dispositions. Such activity is sometimes highly individual, though it can also be triggered and/or enhanced by situations and or by working with others. Many of our research subjects claim that involvement in the project has increased their reflective thinking about their lives and themselves. Such learning from life is always situated, and when it is part of a process, such as engaging in the Learning Lives research, or discussing with a friend, partner or professional counsellor, can usefully be seen as a particular form of participation in a learning culture. However, such reflection can also be an inherently personal and private activity – located within the situated person.

These two rather different challenges to the sufficiency of understanding learning through the relations between positions and dispositions, we have bracketed together in the rather clumsy category of 'embodied self'. This is because, in different ways, each suggests that there is more significance to the importance of the self in learning than is captured in dispositions and positions alone. We next turn to the concept of identity.

Identity

Identity is a concept that is both contested and confused. For the Learning Lives project, it is probably best understood as self-identity, or how a person sees themselves. Put differently, identity can be defined as *a person's dispositions towards and about themselves*. Seeing identity as dispositional in this way makes clear that who we think are is more than a simply cognitive concern. For many people, much of that sense of self is physical and affective. Furthermore, key parts of a person's identity are tacit and taken for granted. When we think and talk about who we are, much is still left out. Derek Hutchinson, for example, talks much about the significance of the place where he lives, and of being a skilled and professional craftsman. He talks about his family. He rarely talks explicitly of being a man, and never mentions social class, ethnicity or being

British. Yet his story makes clear that all these ‘hidden’ features are important in his sense of who he is. We can interpret his interviews to reveal these significances, but for him they are largely taken for granted. When people theorize their lives, and when they explicitly think about who they are, the issue of identity becomes more apparent and takes on a more cognitive sense. However, elements of the tacit remain.

Our data also support those who argue that identities are often multiple. For example, people sometimes see themselves differently in different situations. Derek Hutchinson talks about himself in the family, at work and in leisure activities – stamp and postcard collecting. These identities overlap with each other. For example, part of his family identity is as a person who can help sort out building problems for his children, whilst his hobby activity is underpinned by similar drives for perfection through attention to detail that also figured in his working life. His identities are not completely discrete, but nor are they completely unified in some essential self. Our data also show that some identities can change, whilst others stay the same, even for the same person.

Identity is simultaneously both more and less than a person’s habitus. It is less, because we all have dispositions towards more than just ourselves. It is more, because a sense of who we are can be seen as underpinning many of our dispositions towards life and the world. Like dispositions, identity is positioned, in the sense that it can only be understood in relation to the different types of position (see above) we occupy in life. As our positions change, this can reinforce some existing identities, but it can also cause others to change.

Learning and the self

The relationship between dispositions, identity and learning is predictably complex. To simplify our argument here we are adopting the concept of ‘self’ to include habitus, identity and those other aspects of the self which the Learning Lives research shows to be important in relation to learning. If we do that, then our data make clear that at any point in time and in any location, the nature of the self strongly influences learning. What and how a person learns are enabled and constrained by who they are – the self. Put differently, the nature of the self places boundaries around what learning is possible, and influences the likelihood of some learning rather than other learning within those boundaries. This is neither a deterministic process, nor a simple one. Often, there can be tensions or even contradictions between and within dispositions and identity, and both can be in tension with other aspects of the self – such as bodily health.

Of course, the various aspects of the self are not static, but can be best understood as a mixture of continuity and change. When we argue that the nature of the self enables and constrains learning, it is a dynamic self, with a past history and with the potential for change that we are concerned with.

If who we are influences what and how we learn, then some learning influences who and what we are. Our data show that learning is one of the ways in which dispositions and identities can be reinforced, and also that it is one of the ways in which dispositions and identities can change. When we understand learning as ubiquitous in life, it is important

to recognize that not all learning does these things. People routinely learn much stuff that has minimal impact upon dispositions and identities. This takes us back to the earlier discussion that learning varies in significance. When we focus on dispositions and identity, some learning is highly significant and other learning is trivial or even irrelevant.

In our stories, the ways in which learning contributes to dispositions and identity is most obvious at turning points. As has already been explained, these are periods of significant personal change, which concern the interrelationships between the self and a person's position. It is in turning points that issues of identity are more likely to become foregrounded for a person. To simplify, our stories show three different types of relationship between learning and the self in turning points. They are:

- (i) Learning can facilitate positive changes in a person's dispositions and identity. For Gladys Dean, this happened in the years following enrollment on a literacy course. Learning contributed to her changing dispositions towards her life and particularly, towards her self. We can see her identity shifting, during the years of project fieldwork – though some of her identities have remained largely the same. William Moore experienced similar types of learning change when he took up his job in a music shop.
- (ii) Learning results from tensions and conflicts in a person's changed circumstances. In Wafa Jabeen's case, the main conflicts arose between her sense of identity as an independent Muslim woman, and her position within the family of her husband. However, there were also tensions within her own dispositions, for example between the Wafa who wanted a professional career and the Wafa who wanted to be a mother and carer for her children. Stories like Wafa's confirm the view that conflicts can be a significant cause of new learning. In her case, learning helped her adapt to her changed position, involving some changes in her dispositions and identity. However, it was not just learning that did this. The move to a new adjustment was made possible by the further move in to a house of her own, aided by the economic (she did not have to earn a wage) and cultural capital (a successful education) that enabled her take and succeed in the educational courses that were a significant part of her changed life. Derek Hutchinson experiences are similarly complex, as he progressively learns to adjust to tensions between his identity as a practical craftsman and his declining health.
- (iii) Learning can also be involved in situations where no entirely satisfactory accommodation is achieved. Sergie Seminov's failed application for asylum left him in such a position. He found it difficult to reconcile his legal and economic positions with his dispositional hopes for a new life in Britain and his complex sense of national identity, as someone who was not Russian, could not be Estonian, and now could not be British.

The contrasts between these examples shows that the relationships between learning and dispositional and identity changes are not straightforward. Learning is not necessarily positive. Also, the contribution that learning makes to dispositional and identity changes cannot be understood without also considering other factors. These include position and the resources (capital) that people have at their disposal. Finally, learning can be a significant cause of change (as in Gladys's case) or it can occur mainly as a result of other changes, as was the case for Wafa.

Though the relationships between learning, dispositions and identity can be most easily seen during turning points, the relationships are also present during periods of routine. Here, the more obvious relationships often concern the ways in which existing positions, dispositions and identities influence learning, and the ways in which often tacit learning reinforces those dispositions and identities. However, when gradual identity change takes place during a period of routine, learning contributes to that gradual change, as we saw in the stories in section Elsie Sayer, Anna Reynard, Stephen Connor and William Moore.

Horizons for Learning

It follows from this argument that learning is integral to the interrelationships between the changing person and his or her changing positions. Put differently, learning is facilitated and sometimes triggered by changes in a person's *horizons for learning*, which can, in turn, change as a result of further learning. By horizons for learning, we mean the possibilities a person has for learning, which are bounded by those horizons. A person's learning horizons are neither fixed nor sharply demarcated. As the metaphor suggests, they partly depend upon the position and situation the person is in, including all three meanings of position. From any given position, a person's horizons for learning are governed by the interrelationships between two groups of factors. The first is the opportunities for learning provided by the various learning cultures that the person participates in. The second group of influences includes the health, identity, dispositions and resources of the person concerned. The way in which individuals see themselves and the world will enable some forms of learning, but inhibit and prevent others. Through life, people's positions and self change, though never completely. Some changes are sought and worked for, whilst others occur and have to be dealt with. Often changes involve a mixture of the worked for, the contingent and the forced. Furthermore, it is a mistake to see the personal dimensions of horizons for learning as completely separate from the positional dimensions. In practice, each influences the other. People are part of the learning cultures in which they participate, and those learning cultures become part of the self, at least when participation is more than superficial.

Agency and Learning

This section draws heavily on the working paper by Biesta and Tedder (2005). Following Emirbayer and Mische (1998), Biesta and Tedder (p7) argue that agency can be roughly equated to 'the situation where individuals are able to exert control over and give direction to the course of their lives'. This process is embedded in structural and

temporal situations. That is, it is not a capacity of individuals, whereby a person is 'agentic' or not, but is a quality of engagement. Secondly, agency in any structural and temporal situation is achieved in and through engagement. They agree with Emirbayer and Mische's conclusion that there are three inter-related elements to agency, which we term backward looking, forward looking and concerned with the present.

Another way of expressing what agency means, in these terms, is that agency is seen when a person is able to change either their situation or the ways in which they view and understand their situation. That is, agency is the ability to change parts of a person's dispositions and/or their positions. Biesta and Tedder are clear that such processes are often tacit – as likely to take place within what Giddens (1991) describes as practical consciousness as in discursive consciousness. We can advance this thinking by drawing parallels with the earlier analysis of learning in this paper. Just like learning, agency can vary in its significance for the person. That is, people may exert agency over relatively small or even trivial aspects of their life, as well as over major shifts and changes in circumstance. Also, it may be useful to understand agency also in actions designed to *preserve and reinforce existing circumstances*, which is different from simply drifting passively through life. That is, it is not the presence of change or no change that determines agency, but the ways in which people are able to work for and achieve some degree of control in their lives. This means that agency can be important in routine periods of life, as well as through turning points.

Judgements about the presence of agency, as defined here, are partly subjective. That is, there is a value judgement entailed in determining whether or not a person just 'acted', or was 'being agentic'/had 'achieved agency'. This follows from the fact that agency is part of the interactive relational nature of what we have termed the 'fields' within which people live, or what Biesta and Tedder describe as an ecological understanding of agency.

There is not the space here to analyse all the stories presented in this paper for the achievement of agency. Instead, we concentrate on four exemplar scenarios of the relationship between learning and agency: learning and agency in sustaining existing conditions; learning and agency related to identity change; learning and agency related to positional change; learning and restricted or non-achieved agency. Of course, there are other possible permutations.

Learning and agency in sustaining existing conditions

Jane Eddington has spent much of her adult life in maintaining and reinforcing her existing dispositions towards Mediterranean history, the arts, her love of learning and her sense of identity. She has done this through a life of changing material and social circumstances, including much hardship and some serious personal setbacks. At times in her life she has actively worked, with varying successes, to change her circumstances, most recently when a counseling course increased her ability to be assertive with others. Without denying those parts of her agency, her we are concerned with her efforts to sustain this cluster of dispositions and activities that contribute to key parts of her identity. In this respect, her identity, agency and learning are reciprocally reinforced this

sense of who she is, and what matters to her. Her identity and strong dispositions have enabled her agentic activity, and many of her agentially inspired actions have further reinforced that sense of identity. She continually draws upon the past to help sustain this important aspect of her life in the present. Her learning is an integral part of this process of identity reinforcement. However, her story also shows what Biesta and Tedder (2005) argued – that her agency (and her identity) was strongly affected by numerous other factors and relations within her life.

As a happily retired person, Elsie Sayers is active in sustaining her current lifestyle. She goes on holidays, days out, walking with her friends and attends some adult education classes. As we have seen, she claims to be learning all the time, but much of her learning is relatively insignificant. Yet this repeated if trivial learning is important in sustaining Elsie's sense of enjoyment and wellbeing. We would argue that Elsie is also routinely agentic, in that she is in control of the life she wants to lead. Her focus is mainly on the present, rather than either the past or the future. Taken individually, Elsie's agentic actions are fairly trivial, but collectively they have significant effect on sustaining her lifestyle, and her identity as a happily and actively retired person.

William Moore was agentic in relation to his identity as a working man. As his textile designing business declined, he initially worked hard to sustain the business, and then to seek alternative employment. This took him into new territories, and formal career guidance provision helped him learn that there were jobs he could hope to achieve, and how to go about getting one. He learned to write a c.v. and a letter of application. This learning directly contributed to his agency in getting a part-time job in a sheet music shop. Of equal importance in this respect was his earlier learning to play music, and his love of music and playing as a key identity. Thus, getting this new job was a mixture of agency drawing upon his current and earlier learning and dispositions, and serendipity, in that the music shop vacancy came up and was within reach of where he lived. Though William initially used his agency to sustain a key part of his identity (as an employed man) it led to a significant identity shift too, as he enjoyed being employed, without the pressure of being the boss.

Learning and agency related to identity change

Gladys Dean would never have enrolled on an adult literacy course without two external initiatives. The first was the provision of a suitable local course, as part of a government initiative to target adult illiteracy. The second was the agentic action of one of her daughters, in applying for her and almost forcing her to take the course. Put differently, there was very little agency in her decision to join the class. However, once on the course, Gladys's learning brought significant dispositional changes. She became much more confident in dealing with routine everyday life events which involved literacy, and grew in self confidence. This in turn led to a changed as less passive relationship with her grown up children. Her learning was converted into increased agency, as Gladys slowly took control over aspects of her life that previously felt beyond her. In Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) terms, she was able to move beyond parts of her past, and to envisage a different future, in materially changing her life in the present. A parallel

outcome was a positive change in her identity, also directly attributable to her learning. These parallel changes in identity and in agency were mutually reinforcing.

Learning and agency related to positional change

In Wafa Jabeen's case, the positional change when she moved to live with her in laws was a direct result of an agentic decision taken by herself and her husband. However, once the move was made, it initially resulted in reduced agency. She struggled to assert her own values and interests in an unexpectedly hostile environment, where she had less cultural capital and a position of relative weakness. The tensions between her identity and her position were difficult for her to reconcile, in ways that resulted in lots of learning – about her situation and about herself. Her story is a very good example of the points made by Biesta and Tedder, that agency is not a personal quality, and that agency is situational in character (Wafa had been highly agentic in her previous situation).

Wafa's agency in this new situation involved the construction of defence mechanisms and, more importantly, the move with her husband into a separate house. The conditions that permitted this agentic action are complex. It depended upon her husband also moving north, upon the fact that they had the economic capital to buy a house, and the fact that the cultural values of the in laws recognized the importance of the couple setting up their own family home. That is, Wafa's agency at this point was limited, and the move would probably have happened if she had remained mainly passive.

The second positional shift to a new family home opened up increased possibilities for agentic action, and Wafa once more took control over much of her life, which she now reconfigured in to a changed identity – of a non-employed mother, looking after her family and especially her son, whilst taking educational courses to sustain her earlier academic and independent thinking identity. Over this whole complex period in Wafa's life, we can see the ways in which she draws upon her past and envisions a different future, whilst engaging with a series of different presents. Her agency is at its greatest when her position and dispositions (including identity) are fairly closely aligned and mutually supportive. Though agency, learning and identity change are closely inter-related, at this time in her life, much of Wafa's learning was in response to her changing position and changing agency, rather than being instrumental in triggering those changes.

Learning and restricted or non-achieved agency

One example of learning contributing to non-achieved agency is the middle period of Gladys Dean's life, before she took the life changing adult education class. Her illiteracy, combined with her oppressed family circumstances, meant that much of her learning reinforced her own sense of helplessness, lack of confidence and low self esteem. It needed the catalyst of her daughter's actions and the literacy course to help her break out of circumstances where she had achieved very little agency.

Another example of restricted agency is Sergei Seminov. He was highly agentic in deciding to leave Estonia and move to Britain. For him, this was a way of resolving deep contradictions between his position in a free, non-Russian Estonia, and his identity as an

Estonian professional of Russian ancestry. Based upon what he has told us, he had thought through carefully the reasons why he could not remain in Estonia, and why he did not want to emigrate to Russia (where he had never lived). However, it is also clear that he came to Britain with very little knowledge or understanding as to what Britain was like, or what opportunities and difficulties he would face once he came. His agency derived from deep dissatisfaction with the present, which could not be resolved for Sergei by restoring his past. This was linked with a new imagined future in Britain, but one that was based on little information.

Once he arrived, Sergei was agentic in signing up for a few training courses and applying for asylum. However, once his application was turned down his position, as an illegal immigrant to a country where he still wanted to live, undermined these efforts. He thought about other possible futures, but almost entirely in negative terms. His lack of official status resulted in increased material hardship. He had little money, could not get a proper job, and his health deteriorated.

However, even in these difficult conditions, Sergei continued to work for the future. He squatted in an empty lock-up garage, and gradually furnished it as a home. He learned to live on very little money, becoming a gatherer of discarded food and other useful items. At the end of our fieldwork, these efforts were helping him adapt to life circumstances that were far removed from his initial hopes on arriving in England. However, his agency remained severely restricted, by his lack of money, his poor health and his lack of legal status in England.

Section 4: Learning through life

Our central argument can be expressed in this way. Learning is an ever-present facet of living. Much of this learning is what some people term informal, but many people do attend some formal courses. Where this happens, formal and informal learning are often interrelated. Though learning is ubiquitous in life, its significance varies enormously, from person to person, from time to time and in relation to differing contexts, purposes or effects. This learning through life entails differing mixtures of continuity and change. When looking a whole life, periods of routine are often interspersed with significant turning points. However, even within routine periods, some change takes place, and in the most dramatic turning points, some continuity remains. Learning can be associated with change and also with the reinforcement of existing dispositions and conditions.

At any time, a person's learning is influenced by the embodied self and by her/his positions. These interrelate, forming a person's horizons for learning. The embodied self includes, but is more than, a person's dispositions and their identity – defined here as their dispositions towards themselves. A person is positioned in three different ways: within social structures; in time and place; and within the learning cultures of situations where they live and therefore participate. Within these horizons for learning, a person's learning can be seen as an on-going process of becoming. That is, learning changes and/or reinforces the self, and is in turn influenced by that sometimes changing self.

Self-identity has a reciprocal relationship with some learning, in that it facilitates some learning and inhibits other learning, as a significant part of a person's horizons for action, whilst also being influenced by some of that learning. Not all learning is significant in relation to identity but, arguably, even the most trivial learning is influenced by it.

Agency and learning are interrelated in similar ways. Learning is normally associated with agentic actions. The important questions concern the significance of learning for agency and of agency for learning, not the presence or absence of learning. Learning can occur in situations where very little agency is achieved. In some circumstances, learning can reinforce a sense of helplessness, making that achievement of agency more difficult. Like learning, agency is also positioned. This means that, in traditional sociological terms, agency is always structured. It also means, as Biesta and Tedder (2005) make clear, that agency is achieved through interrelations between the self and the situations in which people live. That is, we could talk of horizons for agency, in very similar ways to horizons for learning.

We next illustrate it through two further stories. In writing these stories, we have tried to stay as close as possible to the data. That is, we have not constructed the stories through the conceptual argument just summarized, though, of course, we were aware of much of this thinking as the stories were written. Our hope is that both stories, in different ways, illustrate the value of our thinking, in relation to people's experiences of learning. The first story concerns Timothy Keane.

During our fieldwork Timothy Keane was training to be an actor. He was an unusual drama student being in his fifties, and he had not been following a specific course of study at a single drama school. Instead he had compiled a programme of courses over four years or so, paying for it from a combination of savings and part-time work, and seeking the skills he finds that he needs as he learns more about the demands from a professional actor. He had an agent, and at the time of the final interview he had had one paid job and was auditioning for others.

This formal learning of his professional craft had built upon years of informal learning about the theatre, and was related to learning, concurrent with the first part of that drama training, that took place in his group psychotherapy. Drama training and psychotherapy intertwined, each fuelling and enhancing the other, and the combination has had a significant impact on both his sense of identity and his agency.

Timothy had a painful and complicated childhood which left him with very low self-esteem, a difficulty in relating confidently with others, and a debilitating inability to focus on studies. In spite of this, he got a BA in English and Philosophy as a mature student in his thirties, though he was not able to complete the MA he progressed to next.

He had been attracted to the theatre since around the age of 20, ironically in that this one thing he wanted to do was about the least achievable given his anxiety about disclosure, relationships and groups; but it was attractive because it was a way to be someone else. Talking about school plays:

'I could become another person. Yeah? Escape from my terrible reality, escape from my terrible reality. I did one play and no one could believe how ... I don't know what I did, I had them in stitches, you know, and, er, next year they insist - I didn't want to do another, they just kept at me until I said yes... So it was an escape, a release, seemed to be something I could do.'

After a couple of quite confused years, which involved some drifting and some psychotherapy, he gravitated to London and casual work including as a film extra. He then spent ten years working with a theatre company, away from the stage in unskilled practical jobs ('donkey work') but absorbing a huge amount about the business:

'one of the duties was sitting in ... you have to have a member of staff in the audience all the time, in case something goes wrong. And I saw [A Streetcar Named Desire, with Claire Bloom] about 74 times, and if they varied one word I knew, you know, one nuance, and I knew, 'wow, you've changed that'. ... And I loved that. And I absorbed that play, and it was just fantastic.'

'in some ways it was like developing a sixth sense about the theatre, I can't really analyse it but I doubt there's anyone else who work for that company, the Albery company who have two or three hundred employees, or anyone I met - people coming through all the time, students on temporary work - who ever looked at things the same way as I did and put themselves through that experience, creeping into the back of a

big production on the first night, because I knew the theatres inside out and I could get in through the sort of corridors at the bottom or the alleyways ... and get to the back of the royal circle in a way that no-one else could and appear and sort of melt into the background and just watch these things as no-one else would ever do it.'

This came to an end because the company split up, and he reverted to earning his living in low-skilled jobs not connected to acting. In an effort to get back on track he sought careers advice and did his degree, but when his MA faltered he went back to low-skilled work, clerical this time. It might have gone on like this, but the death of his foster mother when he was nearly fifty triggered his decision to start acting classes at last.

'The bottom line is, I was so sort of inhibited as a person that it was all inside but I couldn't get it out. ... it's ironic that my foster mother died a few years ago, four years, and I felt a great s- I don't want to, um, sort of be negative about her, but I suddenly felt a sense of freedom, and it started naturally, going to acting classes.'

It also triggered his decision to seek psychiatric help to address the problems that had held him back for so long.

His professional studies were first at an adult education centre, and as his confidence grew he sought out a company that specialised in a particular system of acting. He later came to see that specialist approach as the 'icing on the cake' and after over a year with them he left feeling he needed to master some of the basics, the 'cake' proper.

'I'm probably going to, the next 18 months is going to be part-time at [London drama school], part-time getting out and getting work, paid work, you know, work in acting, commercials, fair enough, anything, I'll do stills. Just getting out there and just learning what it's like in, in, in the cutting edge world of getting work, so I'm working with professionals all the time as opposed to, you know, the relative security of the classroom, you know. Which is good, a good thing to do and that will look very good on my CV.'

During the year with the specialist school he had picked up a great deal about the acting world, as well as technique: real, working professional actors were also studying with this group and they praised his work, which helped him see it as a world of people like himself that perhaps he really could join one day. He began to learn that other people seek reassurance too, and that he had insights which others valued. After he left them he attended a series of single-term courses at mainstream drama schools, and then more short courses such as one on auditioning. He attended some courses at a circus school, learning the art of clowning, which he found he was good at, and studied dance at a dance school. During the last year of the Learning Lives project Timothy was making plans to do a full-time year at drama school and had researched carefully the strengths of different institutions around the country, including how sympathetic they might be to mature students. He was also researching funding options.

All this time he was picking up more and more about how actors have to promote themselves, and how social skills and friendships play their part in making the important contacts. He learnt professional tips for ways to address old problems: how do you learn the part of Angelo in Measure for Measure if you can't concentrate? Answer: you get inside the mind of the character and understand what someone like him would have said in that situation. Then the actual words follow more easily. He read biographies of actors alive and dead, and he looked at films in a new light.

At the same time, he was determined to get to the bottom of his psychological blocks. He was referred, by a psychologist, to a therapeutic group:

'I learnt a massive amount about myself and about how people – how people think and how they are. About the human condition even and it's been very, very beneficial. ... I've never missed a session and I'm never late. I've got this relentless focus on getting myself sorted out.'

Timothy gave a vivid description of the way the group members interacted with each other, what he learnt about himself from sharing his story with them, and the way the therapist chipped in and how they learned from that. He also described the way in which what he learned began to permeate his behaviour outside the group, how he gradually acquired methods and tools to dislodge his old habits, how he learnt not to expect all the change to happen at once, but that he would continue to develop over future years. Just after his fourth interview with the Learning Lives project his therapy group came to an end. After consulting a different psychotherapist, Timothy agreed that he had worked through his feelings about his difficult childhood, and his ongoing feelings about his foster family, enough to be able to live his own life.

Over the period of the project we saw a person in transformation, a chrysalis opening, an identity emerging. Not completely new, but now able to develop. The old Timothy had problems with eye-contact, and hated photographs of himself. The new Timothy was relaxed, laughed a lot, spent a pleasant twenty minutes leafing through hundreds of professional close-ups taken for posting on internet casting websites. The Timothy of the earlier interviews had begun his makeover strategy, and was remarkable in the detail with which he had made his plans. By the third interview he was beginning to see that while plans have their uses they can actually prevent good things happening (and you don't want to have to keep explaining why you didn't in the end do such and such).

'I'm very much into career planning, because my agent and I will plan the way ahead, but I don't want it to be so structured it excludes a lot of the good things that can happen to me and maybe things I haven't thought of, you know. And things change, I'm changing, you know, there has to be some leeway in the plan.'

From someone who had such poor self-esteem, he had changed into someone who could cheerfully see really big ambitions in the same mental picture as knowing that they might never happen. Whatever happens to Timothy's ambitions, his sense of purpose, and the

apparent pleasure he is getting from at last daring to learn to become himself, is palpable.

Timothy's story, as we have written it, is centred upon the ways in which learning contributed to and was fed by his increasing agency in working to achieve his ambition to be an actor. For Tim, this was an identity project, as he strove to become the person he had always wanted to be. In the last few years, much of the learning associated with this identity work was intentional and targeted upon his goal. This included much formal learning. This more recent part of Tim's story shows how this learning changed him as a person. He became more confident as his acting skills and experience increased, and as his hopes became closer and closer to realization. Through the story we can also see how learning, including his therapy sessions, further increase Tim's agency in relation not just to becoming an actor, but in his relationships with other people. The story focuses on the learning and experiences that were significant in understanding Tim's love of acting and his achievement of agency in relation to his ambitions, in his later life. Elsewhere in his interviews, there is much evidence of learning that was either unrelated to this identity work, or of marginal significance for it.

Though not foregrounded in this account, it is clear that Tim's changing positions were significant in his learning to become an actor. Most obviously, we can see how the learning cultures within the theatre company, the psychotherapy sessions and his various formal courses contributed to his learning. In the theatre company, his learning was facilitated and also restricted by his non-acting role. He learned a lot about the theatre, enjoyed being part of it, but was unable to work on his own acting skills, or further his acting ambitions until he had moved elsewhere. His geographical position in London facilitated his access to the theatre company, contributed to the range of acting courses he had access to, and probably helped in getting an agent and also a little work. His historical position, together with his class, gender and ethnicity, are less central to the details of the story. Nevertheless, we would argue that all these contributed to his learning, identity and achieved agency as a budding actor. Our final story is about Colin Farmer.

Colin Farmer's story demonstrates the way informal learning weaves through our lives in relation to work, family, and hobbies, and also the way these areas of our lives inform and influence each other. He has uncertainties about his identity, but he has always been clear that it is not defined by his work.

I've never thought of myself as being the occupation, the thing I do for a living, you know a carpenter, I don't describe myself as being a carpenter... No I just thought this is what I do, to make some money really. I didn't really have a lot of interests in common with a lot of the carpenters I was working with... .'

At the start of the project Colin was 52 years old, and had spent the last 12 years bringing up his two daughters. His wife worked full-time, but was not in good health and Colin was facing up to going back into the workplace himself. He had sought careers advice from a local agency targeted at older adults.

Right at the end of the three-year period of the fieldwork Colin found the perfect job for someone returning to the workplace after a long gap but still with some childcare responsibilities. He was offered a part-time job in school term-time that uses the many skills he has acquired formally and informally. But this was after three years of quite painful struggle.

Colin's experience of formal learning has not been very happy. He did well enough at school to go to university, but the course did not suit him and he dropped out after a year. In the early 1970s it was not difficult to get casual work, dipping in and out of work and benefit, and Colin did this for a few years. He described the varied informal learning that he acquired on building sites and in other passing jobs. He also talked about the conventions and tricks of each of the workplaces he joined and left. Through this stage of his life he also learned about his own abilities, interests and values.

After a year or so of this he was ready to settle down, and tried training as a teacher. This foray into formal learning gave rise to more important informal learning: that this was not a working milieu that was going to suit him. Once again he left a formal course without completing it and went back to living from more routine skills. Now he was taking office and factory jobs that lasted a bit longer, still moving around but still picking up skills. He also went travelling for a while during this period, widening his experience and outlook (and learning to deal with a few minor crises along the way). On his return, still only in his 20s, he went to a Jobcentre for help.

The Jobcentre put him onto the first formal learning course that he did complete after leaving school, a carpentry course, and this led to a more permanent job: as a carpenter for a London borough. He describes the way in which he went on learning new ways of doing things from colleagues, but also learning to trust his own common sense and understanding in addressing tasks. After a few years he went freelance, and learnt something else about himself: he liked best doing work for people that he knew, but found it very difficult to charge them the money he needed to live in London. He also began experiencing problems with his wrists.

It was around then that Colin got married, and when his first daughter was born it made sense for him to be the one to stay at home and care for her and her younger sister who arrived three and a half years later. But his informal learning did not stop there. Over the discussions of the project we teased out the remarkably broad range of skills he picked up out of a combination of needs-must and his own very wide interests.

The obvious first area was childrearing. All parents have to learn this, but what emerges from Colin's accounts is the combination of what we all learn in our own gender roles, and what additionally you need to learn if you cross those lines as a stay-at-home father. The interviews allowed us to track the impact on Colin of his daughters' progression from young children into the storms of adolescence. In the final interview he is expressing his bewilderment as to how on earth to steer through all the shouting and manipulating. But in the way he talked about it, he revealed too the enormous amount he

had come to understand about them: embroiled in the fight, but tenderly explaining his understanding of where they were coming from.

Then there were the hobbies that had grown with him from childhood. His allotment was a source of food for the family and a therapeutic activity, which he could fit in between the nine to three period when his children were at school. He acquired the skills of gardening from his father, who himself came from a generation that took it for granted you would grow your own vegetables if you had the space.

Another of his longstanding interests was repairing motorbikes and pushbikes, developing head-and-hand skills. In line with his value system of not wasting anything, Colin started picking up bicycle frames from skips and doing them up for himself and the family. Another interest which had started young was photography. His own family discouraged him from this expensive hobby, but once he had witnessed the magic of seeing a picture emerge from a blank sheet of paper in a darkroom belonging to a school friend he was completely fascinated. During these years at home with his children he had taken, developed and printed photos, using cameras and darkroom equipment picked up at jumble sales, improvising and experimenting – and learning.

This practical skill with his hands was useful around the house. He turns the story of learning to repair vacuum cleaners into a real odyssey, starting from someone's reject, using his common sense, asking specialists, then discovering websites. In this period, his determination and confidence that he can get to the bottom of a problem was in contrast to his lack of confidence about his employability. Both were fed by a distaste for the profit-driven world 'out there'. He was determined to get the better of manufacturers who seem to make it easier to throw things away and buy new ones than to mend them. This related to his ambivalence about job-hunting: he had been told he must market himself, which he felt would involve a similar kind of stretching of the truth.

Some of his newer hobby-related skills emerged in partnership with his wife. They were equally fond of their assortment of cats, and used the back garden for chickens. Again this involved learning, from books, from the supplier of the chicks, from the internet and by watching what works with successive generations. They both became adept at using e-bay, for buying and selling.

Colin has always had practical skill with his hands, but his creative side has emerged during these years at home and he seems to be getting more confident about exploring areas of visual design. There was a link here to his photography, where he experimented artistically anyway. Over the years of the project he experimented with making simple attractive furniture designs, and learned the skills of mosaic making, realising that many amateurs who do this lack his carpentry skills to frame their work. In both cases he has produced work which people have shown interest in buying, though Colin's lack of confidence about employment lead to his stalling at the point at which these talents might have led to a new occupational direction.

Colin didn't recognise politics as relevant to his informal learning, but he was persuaded in the past to stand as a Green party candidate in a local election. His value system is in tune with a politics of conservation and against corporate power, but his distrust of such organisations prevents his having much faith in politicians.

Colin was aware that he may have been hiding behind these values to put off the moment of trying to get back into employment. However, this self-understanding did not make it any easier for him, and by the second to last interview he was near despairing, aware of the way in which the burden was still falling on his wife. The careers advisers suggested a computer course and a course in volunteering, which he dutifully completed with characteristic misgivings about the point of it all. But besides the actual skills he learned, both gave him some insights into what had been going on in the world of employment since he left it 15 years ago. Each was followed by further months of indecision and loss of confidence. So it was a particular pleasure when he was offered the first job he did apply for. He was to be the art and technology technician at a local secondary school, using many of his previously learned skills.

Colin's story shows complex interrelationships between his positions, his identity and dispositions, his achievement of agency, and his learning. His story is interesting from a gendered perspective. This is a clearly male story, but one which breaches one of the common gender stereotype boundaries, as can be seen in Colin's long career as a house husband. We have brought out in the story the breadth and expanse of Colin's learning through that part of his life, showing some of the affordances of his home and leisure learning cultures. We have also shown how these lived and learned experiences further developed Colin's sense of antipathy towards the commercial world, and his 'Green' values. However, this learning can also be seen in reverse, as it were. For during this period Colin learned how not to be employed, and through his learning and experiences, became someone who did not want employment and did not know how to become employed. This became a problem when he became aware of the need to take some of the money earning pressure off his wife. Put differently, Colin's learning as a house husband reduced his ability to achieve agency in relation to getting a paid job.

Colin was agentic in seeking help to solve this problem, from a careers adviser, and from a course or two. This enabled him to see the value of and draw upon and utilise his accumulated past experiences, interests and skills, in getting his job as an art and technology technician. His is one of several examples in our data, of a person who was helped to achieve significant agency in relation to important aspects of his life, by formal education, guidance and/or therapy inputs. In this sense, Colin's story resembles that of Timothy Keane, and of Gladys Dean.

For each and every personal story in our sample, these same relational influences between self, positions, learning and agency can be seen. However, though there are many similarities between one story and another, we could neither identify any specific relational patterns that were identical for all, nor any clear typology of types of relations, with distinct categories into which all the cases could be grouped. It is quite possible, and often necessary to focus on grouped accounts, for example based upon particular

positions, such as gender, social class, ethnicity, age, generation, geographical location, or particular situations with their particular learning cultures, such as work, schools, family etc. However, as Colin's story illustrates with regard to gender, individual differences will always matter enormously. In understanding learning through life, it is important to hold these general relational principles and the individual specifics simultaneously in view.

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