

SELF DIRECTED LEARNING OF TEN WOMEN PAINTERS

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ABSTRACT

This is a study based on the theories of change in adults. The theories cited are: paradigm shift, perspective transformation, personal constructs and intentional change. The subject of the study is self directed learning as evidenced in the lives of ten women painters. Some consideration is given to definitions of creativity and social context. The purpose of the study was to discover methods of learning that might be useful to women working to develop their creative potential in the visual arts.

The research style is naturalistic and qualitative. Data were gathered by open-ended interview and observation. The original interviews were taped, then transcribed and analysed. The data were organized under the following headings: influential people, developing vision, and problem solving. The findings in the problem solving section were further subdivided into: creative blocks, marketing and skill development. The findings in the skill development section were divided into exploring and experimenting.

The conclusions to be drawn from the experience of these particular women painters are that learning, for them, was integrated into the lifestyle and that it was, primarily, experimenting with solutions to identifiable problems and exploring uncharted avenues for creative

expression. The learning was structured by the evolution of experience and the intrinsic interest of the learners. Each woman initiated her own process and was completely responsible for the directions taken by her learning. In this way the findings paralleled those in the self directed learning literature. The self reflective learning leading to change followed the patterns found in the literature on adult change theory.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to discover methods of learning that might be useful to women working to develop their creative potential in the visual arts. The topic is of particular interest to me because I consider that my development as an artist has been primarily through self directed methods. I consider art and artistic activities to be integral parts of my life. It seems that my art work enables me to view the other parts of my life more creatively and certainly everything that I do and experience, in some way, affects the way I paint and what I attempt to communicate. I am eager to develop my potential in the visual arts and a large part of my reason for embarking upon this particular study was to facilitate my own learning. Knowing of the experiences and processes of other women active in the visual arts will give me new ideas for structuring my future self directed learning.

The focus was on self directed learning because adult education research shows this is the most common style used by adults. The question to direct the study was, What have been the self directed learning projects of women who are active in the visual arts? Research data were gathered in interviews with ten artists. The women selected for the study were all practicing artists from the Victoria, British Columbia area. They ranged in age from their late thirties to their early fifties and they had all taken some college

level art training. From the findings on that question I identified two specifics: How self directed learning was used in the development of creative potential and the activities common to the respondent group as a whole. Any project which has been helpful to a respondent can form a basis of self directed learning for others working in similar endeavours.

SELF DIRECTED LEARNING

Self directed or independent learning is defined in the adult education literature as the process in which the individual student assumes primary responsibility for planning, initiating and conducting the learning project. (Tough, 1971) It is independent in that the student does not require direction from an outside authority, although he or she may choose to consult with or take instruction from a teacher or specialist. Research has shown that there are specific characteristics such as focus and duration which can be used to define a learning project undertaken independently. (Tough 1978)

Brookfield (1979) extends the definition from specific projects to those which become self perpetuating. New avenues of enquiry constantly arise from the field of study. He studied the self directed students who became experts in their fields. I imagine that the development of creative potential is a gradual and continuous process that is incorporated into the lifestyle of an artist. Therefore, I

expected to find the self directed learning of my respondents to be self perpetuating.

THE QUESTION

Independent learning research, so far, has looked at concrete learning tasks and cognitive learning styles. It seemed likely to me that it would be possible to use the foundation of adult education research in independent and self directed learning to build a study that considered the creative process in the visual arts. While development of knowledge and skill through concrete learning tasks and cognitive learning styles is a part of creative development, I wish to open the search to include activities that expand personal parameters and increase the complexity of awareness. These are the elements that lead to fresh insights. As personal expectations and understandings grow, new facets on familiar concepts become visible. If activities have stimulated such expansion and insight, they can be said to have developed the creative potential of the individual.

I was looking for patterns of behavior rather than measuring discrete personality or environmental factors according to a pre-established standard. To increase the likelihood of finding similar patterns, I have confined my research to women. I chose to do a direct empirical study with a small number of participants. This enabled me to

collect more detailed data from each respondent. Such detail or 'thick' description is essential when the factors sought are unknown. In such a study the researcher is the primary data gathering instrument. Interview, empathy, participation and observation are the usual data gathering methods. My data provides a description of what it is like for a woman to be a self directed learner in the visual arts. From this description I identified activities or patterns of learning which may be useful guides to women who wish to develop their creative potential in the visual arts. The activities and styles identified by my study will provide a starting point for further study in self directed creative learning.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: WOMEN AND CREATIVITY

Definition of Creativity

Creative endeavour is defined as original and productive (Random House). Creative people exhibit an independence of judgement which frees them from stereotyped roles. One of the characteristics of creativity is new patterning. The creative person combines known skills and concepts into new patterns. Divergent thinking is another term that appears often in discussion of creativity. From the sources listed in my reference section, I have distilled a definition of creativity. I shall define creativity, for the purposes of my study, as that quality which enables us to see with fresh insight, to make new connections between familiar concepts. The creative thought must be tangibly expressed in a new solution, product or behavior which synthesizes examined parts into a rejuvenated whole.

Dimensions of Creativity: Complexity and Change

Complexity is raised often in the literature as a characteristic common to creative people. Barron (1963) defines this as an awareness of emotional feelings, an ability to confront frankly and express the unconscious. Helson (1967) found that creative young women displayed a high degree of complexity. She concluded that a preference for complexity reflected a central aspect of the creative

personality or of the cognitive-affective process involved in creative performance.

The findings of Bruch-Morse (1972), in their studies of creative women, relate directly to the frustrations of the creative woman in a sexist society. The more complex young women experienced greater discrimination as women than the low complexity young women. She suggests that complex women are more likely to perceive clearly and honestly and they do not deny problems nor try to rationalize them away, as it is apparent the less complex women do. Low complexity women firmly deny that they have any restrictions on the use of their abilities, or they insist that the restrictions are of their own choice. Clearly, such women wishing to develop attributes of creativity or complexity must experience a fundamental change in attitude and behavior. They must develop new patterns, fresh insights, deeper understandings and work toward independent solutions.

Discussions of such change, in the adult education literature, revolve around the following terms; paradigm change, perspective transformation, personal construct theory and intentional changes. Each provides an exciting look at how adults learn and grow.

Paradigm Shift

The term 'paradigm shift' was introduced in 1962 by Thomas Kuhn. A paradigm is a framework of thought, a scheme

for understanding and explaining certain aspects of reality. A paradigm shift is a distinctly new way of thinking about old problems. (Ferguson, 1980) A change comes after data, conflicting with the old theory or paradigm, collect to the point where the old paradigm is no longer acceptable. Usually at a point of crisis, a powerful new insight explains the apparent contradictions and a new and more comprehensive theory emerges. Acceptance of the new paradigm involves rejection of the old. For this reason it is a very difficult change for it must be radical and wholehearted.

Perspective Transformation

"Perspective transformation is the emancipatory process of becoming critically aware of how and why the structure of psycho-cultural assumptions have come to constrain the way we see ourselves and our relationships, reconstituting this structure to permit a more inclusive and discriminating integration of experience and acting upon these new understandings." (Mezirow, 1981 p.6) Mezirow has developed this definition from an understanding of the three primary cognitive interests suggested by Jurgen Habermas. These three are the technical, the practical and the emancipatory. The emancipatory involves an interest in self knowledge. Learning about self results in new perspectives in a personal or world view. This is a perspective

transformation. Mezirow refers to our natural tendency to move toward new perspectives which appear to us more inclusive, discriminating and integrative of experience. He supports this with a reference to Carl Rogers who describes "an evolutionary tendency toward greater order, greater interrelatedness, greater complexity". (p. 7)

The concepts of greater interrelatedness are developed by Carol Gilligan (1982) in her work with the psychology of women's development. Although she contends that the 'different voice' that values interdependency and responsibility is not characterized by gender but by theme (p. 2) it is of note that by studying women a new emphasis was found that underlined interrelatedness and complexity, two cornerstones of creativity.

Mezirow sees this perspective transformation happening in two ways. One is a sudden insight into understandings and assumptions. The other is a series of transformations which permit gradual revisions of perspective. Regardless of method, he recognizes that the passage is always difficult and involves "compromise, stalling, backsliding, self deception and often failure". (p.8)

Personal Construct Theory

Personal construct theory is founded on the work of psychologist, G.A. Kelly. Personal constructs are similar to paradigms described earlier. Based on past experience we

construct a representation of reality which can be used to interpret new experiences. This personal construct is always open to review. The continual development of more complete explanations of the world is the process we call learning. From this process Candy (1982) identifies three levels of learning; 1) consolidation of some aspects of our outlook 2) revision of some and 3) outright abandonment of others.

Situations which challenge the individual's personal construct and require transformation present a potential for stress. Like perspective transformations, changes in personal constructs happen in two ways. They can be sudden, precipitated by crisis, or very gradual as a result of developmental changes within the individual.

Intentional Change

Change in adults has been examined carefully by Allen Tough. His approach has been to study self directed learning and intentional changes. Certainly paradigm shifts, perspective transformations and personal construct revisions can be the direct result of intentional changes. Tough has confirmed that most people are remarkably successful at choosing, planning and implementing intentional changes. Speaking of these people he quotes Leonidas: "People, in their different ways, gathered up their courage to do something new for themselves. In

ordinary and everyday ways all the people. . . were quite brave".

Social Context of Women Artists

What is needed for a woman to discover, develop, express and sustain her artistic creativity? Virginia Woolf says, 'a room of one's own' and preferably independent means. The research of Bruch and Morse (1972,1973,1978) shows that independence and assertiveness are characteristic of creative women. Stephen Amos (1978), in a study of artists, found that established female and male artists were remarkably alike. He was using the California Psychological Inventory (CPI) and found creative males and creative females differed only on the femininity and tolerance scales, indicating females slightly more passive, and dependent and more willing to tolerate differences of opinion between themselves and others. The other scales usually showing significant differences between males and females including socialization, communality, responsibility, self control and good impression indicated that male and female artists were quite androgenous. Schwartz (1977) suggests creativity in women can be stimulated only after a re-education that would counter the assumption that creativity is non-domestic and therefore, by definition, male. After this re-education, the second step is, logically, building self esteem in the would-be female creator. Building self esteem will be important even for those women who function creatively. Marilyn Whiteside (1977) found that of

high and low creative male and female college students, highly creative females had the lowest self esteem. As she concludes, "talent without self confidence is too often talent without a future". (p. 227)

The conventional roles for women in the arts have been woman as object, woman as myth and woman as creative homemaker. (Conklin, 1977) Women attempting to break with tradition and become creators meet with several sources of frustration which lead to problems of low self esteem. Because women have been peripheral in the art world, there is no continuing tradition of women artists upon which to build. Consequently, the spiritual, intellectual and material needs of women artists are not met. (Woolf) They are expected to reflect human values that are in fact male, white, middle and upper class values. They are artists who are women in a sexist society.

Conclusions

Two conclusions stand out clearly from the literature on women and creative change. We must look at old problems in new ways and we must look inward for our new solutions. Growth is a result of a more integrated understanding. The process may be initiated by crisis and be very quickly done, or, more commonly, it may be a building, step by step, of a new analysis. A more clear understanding of self and of self in relation to society will enable women to develop a more complex, creative vision.

METHODOLOGY

CHOOSING RESPONDENTS

I began my methodology planning by considering standardized creativity tests as a means of identifying creative women who could participate in my study. Cattell's Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire (1970), for example, has been accepted in the literature as an objective measure of creativity. I found that it identified personality characteristics of people who had already demonstrated their creativity in a recognized manner. Such a profile is potentially useful in specific behavior predictions of people who are not already known to be creative, but it was not necessary for my purpose. My intent was to study biographical information and learning styles of women already active in the visual arts. I had no need to reaffirm their creativity or to predict their behaviors.

Welsh's Art Scale (1975) is another diagnostic and predictive instrument I considered. It was developed by determining which drawing samples, from a set of sixty, were preferred by recognized artists. This was further refined to eliminate forced or chance correlation. The construct validity of the test was established by administering the test to subjects who were nominated as creative because they were widely recognized in their field. Again, the

participants I chose were active and recognized in their field. There was no need to validate their status by administering Welsh's test to them.

The objective criteria I used for choosing respondents for my study was that they were active in the visual arts. This was to be evidenced by three of the following:

a) maintain a studio, b) have had a one woman, juried show within the last two years (including public and commercial galleries), c) receive income from sale of artwork, d) teach art students.

Subjective criteria were also useful in deciding which individuals would most likely be enthusiastic participants with whom I could establish empathy. The criteria I considered were that they define themselves as professional artists, as compared to hobbyists or amateurs, and that their work have appeal or excitement for me.

When I identified several potential respondents I contacted them by telephone to make an appointment to introduce myself and my study. This introductory visit was very short. The information the potential respondent needed in order to make an informed decision about participating was presented in a covering letter. (Appendix A) The information included definitions of creativity, self directed learning and intentional changes, the question I had formulated to study, a brief description of my theoretical framework, a statement as to the voluntary and

anonymous nature of the study and an estimate of the time commitment required.

I consider the immediate personal contact of this introductory meeting to have been vital in establishing interest and rapport. Another letter going across the desk of a busy woman could have been easily ignored and follow up phone calls could have been a nuisance. A face to face introduction enabled the potential respondent to make a personal connection as she read the letter that gave her a hint about whether or not she was interested in working with me as an individual. I knew that an informed decision was most likely to be a committed decision. All of the women approached agreed, during that first visit, to participate.

This personal introduction and written description of the study replaced an earlier consideration of a group meeting. The purposes of the meeting were to define terms, introduce the study question and spark thought before the personal interviews. The logistics of such a meeting with ten respondents demanded that I reconsider. My new plan met the objectives set for the group meeting and eliminated the potential dangers of destroying anonymity and narrowing each woman's focus to those ideas which might have been expressed in the group session.

THE INTERVIEW

The information I was seeking was undefined. The

parameters were wide and I wanted to give respondents a great deal of freedom to develop and expand their own descriptions of self directed learning and to consider carefully how their experience has been both unique and universal. If independent learning in creative endeavors had already been defined, a questionnaire might have been appropriate. However, I needed to motivate the respondent to provide accurate and complete information in a subject area where definitions are few. Gorden (1969) suggests the necessity to motivate informants increases with the amount of information required by the researcher, as the answer structuring decreases and as extrinsic rewards decrease. A personal interview provides the opportunity for that motivation to be given.

The non-scheduled or open ended interview is the most appropriate data gathering technique when the 'universe of discourse' of each respondent varies so greatly that the interviewer must be ready to vary the wording of questions and sequence of probes to fit the understanding of the respondent and the particular circumstance of the interview. (Gorden p. 48) Rather than an interview schedule where questions and subquestions are set, ordered and ranked, I decided to use an interview guide. (Appendix B) An interview guide has an outline of topics and subtopics but no specified sequence. Objectives can be listed with each topic to facilitate tracking of answers and formulating

probes. My interview was a voyage of discovery. "What kinds of independent learnings do female painters structure for themselves? How do they begin? How did they travel to where they are now?"

Richardson (et. al. 1965) has outlined very clearly the criteria of a good interview. Each item related to the interviews I planned as follows:

Satisfactory participation: the responses must be substantial enough to provide interesting detail.

Response quality: the responses will reflect an understanding of the definitions of independent and self directed learning.

Validity: the responses will be consistent with public information such as gallery dates when appropriate. There will be internal consistency in factual information and between verbal and non verbal responses.

Relevance: responses must relate to the topic with the understanding that the respondents are unique and qualified in their field and are therefore equally as good judges of relevance as the interviewer.

Specificity and clarity: responses will show an understanding of applications not just ideas. Language will be clear and understood by the interviewer.

Coverage: there will be a full range of response. All topics of the interview will be dealt with.

Depth: responses will include feelings in addition to knowledge. Artists will discuss their fears, frustrations, excitements, joys.

I set specific questions to get the interview started. Biographical data was the beginning point but I moved quickly to broad, open ended questions. Probes were useful to stimulate expansion when a response had not been specific

or clear. If there was resistance to a probe I eased back but kept the focus on the respondent. "What did you do then?" "How did that work out?" Leading questions can be directional to facilitate efficient responses. Richardson (1965) found that respondents were influenced by interviewer value judgements or assumptions explicit in questions only when the respondents were fearful, eager to please or bored. Such feelings did not surface in my interviews because of the selection process used.

The interview questions were generated from my own experience as an artist and as a woman, from the adult education literature on self directed learning and from the topic of the study. These sources provided the informed and empathic perspective necessary to an empirical study. My perspective was field tested in preliminary interviews with four women artists. These interviews pursued general lifestyle/workstyle questions and were used as a guide in constructing my interview outline.

I chose the interview as my primary data gathering method for the reasons discussed above. I was able to approach the interviewing from an empathic position because of my experience in the visual arts. Although I did not focus on my own experience, it did, as mentioned, aid me in formulating questions and it provided a background and a reference point from which to recognize the patterns which I found.

In addition to the taped interviews, observation was an important method of gathering data. This was not the participant observation common to many empirical field studies because there was no on-going group activity and informants' past experience was as applicable as their current projects. The observation focused primarily on body language. Body language clues indicating discomfort with a question or answer were followed by investigating and clarifying questions. A confidence of voice and comfortable body stance on the part of the respondent was interpreted as signifying honest and clearly understood answers. Body language such as a cynical smile or bravado in the voice signaled a possible bias which was subsequently discussed and evaluated. Thus the interview information was validated immediately. In addition, I interviewed most respondents in their studios. This enabled me to observe and record any physical description of the studio that could possibly augment the verbal information. These notes provided additional data upon which to base my conclusions and/or substantiate findings from the interviews.

In an interpretive project such as this the concern is for validity more than replicability. I have taken only one view of a social situation. My data were specific to the situation and another view could easily produce quite different patterns. All efforts toward validity and reliability attempt to guarantee the accuracy of the

patterns discovered and assure that the picture of the situation described by the fieldwork does reflect what it is like from the inside. (Dobbert 1982)

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The first task in analysing the data was to begin coding categories of information. As the interviews had followed the proposed outline quite closely, the same categories emerged in each of the transcripts. I began grouping quotes and descriptions within each transcript. Several topics took shape. I divided the information into seven areas: biography, influential people, source of vision/ ideas, marketing, creative blocks, exploring and experimenting. The biographical information was useful as background and the discussions of influential people evolved naturally from the biographies. Discussion of influences leads to discussion of the source of ideas and visions. It is in this area that many of the interviewees spoke intimately of their inner lives. The learning style that most adequately covered the remaining topics was problem solving, so I initially grouped creative blocks, marketing, experimenting and exploring. Experimenting and exploring were directly related to skill development and I further subdivided that information for clarity.

INTERVIEW FINDINGS

Each interview began with a general discussion of biographical background. All of the interviewees had clear recollections of childhood art experiences and many considered artistic endeavours their main focus from a very early age. Their responses were clear, "I ALWAYS wanted to be a painter" (8), "I wanted to be a painter the minute I was born"(6), "I can't think of ever not wanting to be an artist"(9). Most women were encouraged by their families and had ready access to art materials. One (2) who did not feel particularly encouraged toward creativity by her family did spend a great deal of time alone, outdoors, as a child. She knew, at age eight, that she wanted to be a painter and there was never any question that she would go to art school. Another (3) went, at age eleven, to art classes at the Chicago Art Institute with a friend. There she fell in love with paintings and the Art Institute became a part of her life. The third woman found her family in direct conflict with her artistic drive. She learned early that art was appropriate only within certain boundaries. "It was O.K. to fool around, but not to take art seriously"(6). She was allowed supplies and sporadic lessons after failing miserably at ballet and piano, but at the end of high school the family vetoed an art scholarship and sent her to college. Her life since then has been a struggle to validate her devotion to her artwork.

All of the women interviewed described artwork as an all encompassing motivation in their lives. Some statements were:

"I have come to realize that my painting is where I live. Part of the reason I do other things is that I'm waiting for something to happen here." (7)

"The very act of painting is where my energy is. That is why it must be the center of my home." (6)

The years spent away from painting are considered, by these women, to have been "lost" in terms of emotional satisfaction and connectedness with their true selves. In describing her years before entering art school, one said, "I just put in time"(10). Another spent "ten lost years" (7) recuperating from the pressures of art school. Eight have children and the years spent focused on youngsters are considered by most to have been a conservative period, with their artwork "on the back burner"(8). "I was a housewife and all that junk", (4) was one good natured comment that seemed to echo the sentiments of five who had been "at home" wives and mothers. The notable exception is one woman who considers her family situation to be the stabilizing factor in her life which, in fact, establishes the structure in which she can work regular hours on her art. This is, of course, after she "spent a long time with the babies" (1).

The women without children present two very different perspectives. One works full-time in a helping profession and is seriously considering having a child on her own. She stopped painting for one year while preoccupied with people

but has "done it every spare minute since" (5). The second has chosen not to have children. She says, "I don't have room in my life for children" (2). This is not considered a sacrifice but a choice of a favoured lifestyle, acknowledging that the discipline of her life would be disrupted by children.

A composite picture emerges from the lives of these ten women. They have each carried, from childhood, a vision and a commitment to their work. They were supported, either or both at home and at school in their creative endeavours and they have, as adults, established a lifestyle with art at its center. They came through difficult, sometimes fallow, years to a place of personal strength and satisfaction where they could say, as one did, "My art becomes me and I become my art" (6).

INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE

The influential people in the lives of the women interviewed were instructors, colleagues and friends. In only three incidents the instructors were chosen specifically. One woman (2), as an art school student, chose an instructor she knew to be particularly supportive of students working on their own. Another (5) sought out a local painter for instruction because she respected that painter's work. The third (4) sought a critique from a university instructor and was subsequently invited to join a

sessional class. The friends identified were usually also painting colleagues. In one case (2), the friends were a dancer and a writer, so that, although they did not share the painting experience directly, they were involved in the creative arts.

The instructors considered influential by the interviewees were, without exception, characterized as encouraging and supportive. They permitted the students to work independently and did not attempt to influence style. They were teachers who spent a lot of time looking at the student work and talking about art in general. Often a single remark, such as: "Best thing you've ever done." "You're painting! You're there!" "You must draw, draw, draw." "Nobody but you will give a damn whether you paint or not", has been remembered for years.

It is significant that, outside of the exceptions noted, the meeting of these influential instructors was as a result of the student looking for a group with which to work or being ready to begin a new learning experience. The specifics of the learning environment were circumstantial. This relates to the findings of Aslanian and Brickell (1980) in "Americans in Transition" and Spear and Moker (35:1) in "The Organizing Circumstance": They found that the need or impetus was in the learner but the working out of process depends very much on the facilities and resources immediately available. In all cases, the learner identified

the need, initiated the process and took responsibility for the learning, using the instructor as a support and a source of information.

Each of the respondents considered it important to share work and critique with other artists. They sometimes chose to do this individually and other times in groups. Group experiences were usually in the form of workshops and seminars and occasionally travel. These situations will be discussed more fully in the Problem Solving section as workshops and seminars are often used for that purpose.

The most important influence on each of these painters has been their friends. Again the words supportive and encouraging came up again and again. "We help each other. We respect each other's work and we like each other's work." (9) "We talk about everything." (2) Two of the interviewees identified men within their support structure. One (1) considered a friend and colleague very important, although he lives far away, and the other (8) felt that her husband was the one with whom she had most interaction and from whom she received the most support. The others named women friends. This quote sums up that experience:

"My support and encouragement comes primarily from my women friends. We talk about personal things. That validates my life experience." (2)

These findings clearly relate to Tough's findings (1971) where people turned to friends, family and informal networks for help and direction in self directed learning.

DEVELOPING VISION/SOURCE OF IDEAS

All of the women interviewed discussed the integrated nature of their work and their daily lives. It was clear that their imagery and vision for their work came directly from their life experience. I will quote extensively from many of the respondents to illustrate this important finding.

"Everyday life experience is my drawing image. Images come very slowly then mix together for one picture. I absorb it day after day." (1)

"What works best is my experience and my feelings." (5) (3)

"My work is always integrated into everyday life." (6)

"My images come from integrating ideas, something someone says, dreams, words." (3)

"They (images) are the facets of your life." (4)

The integration of life and vision is discussed in the work of Gilligan, cited in my theoretical framework. Another term used for this "way of seeing" is field dependent, meaning that the background information, the environment, in short, all contributing factors are included in the understanding or analysis. Such wide reaching and inclusive thought leads to the complexity that is named by Barron, Helson, Bruch, Morse and Rogers as characteristic of creative people.

Barron defined complexity as "an awareness of emotional feelings, as ability to confront frankly and express the unconscious." Mezirow discussed the emancipatory self knowledge of perspective transformation. Some of the women

interviewed related this same phenomenon in psychological terms, such as the one who said, "Being human is so painful and that has to come through in the paintings." Feelings are expressed by painters as artistic images. Personal growth and self understanding to gain an awareness of emotional feelings and that ability to confront and express the unconscious were very important to the women that I interviewed.

Many different techniques and experiences were used to initiate personal growth and self understanding. Some mentioned during the interviews were dreams and dream analysis, psychic experiences such as time travel and white light experiences, tarot card reading, drugs, psychotherapy, art therapy, yoga and the study of mythology. All the painters wanted their work to have emotion, to express feelings and relate those feelings to the viewer. Their comments regarding their personal growth experiences indicate that the internal changes did affect their work.

"It all began to show in my work" (6)

"I found a place to go for ideas for my work -- inside myself.(3)

"And it all comes out in my paintings." (10)

"All of my imagery comes from the unconscious." (6)

"I want to paint from the power of my inner reality." (2)

While personal growth and self understanding influenced their work for the better, the women found the benefit was

reciprocal. The act of painting gave them inner strength.

"Painting gives me a sense of coming together." (8)

"It was my sanity." (2) (4) (7)

"The act of painting stretches you and you move onto the next stages." (7)

"It just gave me the greatest high." (4)

The frustrations of creative women in a sexist society, identified in the Bruch-Morse study, were born out in the experiences of the women that I interviewed. Sensitivity to their own experience enabled many of these women to identify dissonance when faced with an emphasis on male experience and a denial of the validity of female experience. Six of the ten women interviewed discussed the influence of feminism on their lives and their art. The feminist analysis provided an explanation of why women's experience was domesticated and trivialized by men. This was affirming for women who felt forced, by convention, into traditional male imagery. The women interviewed used the number of women instructors at art schools as an example of male dominance in the contemporary art community. They talked of pressure to produce work that fit the male norm in order to please male instructors. They spoke of the pain of veiling or hiding their own experience in order to be accepted into the art establishment. The most direct result of the affirmation found in feminism was an increase in self confidence. Women felt more able to value and respect their own experience and

their own vision. Of these six, four considered their work uniquely female in imagery. One uses primarily female figures, another works with sensual textural surfaces, the third uses goddess imagery and the fourth works with elemental shapes and colours, which she identifies as female. The other two work primarily in land and sea scapes but consider that their sense of self and feelings of confidence and value have been enhanced by their developing consciousness of women's movement issues.

Most of the painters interviewed related strongly to natural surroundings. "There is something magical about the wind, the rain, the elements." (5) "The move to Saskatchewan changed my vision. I dove into my work." (9) "I relate to landscapes." (7) "I have a physical memory of my childhood environment." (2) The physical environment directly influenced their feeling about their work as well as their imagery.

The last influence on vision mentioned during the interviews was the experience of photography. One of the interviewees (3) considered it an important part of her work. She has learned much about composition because the lens forced a focus on form, composition and light. It also captured a moment in time. This was the clearest example, in my research, which seemed to parallel Tough's idea of intentional change.(1982)

Integration is the key word in the consideration of the

artistic vision of these painters. Their work relates in some way to every part of their daily lives. Everything that they do touches their vision. The spiritual, the emotional and the physical facets of their beings are acknowledged and honoured so that both the inner and outer reality are included in their imagery.

PROBLEM SOLVING: CREATIVE BLOCKS

All of the interviewees had experienced some difficulty in overcoming creative blocks - those periods of time when they seemed unable to paint or when nothing they did would satisfy them. The overcoming of the creative block often constitutes a paradigm shift. The old paradigm is no longer acceptable. Consider the statement of one interviewee, "As soon as I know how to do it, I can't do it any more." (7) An impasse is reached because a more comprehensive vision is required. Another woman recalled a time when her work had no vitality. A friend said, "Just paint what's inside you". "Just that statement," she says now, "changed me. The first thing I did after that was just colour. That was a real breakthrough." (3) She made a radical and wholehearted change.

The techniques developed for overcoming creative blocks turned out to be similar for most of the women interviewed. All of the women were routine about their studio time and considered it important to spend regular, committed time at their painting. When painting was difficult, they

considered it important to spend time in their studios doing related work or reading. Support networks were valuable in times of frustration in the studio. One woman said, "I'm learning that I need emotional support and that I can ask for it." (6) Others identified specific friends that had been helpful in giving advice or a well aimed push.

The most common response to a creative block was articulated by one as, "go with the process, have faith in the process." (7) Some women stop painting and read art books, others keep trying different approaches, others switch to a different medium. Then "it all comes together with experience". (5)

Two women interviewed did not experience creative blocks. One (1) found her work detailed and labourious, so that, after the composition was set, the work was routine. The other found each painting carried her into the next and each series of ideas led directly to another. She said, "I'm hooked on this thing. I have to see where it takes me".(10)

PROBLEM SOLVING: MARKETING

All of the women interviewed described the process of learning to market their work as a process of trial and error. "You just learn by doing.", was what I heard over and over, echoed by "It's hard". Advice from colleagues was solicited by some and certainly some information was gleaned that way. One woman said, however, "I looked for someone to tell me how to do it and there was no one" (2). Another (5)

finally found a book, How to Market Your Work but soon realized she had already learned everything in the book by her trial and error efforts.

It is important, in marketing art work, to have photographs of the work for sale. This demands that the artist develop new skills. Again the process was described as trial and error. One woman (2) found an instructional book, another (5) attended a skills workshop on the topic. All were struggling slowly with perfecting techniques that would suit their particular work and photographic facilities.

Two methods proved successful in marketing, cooperative showing and professional help. One woman (9) was involved in a cooperative gallery. This provided showing space for each of the members. They found they were able to sell each other's work because they really liked it. The process of setting up a cooperative is complex and demanding. The structure is very important because without a structure not everyone has a voice. It also requires an attitude of cooperation which this woman found was not common in every community. A version of the cooperative gallery is implemented here, in Victoria, in the form of group shows organized by artists rather than galleries. These efforts have not been cooperatives in the traditional sense of equal participation but they have been an organized response to the question of marketing.

Three women considered the hiring of professional help to be a partial solution to the problems of marketing. One (6) had hired a business consultant to assist in organizing her teaching, publications, travel and showing. Two (1,5) others used professional photographers to take slides of their work. Most of the others indicated in the interviews that, with safeguards, an agent to market their work would be wonderful.

PROBLEM SOLVING: SKILL DEVELOPMENT

I have divided the third problem solving section into two parts, exploring and experimenting. Exploring and experimenting cover the skill development directly related to painting. Exploring describes those experiences where the artist explores the work of other artists through books and gallery visits. Experimenting describes those experiences where the artist experiments with the art materials. Skill development relates to the intentional change discussed in the literature. It is an ongoing search for a better way.

EXPLORING

Viewing other artists work is extremely important to many painters and the women I interviewed were quite deliberate in their viewing methods. Careful observation is how their process could be described. "I analyze what I see. I say the colours out loud. I look at patterns and figure out the geometrical pattern on the colour wheel.",

said one. (3) "I was looking at paintings to see how they were structured.", said another. (6) From this careful observation the women learned new methods. "I looked at paintings and then came home and worked." (6) Viewing other artists work was also emotionally vital. The women interviewed enjoyed works of art for the feelings expressed and shared. They found works of art emotionally and spiritually moving and their own work could be inspired by the viewing the work of others.

Art books provided a similar, although less intense, experience. General art information, such as historical and contemporary work, not available for local viewing can be gleaned from books. Books were also used to study intensively the work of a particular artist or artistic concept. One woman (3) described a very concentrated learning about colour using the book The Art of Color. She was only able to have it from the library for three days, but for three days she studied very fast and very hard. From the information gathered in that study session she worked for six months on the concept of colour by setting experiments for herself and working through the exercises in many different ways.

One woman described learning still life techniques from a book. "I got books from the library and started from zero. I learned I could touch a form. I remember the first time I saw light. I had to discover everything myself. It

was great!" (7) Other specific skills found in books were colour mixing, stretching canvas, gessoing. Books were also used by one (6) to research her imagery. The source of vision had been spiritual and the information to translate the vision to canvas was difficult to find. Books and, finally, travel to original sources were the solution to her quests.

Interaction with colleagues was also a source of new information. "I just ask a few things." (1) "I'm always watching." (5) "New things come out, then I can try them." (1) Observation, reading, discussion: Each provided a road to new skills.

EXPERIMENTING

The experimenting section of my data analysis came out of the questions I asked around learning techniques and use of media. While this was obviously the largest area of learning the women were, for the most part, unable to identify specific or structured learning projects. Like the learning in the other areas, it was integrated totally into their lifestyle and was simply part of the process of painting.

"I just wanted to paint." said one. (3)

I have titled the section experimenting because that most aptly describes how these painters learned about their materials and how to use them. When asked about selecting paint and mixing colour, one woman said, "I don't know, I

just buy and try." (2) Another said, "I was just floundering around." And later, "I spent years going back and forth on rough and smooth." (3) They were willing to try and try again when beginning a new style or medium or coming back to something after time away. "I always have ten disasters before getting going in watercolour," (9) was a comment that illustrated the attitude toward experimenting. One woman described the process quite clearly: "Technique is a matter of staying close to your materials. . . . Riding on your paint brush in all this space. Watch the painting as it spreads on the canvas. Keep painting until you get it right." (7)

Another described the same process, "My technique has come by trial and error. I learned by doing it a lot of times." (3) Said a third, "When I was ready to try acrylics I put colour charts on the wall and began experimenting. It was trial and error." (2)

Two tools were used in the skill development process by almost all of the women interviewed. Most went to workshops and used this as a time, free of constraints, to experiment and move into new areas. The second tool was the journal or notebook. All the women interviewed, except one, kept a journal. The one who did not have a journal (4) did notes and sketches but had them on little pieces of paper, brown paper bags and other such scraps. She felt some of her best work was floating around on those scraps.

The women who went to workshops were clear that this was a time to experiment. One woman, who found workshops

particularly useful, said,

"I went away to be free of fear of failure. I experimented with many things. I really like to go on workshops once in awhile. I throw out all the stops and dive in. I stretch out to a new area--be a bit different--do something really strong." (4)

The journal is usually detailed and specific. Most women use it to record new ideas, to plan and develop work, to discuss 'how to' technique and document research as well as record and deal with feelings and emotions.

"I identify what I want to say (communicate). I carry on a dialogue. What is most important? How could it be executed? I could move this forward, this back. I identify how I will go about it, what colours I will used and then decide whether or not there is something stylistic that I want to achieve." (5)

"My notebook is writing from my mind how I'm going to do things. A few things I draw first before I start out but mostly it is composition." (1)

"I record all my dreams in my journal. I loose associate in my journal." (2)

It is important to each of the women interviewed that every thought, feeling and experience be considered part of learning. Trial and error experimentation was the basis of their process as they sought new ways of working.

SUMMARY

It is clear from the data that the ten women painters interviewed have similar learning styles. They have integrated their work into their daily lives. They use day to day experiences as a basis for their work and they consider that their self esteem relates directly to their vision.

The learning experiences are, for the most part, unstructured and are in a process of problem solving. The specifics of the solutions are a natural outgrowth of the life circumstance and available material and human resources are used to form the solutions.

The process of learning, growth and change experienced by these painters is self directed and relates to the processes discussed earlier: paradigm change, perspective transformation, personal construct theory and intentional changes.

The learning has been self directed because it was initiated by and remained totally the responsibility of the learner. As the learning was integrated into the lifestyle, it was seen, in retrospect, to have evolved rather than to have moved through the identifiable stages of planning, initiating and conducting of projects. There was, however, a process which included the identification of needs and methods of problem solving. The solutions brought changes to the lives and the work of the learners.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

The major finding of my study has been that my respondents have moved beyond learning projects and have incorporated self directed learning into their lifestyles. The women that I interviewed have so integrated their learning into everyday life that to discuss their self directed learning is to discuss their style of learning and their style of living. Life long learning has become their lifestyle. They could say, as one did, "My whole life is self directed learning". (3) The learning has become self perpetuating, such as that described by Brookfield (1979). They are deeply involved with the subject and new avenues of enquiry constantly arise from the field of study.

Cognitive and affective learning are integrated in the visual arts. Skill development is fundamental but provides only an empty shell without the development and expression of feelings and emotions. Therefore, the creative development of my respondents was dependent upon the expansion of personal parameters. To some extent they have developed all three learning levels discussed by Mezirow (1985), instrumental learning, the skills of their art; Dialogic learning, the meaning of the work of other artists; and self reflective learning, the understanding of their own meaning. All of this together led to new and creative avenues of expression. Personal growth provided the

infrastructure of understanding necessary to combine the skill and the vision.

The interview findings described above cannot be called learning projects in the traditional sense. They do not have a specific duration, focus or a linear progression. But each activity described involved process, that is, it required participation and it did result in change. Some changes related specifically to painting, such as familiarity with elements of design or colour awareness. Others, such as portrayal of emotional intensity and clarity of philosophical statement were more far reaching and would relate to the whole of the person. They did, however, all relate to creative development and increased the individual woman's potential for further development.

The similarities of experience within my respondent group is not surprising. The group is very select culturally, socially and economically. This was a deliberate research decision made in an effort to establish as strong a patterning in learning styles as possible. The strongest pattern for me was the integration of learning, work and personal life. These women are not only on a career path, they have embraced life long, self directed learning. The second important finding was the overwhelming use of trial and error learning methods. Although the interviewees described their process as trial and error I consider experimenting and exploring to be more accurate descriptions.

There is, in fact, no error because each trial provides new information and new skill that may very well be appropriate and even necessary at a later time. The encompassing factor that was expressed in every interview was the enthusiasm and devotion that each painter felt for her work. I consider this the most valuable benefit of self directed learning.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

My work on this project has sparked many new ideas for me. As I had hoped, some personal directions are more clear. The message for teachers and planners is also clear. Support and encouragement were identified as major ingredients of the success of these respondents. We must find ways to provide supportive, encouraging environments. Programming for self directed learners involves the providing of resources, equipment and space. Simply facilitating opportunity for self directed learners to get together is one way to begin.

The directions for future research that I see are:

1. Look specifically at spiritual and psychic phenomena and how they relate to creative visualization.
2. Consider the relationship of the human potential movement and increased personal awareness to an increase in creativity in the general population.
3. Consider whether or not participation in the exploration of art work or experimentation with art materials leads to artistic expression.
4. Consider the connections between feminism, self confidence and artistic productivity.

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APPENDIX A

Dear _____:

I am inviting you to be part of a study of self directed learning projects of women active in the visual arts. I am working on a master's degree in the field of Adult Education/Curriculum Studies and this is my thesis study.

The purpose of this study is to discover methods of learning that might be useful to women wishing to develop their creative potential in the visual arts. The focus is on self directed learning because adult education research shows this is the most common style used by adults. The question to direct the study is: What have been the self directed learning projects of women who are active in the visual arts? Research data will be gathered in interviews with ten artists.

From the findings on that question I hope to identify two specifics: Which characteristics of self directed learning projects have specifically related to the development of creative potential and whether or not any are common to the respondent group as a whole. Any project which has been helpful to you in developing your creative potential can form a basis of self directed learning for others working in similar endeavours.

Definitions for your background information

Creativity: that quality which enables us to see with fresh insight, to make new connections between familiar concepts.

Self Directed Learning: learning where the student has primary responsibility for planning, initiating and conducting learning experiences.

If you are willing to participate, I expect that the initial interview will require two hours of your time. I will be available for a second session if you wish to clarify or expand upon the first. Your participation, and that of all interviewees, is voluntary and your responses will be anonymous in the final report of the study.

I thank you for your consideration. I will call within this week for your decision.

Yours sincerely,

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW OUTLINEBiography

family support
formal training
number of children
other jobs
intimate partnerships

Skill Development

trial and error
mentor
colleagues
group activities
practice

Attitudes Toward Work

confidence
professionalism
detachment/perspective
self worth
passion
drive
goals

Philosophical/Political Influences

alternate gallery system
female imagery
social conscience
feminism

Creative Process

studio environment
source of ideas/inspiration
execution of work

Fundamental/Significant Learnings

what?
how?
when?
why?
where did that lead?

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Self Directed Learning of Ten Women Painters



SHIRLEY ANN AVRIL

August 15, 1985