

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF RESOURCE SELECTION AND EVALUATION  
BY SELF-DIRECTED LEISURE LEARNERS WHO PARTICIPATE IN ONLINE  
LEARNING COMMUNITIES

By

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B.S., Rice University, 1988  
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AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the degree

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## Abstract

There have been two classic models of the way self-directed learners organize their learning experiences – a planning model, discussed by researchers such as Tough (1971) and Knowles (1975), which considers self-directed learners to be actively and deliberately planning their learning projects, and an environmental model, proposed by Spear and Mocker (1984), which considers these learners to be strongly influenced by what they called the organizing circumstance. Later researchers have found support for both models. Both models posit that learning resources play an important role for self-directed learners, but there hasn't been much research specifically looking at how learners make resource decisions. For this project, the researcher recruited 13 women from online sewing communities who had reported obtaining a particular hard-to-find sewing resource and interviewed them about their resource decisions and resource libraries. The project asked the questions of how self-directed learners are planning, the criteria they use to choose learning resources, how an environment of plentiful resources and the internet affect these choices, and how learners evaluate their resources. The researcher found that this particular group of learners are conscious only of doing short-term, project-by-project, planning, but reveal another, unconscious level of building mental maps of their entire field of interest, including judgments of their personal interests and evaluations of their personal skill sets. These learners enjoy this learning, and consider their resources to be treats as well as references; they seek relevant content, novelty, and intellectual challenge. They are strongly influenced by their communities, both local and online, but maintain independence in their learning choices.

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An Exploratory Study of Resource Selection and Evaluation by Self-Directed Leisure  
Learners Who Participate in Online Learning Communities

JULIA JEANNETTE LANGEL

2011

## Abstract

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## Table of Contents

List of Figures.....	xii
Chapter 1 .....	1
Introduction .....	1
Background .....	2
The Home Sewist.....	2
Self Direction in Learning .....	4
The Self-Directed Learning Process.....	5
Problem Statement .....	6
Statement of Purpose.....	7
Research Questions .....	7
Methodology .....	7
Limitations.....	8
Significance .....	9
Definitions .....	9
Summary .....	10
Chapter 2 .....	12
Introduction .....	12
Self-Direction in Adult Learning .....	13
Characteristics of Self-Directed Learners.....	13
Tools and Techniques for Teaching Self-Direction and Self-Directed Learners .....	15
Philosophical Considerations of Self-Direction in Adult Education.....	16

Documentation and Analysis of Self-Directing Learners and Self-Directed Learning

Projects ..... 17

The Self-Directed Learning Process..... 17

Types of Learning Projects..... 17

Resource Selection ..... 21

    The Knowles/Tough Model..... 21

    The Organizing Circumstance..... 25

    Environments of Abundance..... 27

Goals and Criteria..... 30

    Criteria for selecting learning resources..... 30

    Evaluating learning outcomes..... 32

Environment ..... 34

Japanese pattern magazines ..... 38

Summary ..... 40

Chapter 3 ..... 41

    Introduction ..... 41

    Research Questions ..... 41

    Selection of Methodology ..... 42

    Study Population ..... 43

    Data Collection..... 46

        Interview Design..... 47

        Pilot Interview ..... 48

Interviews ..... 49

Data Analysis ..... 50

Credibility and Transferability ..... 52

Protection of Human Rights ..... 55

Summary ..... 56

Chapter 4 ..... 57

    Introduction ..... 57

    Sample Selection ..... 57

    Characteristics of the Sample ..... 57

    Findings ..... 61

        Research Question One: Are these Japanese pattern magazine users deliberately planning their learning progression? If so, how does this planning work? If not, are they selecting learning activities at random?..... 61

            Planning Project by Project. .... 62

            Long-term (Multi-project) Planning. .... 64

            A General Map of the Domain. .... 65

            Life Gets in the Way..... 68

            Learning Strategies. .... 70

        Research Question Two: Do self-directed learners use criteria to choose new resources, and if so, what are these criteria? ..... 71

            Value for the Money..... 72

            Style..... 77



Source is Independent Business. ....	81
Collecting References.....	81
Getting a Treat.....	82
Interesting.....	85
Wanted Japanese Style.....	87
Library.....	88
Research Question Three: How does an environment of plentiful, easy to access	
resources affect decision making and choices? .....	89
Community.....	89
Online Learning Activities.....	90
Resource Referrals.....	92
The New Normal.....	94
Randomizing.....	97
Research Question Four: Do self-directed learners use criteria to evaluate resources, once	
tried, and if so, what are these criteria? .....	98
Keep Everything.....	98
Space.....	99
Duplicates.....	100
Lost Interest or Need.....	101
Why Keep?.....	102
Disposal.....	105
Other Criteria.....	105

Summary .....	111
Chapter 5 .....	112
Overview .....	112
Restatement of the Research Problem.....	112
Discussion .....	113
Research Question 1: Are these Japanese pattern magazine users deliberately planning their learning progression? If so, how does this planning work? If not, are they selecting learning activities at random?.....	113
The planning model.....	113
The organizing circumstance.....	114
Mental Maps and Filters.....	116
Research Question 2: Do self-directed learners use criteria to choose new resources, and if so, what are these criteria? .....	118
Research Question 3: How does an environment of plentiful, easy to access resources affect decision making and choices? .....	121
Research Question 4: Do self-directed learners use criteria to evaluate resources, once tried, and if so, what are these criteria? .....	127
Implications .....	128
Conclusions .....	130
Recommendations for further research .....	132
Conclusion.....	135
Appendix A: Participant Recruitment .....	136

Sample Message Board Posting ..... 136

Sample Email..... 136

Sample Confirmation Email ..... 137

Appendix B: Interview ..... 139

Appendix C: IRB Approval..... 142

References ..... 144

List of Figures

Figure 4.1. Learning Strategies Reported by Participants ..... 70

Figure 4.2. Criteria for Selecting Learning Resources ..... 72

Figure 4.3. Reported Benefits of Participation in Online Communities ..... 89

Figure 4.4. Reported Benefits of Participation in Local Communities ..... 90

Figure 4.5. Source of Original Information about Japanese Sewing Resources ..... 93

Figure 4.6. Manner in which Respondents Got their First Copy of Japanese Sewing Resource  
 ..... 93

Figure 4.7. International Sewing Resources Used by Respondents ..... 95

Figure 4.8. Manner in which Respondents Disposed of Purged Resources ..... 105

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Adult educators have long known that there are many adults who quite happily manage to learn things without the benefit of formal education programs. The work of researchers such as Houle (1988/1961), Tough (1971), and Mocker and Spear (1984), among others, has demonstrated that these self-directed learners master a wide range of subjects, from history to auto mechanics, and are quite diverse in age, socio-economic status, amounts of formal education completed and other demographic characteristics.

Home sewists are self-directed learners learning for enjoyment. In the United States alone there are millions of people making their own garments, accessories, home decorating items and costumes. They have a wide range of resources to choose from, and the internet makes almost all of these resources equally available (Hamilton, 2006). How do they make resource decisions? And does our current understanding of self-direction explain why a subset of these learners would deliberately choose resources that are expensive, hard to obtain, and hard to use when there are many less expensive, readily available, high quality resources available?

This exploratory study investigated the resource selection and evaluation experiences of several home sewists who have deliberately sought out and utilized these relatively hard-to-use resources. By looking for common themes in their experiences, the researcher hoped to gain some insight into why learners in charge of their own learning would occasionally choose to do things the hard way – and perhaps help to refine our understanding of how self-directed learning works.

## Background

### The Home Sewist

Home sewing is a large, vibrant, diverse and economically important community (Hamilton, 2006; Robbins, 2007). According to the Home Sewing Association there are as many as 35 million sewing hobbyists in the U.S., up approximately five million in six years (Hamilton, 2006; McLaughlin, 2007). There are over 20,000 members of the American Sewing Guild, an association serving just home sewists (professionals are served by the Association of Sewing and Design Professionals.) There are several on-line social networking services for sewists (Hamilton, 2006); one, PatternReview.com, claims 225, 410 members as of July 14, 2010 (Prakash, 2010). These sewists are, for the most part, sewing for enjoyment rather than from economic necessity (Hamilton, 2006; Montgomery, 2006; “Sewing machine companies,” 2006). Sewing machines for the home sewing market range from under \$100 to well over \$10,000 for a top-of-the-line electronic machine that communicates wirelessly with design software installed on home computers (“Sewing machine companies,” 2006; Slatalla, 2007). Jo-Ann Fabrics, one of the largest retailers serving this market, estimates that 51% of their net sales volume for the fiscal year ending January 31, 2009 were due to the sewing businesses (fabric, machines, notions, books, etc.), generating approximately \$969.5 million (Jo-Ann Stores, 2009). This is a surprisingly large and economically active group (“Sewing machine companies,” 2006).

Home sewists learn from a wide array of sources. Print sources include books, magazines, and pattern instructions (Hamilton, 2006; McLaughlin, 2007; Robbins, 2007). Most machine and fabric stores offer brief classes and workshops (Hamilton, 2006; “Sewing machine companies,” 2006). Clubs and groups like the American Sewing Guild publish

newsletters and hold meetings with workshops and presentations (Green, 2008). Online, message boards encourage conversation and many sewists publish blogs with pictures, reviews, and even photo tutorials (Green, 2008; Hamilton, 2006; Robbins, 2007). Home sewists as self-directed learners have a wide array of resources to choose from.

Most home sewists, however, don't have access to formal learning opportunities. Very few high school students have the option of taking sewing in home economics courses, and even fewer communities have secondary programs in clothing design or construction (Brandes & Garner, 1997; Montgomery, 2006; Robbins, 2007). Even county extension services have reduced their offerings (Brandes & Garner, 1997).

In the United States, home sewists are fortunate to have a thriving community of suppliers, both of physical materials such as fabric and trims, and of learning resources such as English-language patterns, books, magazines and tutorials. Every Jo-Ann Fabrics, Hancock, Hobby Lobby and Wal-Mart sells pattern lines such as Vogue, Butterick, McCalls and Simplicity. Simplicity alone releases more than 200 new designs every year (Vanmaanen, 2010). Independent pattern designers such as Louise Cutting, The Sewing Workshop and Amy Butler sell patterns through smaller fabric stores and websites.

Sewists in the U.S. are also able to obtain, with varying levels of difficulty and expense, resources from other countries. Some of these, such as *Burda World of Fashion Magazine* (German) and *Ottobre* (Finnish), are translated into English. Others, such as *Patrones* (Spanish) and *Ms Stylebook* (Japanese), are not (Gifford, 2005). While not as popular as English-language resources, these foreign-language resources have a certain following (Gifford, 2005; Lipson, 2009). But why?

Why would a self-directed learner, faced with a wide array of stylish, inexpensive and readily available resources, choose to seek out a more expensive, hard-to-get resource written in, say, Japanese? Are such choices anomalies or can we explain them within the framework of our understanding of self-directed learning?

### **Self Direction in Learning**

Those in the adult education field have a variety of perspectives on the subject of adults doing their learning outside of the formal education market. On the one hand, Knowles (1990) placed self-direction at the core of adult education, and Tough (1971) stressed the importance of understanding the efforts adults make to learn by asking “Without an emphasis on helping people to learn or change, how can we move toward peace, economic development, productivity, zero population growth, more effective government, better cities, widespread physical and mental health, satisfactory race relations – and away from poverty, crime, urban problems, and pollution?” (pp. 31-2) Brookfield (1985a), on the other hand, noted that, in 1981, a speaker at an education conference called independent learners the “competition.”

Although educators have been interested in self-taught individuals for hundreds of years (L. L. Guglielmino, Long, & Hiemstra, 2004), the academic focus on self-directed learning in the United States started with Houle (1988/1961) and Tough (1971), who established that self-directed learning was widespread. Since then, academic efforts have generally fallen into four categories: documentation of self-directed projects and self-directing individuals (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991); description of the characteristics of successful self-directed learners (Candy, 1991); development of tools and techniques for integrating self-direction into formal education environments (Knowles, 1975); and discourse about the place



of self-direction and self-directed learning in the evolving philosophical foundations of adult education (Brookfield, 1993).

Within the category of documentation, the research into self-direction has expanded in both scope and methodological variety. From the early Tough (1971) studies, which established that most adults did engage in self-directed learning projects requiring non-trivial amounts of time and effort, researchers have taken closer looks at the learning done by specific groups of learners and specific types of learning projects (L. L. Guglielmino et al., 2004). These research projects have included a range of methodologies, including scripted interviews and surveys that enable statistical analysis and unstructured interviews that reveal the lived experiences of individuals involved in self-directed learning (Candy, 1991). For this project, the researcher used qualitative research methods to look more closely at the resource selection process used by some self-directed learners.

### **The Self-Directed Learning Process**

Over the years, adult educators have developed two classic models of the self-directed learning process. One early view, described by Tough (1971) and Knowles (1975), posited that the learner is a fairly far-sighted and thoughtful program planner who identifies learning goals and selects learning resources most likely to enable the learning to reach those goals.

A second major view was proposed by Spear and Mocker (1984). This view, which they called the organizing circumstance, suggested that learners are very strongly influenced by the environment in which they were located. This environment presents a very limited selection of possible resources, from which a learner selects the one which seems most relevant or most interesting. This view dropped the requirement for long-term planning but

didn't provide much understanding of a learner's behavior in an environment of unrestricted resources (Rager, 2006).

Brockett (2006) has suggested that the work of consumer choice researchers might provide some insight into the question of choice in an environment of abundance. These theorists, such as Schwartz (2004) and Iyengar (2010) have explored the effects of both goals and environment on consumer choices.

Given these models, the researcher decided to look at the resource choices made by self-directed learners in terms of their goals and motivations and their environments, including their communities and the internet.

### **Problem Statement**

To date, the research on self-directed learners hadn't looked specifically at the choices these learners make as they select and evaluate the resources they will use in their learning endeavors, particularly when those learning endeavors are embedded in a social environment that offered a wide variety of choice. We didn't know what criteria they use – are they looking for efficiency? Value for the cost? Novelty? Status? How do they trade off competing criteria? In particular, why would learners select a learning resource that is expensive, hard to find, and written in a foreign language when inexpensive, high-quality, English-language resources are plentiful and easy to get? Because so few studies have investigated the preferences of this subset of self-directed learners, we have only a partial understanding of how resource decisions are made.

### **Statement of Purpose**

This study investigated the learning resource selection and evaluation practices of self-directed learners who, while learning for enjoyment, had selected resources (Japanese pattern magazine users) that would appear to make the learning experience more difficult or expensive than it needed to be.

### **Research Questions**

This exploratory study addressed the following research questions:

- Are these Japanese pattern magazine users deliberately planning their learning progression? If so, how does this planning work? If not, are they selecting learning activities at random?
- Do self-directed learners use criteria to choose new resources, and if so, what are these criteria?
- How does an environment of plentiful, easy to access resources affect decision making and choices?
- Do self-directed learners use criteria to evaluate resources, once tried, and if so, what are these criteria?

### **Methodology**

This qualitative study consisted of a series of interviews. These interviews addressed the participants' experiences with selecting, using and evaluating a particular type of foreign-language resource. The researcher believed that these individuals, who have demonstrated that they are willing to seek out, obtain, and use a resource that is comparatively inconvenient, represented an interesting and information-rich population of self-directed learners.

The respondents for this study were drawn from the population of English-speaking, United States- and Canada-based home sewists who had obtained Japanese pattern magazines that offer sloper-based patterns. These language, residence and resource restrictions were designed to increase the likelihood that all respondents were using a resource they planned to acquire (rather than an impulse purchase), which the researcher believed would increase the mindfulness of their responses. The respondents were recruited through a combination of online message boards and private email messages. The researcher continued until fifteen respondents were interviewed or the analysis reached thematic saturation.

The researcher analyzed the interview transcripts using AnSWR, computing software designed for qualitative research (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007). The goal of the analysis was to compare participant responses and identify themes related to resource use by the self-directed learner.

### **Limitations**

The significant limitations and assumptions for the study included:

- The researcher assumed that the participants would be honest during the survey and interview.
- The interviews were conducted over the phone. This could have posed some problems, because it was harder for the interviewer to detect and react to non-verbal cues.
- Because the interview participants were recruited primarily online, the sample was heavily weighted toward sewists who used online resources or were recruited by sewists who did.

### **Significance**

Forty years of studies have demonstrated fairly convincingly that there is considerable self-directed learning occurring in the United States (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991). Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) generally viewed this favorably -- “in other words, self-direction in learning can be seen as a means, or vehicle, by which individuals can more fully realize their greatest potential as human beings” (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991, p. 122). In an effort to help more individuals achieve this potential, a significant amount of adult education resources have been devoted to helping learners be more self-directed, and to providing self-directed learners with resources and programs they want and need (L. L. Guglielmino et al, 2004). And yet, there hasn't been much known about how self-directed learners prefer to choose their resources, or what they are looking for. The existence of home sewists who deliberately sought out expensive, hard to find and hard to use resources suggested that the learner selection process involves factors other than cost and easy access.

This exploratory study investigated some of the factors involved in the selection of learning resources by self-directed learners. The themes that emerged from the study may provide useful items for consideration for the development or evaluation of resources intended for self-directed learners.

### **Definitions**

The researcher used the following definitions in this study:

**Self-directed learner:** An individual who is pursuing learning without participating in formal educational programs, also referred to by Candy (Candy, 1991, p. 411) as autodidaxy.

**Learning project:** A learning project is a discrete episode of learning, including the choice of goal, selection of resources, learning activities, and evaluation.

**Learning pursuit:** A learning pursuit is a long-term, multi-episode learning endeavor.

**Learning resource:** A learning resource is any person, place or thing that a learner chooses to assist him or her in the completion of a learning project or pursuit.

**Community:** A learner's community is comprised of the people who the learner considers to share interests and information related to a learning pursuit. This is not necessarily (and in this setting probably is not) a community of practice.

**Online Community:** A learning community that communicates primarily through internet tools such as email, blogs, message boards and other websites.

**Online Community Site:** A specific website established as a meeting place for members of a larger online community.

**Sloper-based pattern:** There are several types of sewing patterns. The kind that is presented in the learning resources discussed here is presented as a diagram indicating how to draw a garment pattern piece starting with a custom body map called a sloper. This is different from the kind of pattern most commonly sold in the US, which is printed on paper in a series of standardized sizes.

**Japanese pattern magazine user:** A sewist who has owned or borrowed a sloper-based Japanese pattern magazine such as those known in the U.S. as *Ms Stylebook* and *Lady Boutique*.

### Summary

Home sewists are self-directed learners with a wide range of learning resources available to them, some more easily accessible than others. We know that there are sewists who deliberately seek out a particular kind of resource that is comparatively hard to find, obtain, and use. Is this part of a deliberate, carefully-considered learning plan? How are

these learners responding to environmental influences? By gaining more information about the planning and evaluation processes used by this particular group of learners, this qualitative study gained insight to the more general application of self-directed learning models in this world of plentiful learning resources.

## Chapter 2

### Introduction

This chapter will include a brief overview of the wider field of self-directed learning, followed by a more detailed look at the research and models related specifically to the learning process used by self-directed learners, and the choices they make when selecting learning resources. The chapter will conclude with a brief discussion of Japanese pattern books, the learning resource that was the focus of this research project.

The idea of self-direction is central to the adult education field. As practitioners have worked to define the field of education, the idea that adults are different from children because they are self-directed has come up time and again. For example, Knowles (1990) wrote that “Adults have a self-concept of being responsible for their own decisions, for their own lives. Once they have arrived at that self-concept they develop a deep psychological need to be seen by others and treated by others as being capable of self-direction” (p. 58). And because of this, Lindeman (1989) wrote, “...in adult education the curriculum is built around the student’s needs and interests” (p. 6). L. A. Guglielmino (2008) wrote “it is our most natural way to learn” (p. 2).

Probably because it is such a core concept in the field, “self-directed learning” has been a wide-spread and fluid term in adult education. Candy (1991) identified four distinct concepts. These are self-direction as the independent pursuit of learning without formal institutional structures (referred to here as autodidaxy), self-direction as a way of organizing instruction (learner-control), self-direction as a personal quality or attribute (personal autonomy), and self-direction as the



manifestation of a certain independence of mind and purpose in learning situations (self-management in learning). (p. 411)

This research project focused on individuals demonstrating the first concept, autodidaxy. The term self-directed learner was used rather than the more unfamiliar autodidact.

### **Self-Direction in Adult Learning**

Although educators have been interested in self-taught individuals for hundreds of years (L. L. Guglielmino et al., 2004), the academic focus on self-directed learning in the U.S. started with Houle (1988/1961) and Tough (1971), who established that self-directed learning was widespread. Since then, academic efforts have generally fallen into four categories: documentation of self-directed projects and self-directing individuals (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991); description of the characteristics of successful self-directed learners (Candy, 1991); development of tools and techniques for integrating self-direction into formal education environments (Knowles, 1975); and discourse about the place of self-direction and self-directed learning in the evolving philosophical foundations of adult education (Brookfield, 1993). Because this project fell within the documentation category, documentation will be discussed last, and in the greatest detail, in this chapter.

### **Characteristics of Self-Directed Learners**

There have been three primary schools of thought in self-direction literature. The first is that self-direction can be described as a set of attitudes, skills and practices; the second is that self-direction is better described as a set of personality traits; and the third is that self-direction is a stage of adult development.

One very common view is that self-direction is a set of attitudes, skills and practices. Knowles expressed this view when he stated that adult learners may need to “reorient to what learning is” after being conditioned to be passive receivers of transmitted information (Hatcher, 1997). In an attempt to be concrete about what, specifically, constitutes this set of attitudes, skills and practices, Guglielmino first published the Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale in 1977 and has conducted, supervised, or consulted on hundreds of studies using the instrument, since renamed the Learning Preference Assessment, in the years since (L. L. Guglielmino et al., 2004). Although there have been numerous criticisms of the SDLRS/LPA (Delahaye & Smith, 1995), it continues to be an important part of the self-direction research toolkit (Long, 1994). One appeal of this approach is that it suggests that these attitudes, skills and practices can be taught or facilitated, increasing the degree to which learners can direct their own learning. Research to document the effects of such interventions has found mixed results (L. L. Guglielmino et al., 2004).

An alternative is the idea that self-direction in learning is, instead, a personality trait that is present to a greater or lesser degree in each individual (Bonham, 1989). This is the approach that Oddi took with her Oddi Continuing Learning Inventory (R. S. Caffarella & O'Donnell, 1987) and that Brockett and Hiemstra took with their Personal Responsibility Orientation model (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991). This perspective resonates with those who see a strong relationship between self-direction in learning and the psychological concept of field independence (Brookfield, 1985b).

More recently, researchers have explored the idea of self-efficacy in relationship to learner self-direction. Garrison's model included self-management, self-monitoring,

and motivation components (Garrison, 1997). Ponton, Derrick, Confessore, and Rhea (2005) have developed a set of instruments designed to measure related constructs such as persistence, desire, resourcefulness, initiative and autonomy. This appears to be a synthesis of the ideas of self-direction as learnable and self-direction as innate.

Finally, there was the idea that true self-direction in learning is part of a more general accomplishment of adult development. Brookfield has expressed the opinion that the “most fully adult form of self-directed learning” would combine learner independence with critical reflection and perspective transformation (1985b), an idea echoed by Mezirow (1985) and Eneau (2008). Taylor (2006) has suggested that self-direction in learning does not truly emerge until stage four in Kegan’s model of adult development (Kegan, 1994). In the field, a study by Reio and Davis (2005) found a positive correlation between SDLRS scores and age, while Brockett’s (1985) earlier study did not.

### **Tools and Techniques for Teaching Self-Direction and Self-Directed Learners**

This is the practical face of self-directed learning. This category of academic focus includes both specific techniques for organizing instruction and more general models of teacher/learner relationships.

At the most specific level, educators have worked on techniques like learning contracts (R. S. Caffarella & Caffarella, 1986; Rosenblum & Darkenwald, 1983), problem-based learning (Vernon & Blake, 1993), resource centers (P. J. Guglielmino & Murdick, 1997), and online and computer-based courses (Boyer & Maher, 2004; Gabrielle, Guglielmino, & Guglielmino, 2006). The research on the effectiveness and attractiveness of these tools has shown mixed results, and Jarvis (1998) has criticized them as a way of transferring instructional workload to students.

In addition to the development of very specific tools and techniques, there have been suggestions for how to structure the relationship between learner and teacher in ways that support learners at different levels of self-direction. The model by Grow (1991) supposed four stages of self-direction and provided guidance for teachers working with students in each stage. Pratt (1988) presented a four-quadrant model that related learner confidence with learner motivation and also offered suggestions for instructors. Taylor (2006) had suggestions for helping learners move into a self-directed stage of development.

### **Philosophical Considerations of Self-Direction in Adult Education**

The idea of self-directed learning has been a popular and durable topic in the field of adult education and this has caused some philosophical debate. Writers have reflected that the concept might be biased toward Western cultures (Brookfield, 1984; Hvitfeldt, 1986), the middle and upper classes (Brookfield, 1984), men (Brookfield, 1984), those who did well in formal schooling (Brockett, 1985), or those who naturally prefer to learn by reading (Heisel, 1985).

The pursuit of self-directed learning has also been criticized for over-emphasizing certain kinds of learning, particularly technical, and diminishing other kinds of learning, including critical reflection and perspective transformation (Brookfield, 1984; Mezirow, 1985). Supporters of constructivist approaches to learning, such as Eneau (2008), have also argued that the idea of a self-directed learner was, perhaps, neither practical nor desirable.

## **Documentation and Analysis of Self-Directing Learners and Self-Directed Learning Projects**

Within the category of documentation, the research into self-direction has expanded in both scope and methodological variety. From the early Tough studies, which established that most adults did engage in self-directed learning projects requiring non-trivial amounts of time and effort (Tough, 1971), researchers have taken closer looks at the learning done by specific groups of learners and specific types of learning projects (R. S. Caffarella & O'Donnell, 1987; L. L. Guglielmino et al., 2004). These research projects have included a range of methodologies, including scripted interviews and surveys that enabled statistical analysis and unstructured interviews that revealed the lived experiences of individuals involved in self-directed learning (Candy, 1991).

### **The Self-Directed Learning Process**

This review of research and model-building will focus on the planning process (if any) that learners use, the criteria they use when selecting learning resources, how learners evaluate their resources after using them, and how these resource selections are affected by the environment, particularly by peers and by the internet. First, however, this chapter will review the types of independent learning projects that have been studied.

### **Types of Learning Projects**

Over the years, researchers have documented fairly extensively the extent to which adults independently pursue learning (Merriam & Brockett, 1997). “Since so many self-directed learning efforts take place outside of institutions, it can be quite difficult to examine self-directedness in a holistic way that considers social, cultural, political, and

psychological dimensions of the concept” (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991 p. 37).

Nonetheless, research aimed at establishing the existence and extent of self-directed learning has consistently found a substantial number of learning projects conducted for recreational purposes (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991).

Much of the research on self-directed learning has been focused on areas where adult educators might have some influence. One popular area has been formal schools, where self-directed learning behaviors might be taught, developed or identified. Booth (2007) studied adult undergraduates, James (2008) studied pre-school teachers and Huang (2006) studied teacher education students. Another has been corporate work environments, where self-directed learning might be harnessed as part of a program of human capital development. For example, Muller (2007) examined health care managers, Paur (2007) surveyed students in online medical science courses, Williams (2008) studied school personnel increasing their use of student management software in the months after an initial adoption period, Liddell (2008) interviewed female executives at charitable organizations and McMillan (2007) interviewed customer support representatives.

When researching what Candy would call autodidacts, adult educators have tended to focus on efforts to learn “important” subjects, such as parents learning to manage the care and therapy of their autistic children (Nefdt, 2007) or to homeschool (Ortloff, 2006), women researching breast cancer treatment options (Jones, 2006; Rager, 2004), dairy farmers (Steele, 1994) or community leaders (Phares, 2006).

There have been relatively few researchers focusing on self-directed learners who were learning for the sheer enjoyment of it. Mesbur (2006) interviewed adolescent girls

participating in informal music learning. Austin (2008) profiled a woman who researches and acts out portrayals of over 40 historical characters. Scott (2006) studied people over 50 years old who had recently embarked on challenging learning projects that changed the directions of their lives, including learning to sail around the world, compose jazz piano music, and speak Cornish. L. L. Guglielmino et al (2005) studied barriers, interrupters and restarters with people whose learning projects included landscaping, cooking and riding a motorcycle. Banz (2009) interviewed visitors to museum exhibits. Redding (1991) studied amateur radio operators. Steele (1991) reflected on her own studies of genealogy and quilting, while Bonham (1989) studied her own introduction to Sacred Harp singing.

General studies of self-directed learning projects have found that many of them were related to leisure. Heisel (1985) found that many of the self-directed learning activities pursued by a sample of older black adults were leisure activities such as singing, card playing and knitting. Padberg's (1994) study of volunteers selected from students at a GED preparation program found activities such as sewing and sailing. Hiemstra's study of older adults in Nebraska found that about half involved self-fulfillment topics such as crafts, recreation and religion (Verduin & McEwen, 1984). Roberson and Merriam (2005) also found that the learning projects of older, rural adults in Georgia included topics such as computers, genealogy, gardening and flower arranging. In fact, one of the respondents described in the Spear and Mocker (1984) study was learning how to sew and design clothes! Danis and Tremblay (1988) concluded that self-directed learners engaged in long-term learning pursuits were not

seeking solutions to problems of personal life, and were, instead, more motivated by curiosity and interest.

Turn of the previous century educators considered leisure learning important enough that skills to make good use of leisure time was listed as one of the seven major goals for secondary education by the 1918 Conference on Education (Verduin & McEwen, 1984). “Adult educators will be alert to discover what activities give joy to particular students; they will be on the watch to uncover temperamental hobbies, pursuits which may seem ludicrous to others but which to the doer bring peculiar satisfactions. Indeed, adult education will have justified itself if it does nothing more than make adults happier in their hours of leisure” (Lindeman, 1989, p. 39). This was especially true for creative activities that “can enhance life for the adult who may have little other opportunity in everyday working and living for creative experience” (Verduin & McEwen, 1984, p. 7).

Brookfield (1993) also suggested that exercising the freedom to choose your own learning topics could be a small, but political step. In the case of learning for pleasure, a learner is asserting his or her right to direct resources toward personal satisfaction rather than to work or family.

In addition to the general sense that leisure learning is worthwhile and therefore worthy of study, there is a methodological reason to study autodidacts pursuing leisure learning: it may provide a glimpse of how people approach learning when there are few external decision makers to please. As Charles Brightbill said (quoted in Verduin and McEwen (1984)), “Tell me what you do when you are free to do as you wish, and I will tell you what kind of person you are” (p. 18). Studies of autodidactic projects conducted



in a professional or medical arena may be complicated by the influences of other decision makers such as supervisors or doctors.

### **Resource Selection**

Over the years, adult educators have developed two classic general models of resource selection by self-directed learners – one very planned and linear, one much more circumstantial and reactive.

#### **The Knowles/Tough Model.**

The first view is that of a self-directed learner carefully planning a learning event, identifying possible learning resources, and selecting the desired resources. Tough's extensive interviews revealed, he claimed, thirteen possible steps taken by learners planning a "learning project" (Tough, 1971). These steps were:

1. Deciding what detailed knowledge and skill to learn...
2. Deciding the specific activities, methods, resources, or equipment for learning...
3. Deciding where to learn...
4. Setting specific deadlines or intermediate targets...
5. Deciding when to begin a learning episode
6. Deciding the pace at which to proceed...
7. Estimating the current level of his knowledge and skill, or his progress in gaining the desired knowledge and skill

8. Detecting any factor that has been blocking or hindering his learning, or discovering inefficient aspects of the current procedures
9. Obtaining the desired resources or equipment, or reaching the desired place or resource...
10. Preparing or adapting a room (or certain resources, furniture, or equipment) for learning...
11. Saving or obtaining the money necessary...
12. Finding the time for learning...
13. Taking certain steps to increase the motivation for certain learning episodes (Tough, 1971, pp. 95-97)

Knowles (1975) also described a process "... in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes" (p. 18). This view proposed that the learner is a fairly far-sighted and rational program planner.

Some researchers have found evidence that some learners do use a linear planning process. Padberg (1994) found that almost one third of his respondents used some sort of linear planning process. Confessore (1995) found that learners with fairly focused learning goals were more likely to develop and follow a linear plan.

This view has been critiqued by Pratt (1988), who pointed out that many learners "vary considerably in their desire, capability, and readiness to exert control over these

functions” (p. 161). With respect to desire, Pratt specifically mentioned situations in which learners have elected to enroll in teacher-led courses because they are perceived to be an efficient way to achieve a learning goal. Thus, this criticism was mostly directed to self-direction within formal learning environments, rather than to the autodidactic experience this project explored.

A more applicable concern is that of competence. The Knowles/Tough model did appear to require that the learner know enough about the interest area to make plans. Pratt (1988) and Mezirow (1985) pointed out that it is entirely possible to envision situations in which a learner, who may be very confident in his or her ability to learn, is still too unfamiliar with a topic to even know where to start, which would make it difficult, if not impossible, to formulate a learning plan. Others have pointed out that there are planning, learning and evaluation competency issues, as well (Bouchard, 1998; R. S. Caffarella & O'Donnell, 1987). Spear and Mocker (1984) suggested that some of these competency issues arise when comparing learner planning processes to more formal program planning processes – adults who are less familiar with formal education may not know about, and therefore not do, much planning.

Of course, Tough's model addressed this issue, in a way – step thirteen includes a substep on “dealing with lack of confidence in one's capacity to learn” (Tough, 1971, p. 96). Tough's research also found that learners approaching an unfamiliar topic tended to iterate through several planning-learning-planning phases and often asked others for help with certain steps in the planning process.

Brookfield (1984) offered a methodological criticism, which was, roughly, that the kinds of interviews used by Tough and others included “leading questions” that

caused respondents to recall learning projects that followed this kind of step-by-step model in much greater numbers than learning projects that didn't. Brookfield (1984) had an additional concern here – he believed that this tendency to anchor on this kind of process has led to a focus on “action goals” rather than projects that involve fuzzier products such as “aesthetic appreciation, raising of political consciousness, or developing of interpersonal sensitivity” (p. 64). Mezirow (1985) also suggested that the planning model is most appropriate for what he called instrumental learning, rather than dialogic or self-reflective learning.

When Spear and Mocker conducted interviews without using the Tough interview template, they found that they could not verify the “controlled, linear process” (Spear & Mocker, 1984, p. 3) that the Tough/Knowles model seemed to describe. Roberson and Merriam (2005) also found few indications of a planning process among older, rural adults; their sample included adults with education levels ranging from the fifth grade to post-graduate degrees. The interviews conducted by Danis and Tremblay (1988) revealed “multiple approaches which do not correspond to the unidirectional representations prevailing in the literature” (p. 183). These results seem to support Brookfield's idea that there was something about the structure of the interview protocol that affected the results of Tough's research and that of the many replication studies that followed it.

Another Brookfield criticism has been that much learning occurs in informal social settings, such as conversation with knowledgeable peers (Brookfield, 1984). If this is the case, such learning can not really be planned for.

Brookfield (1985b) has written that much of the early research upon which this model was based was conducted with white, middle class respondents, leading to the possibility that the model is not universal. However, at least three of the seven groups of respondents Tough (1971) interviewed did not have college educations, and one of them consisted of factory workers, which made the sample perhaps more representative than Brookfield feared. Long (1994) wrote, with some irritation, that by 1994, there were some 266 research reports investigating a wide range of populations; his conclusion was that the question of representativeness has been settled.

### **The Organizing Circumstance.**

A second major view was proposed by Spear and Mocker (1984). This view, which they called the organizing circumstance, suggested that learners are very strongly influenced by the environment in which they are located. This environment presents a very limited selection of possible resources, from which a learner selects the one which seems most relevant or most interesting; engagement with this resource puts the learner in a position to choose from a new set of resources, and the selection, engagement, selection process continues. This view dropped the requirement for long-term planning and organization, upon which many of the critiques of the Knowles/Tough model have been based.

Spear and Mocker described the learning process thus:

1. The impetus or triggering event for a learning project or episode proceeds from some change in the life circumstances. The change may be positive or negative, may happen to the individual or to someone

who affects a person's life, or may be an event which simply occurs and is observed...

2. The changed circumstance tends to provide a single or, at best, very few resources or opportunities for learning that are reasonable or attractive for the learner to pursue.
3. The structure, methods, resources and conditions for learning are provided or dictated most frequently by the circumstances.
4. Learning sequences progress, not necessarily in linear fashion, but rather as the circumstances created during the episode become the circumstances for the next necessary and logical step in the process.

(Spear & Mocker, 1984, pp. 4-5)

The research upon which this model was based was conducted with respondents with a less-than-high-school education (R. S. Caffarella & O'Donnell, 1987), which meant that it didn't share the weakness that the Knowles/Tough model might be reflective of middle-class behavior.

Several studies have found that this model reflected the learning process for many learners. Roberson and Merriam (2005) concluded that this model was more consistent with the "loosely organized series of events" that comprised the learning projects conducted by their respondents (p. 275). Banz's (2009) research with museum visitors found that although few visitors initiated a visit as part of an existing learning project, many discovered something during the visit that triggered further learning activities. Rager's (2003) research with breast cancer patients found that, because of the time sensitive nature of most of their learning projects, most didn't feel they had they time to

plan, and instead used whatever resources they found, in the order in which they found them. Padberg (1994) found that the organizing circumstance model was the best fit for a majority of the learning projects conducted by the people in his study.

Spear (1988) pointed out a weakness in his own model. The model appeared to be somewhat deterministic, placing the learner in a mostly reactive mode and leaving very little room for personal attributes. Spear suggested that the model be updated to include a more interactive relationship between the learner and the environment.

One current critique of the organizing circumstance model has been that it doesn't provide much understanding of a learner's behavior in an environment of unrestricted resources. "Individuals bring to each episode or project their own motivation, aptitude, creativity, energy, and tenacity. They may differ in their ability to identify alternative means for learning present within the circumstance. However, this analysis suggests that the most powerful determinants lie primarily within the circumstance itself which, in turn, tends to structure or organize the learning process" (Spear & Mocker, 1984, p. 5). Rager (2006), for example, has written that "clearly, the Internet has revolutionized Spear and Mocker's (1984) concept of the organizing circumstance. Now, anyone with a computer, Internet access, and the appropriate skills has the ability to tap into the vast resources that are electronically available about any subject..." (p. 54).

### **Environments of Abundance.**

Brockett (2006) has suggested that educators and learners might find insight in recent psychological and sociological research into consumer choice in environments of overabundance. In one famous 1994 project, Iyengar (2010) conducted a study with jam

that showed that having multiple choices made for better shopping entertainment but resulted in fewer actual jam purchases. The same cognitive overload issues with abundance were found in studies of retirement plans, automobiles, and toys (Iyengar, 2010).

According to Iyengar, there were several ways consumers could handle more choices, two of which seem appropriate in this context. First, consumers were less frustrated and confused if a choice was one of many repeated or similar choices, such as buying cereal every week. Second, they did better when making selections within an area of expertise, which “enables people to understand options on a more granular level... This additional level of detail lets people sidestep their cognitive limitations in several ways, resulting in significant benefits for the amount of choice they can handle” (Iyengar, 2010, pp. 191-2). It is possible that learners can successfully handle more resource choice when they are assembling a library of learning resources within an area about which they are becoming familiar.

Schwartz (2004) divided consumers into three categories. “A chooser is someone who thinks actively about the possibilities before making a decision. A chooser reflects on what’s important to him or her in life, what’s important about this particular decision, and what the short- and long-range consequences of the decision may be” (p. 75). Schwartz (2004) further divides choosers into maximizers and satisficers. “Maximizers need to be assured that every purchase or decision was the best that could be made” (Schwartz, 2004, p. 77). Surveys conducted by Schwartz and his colleagues (Schwartz, 2004) have found that maximizing tends to cause stress because a maximizer can never be sure he or she hasn’t stopped the search too soon; maximizers also tend to take longer



to make choices and are less satisfied with their purchases (Schwartz et al., 2002). “To satisfice is to settle for something that is good enough. A satisficer has criteria and standards. She searches until she finds an item that meets those standards, and at that point, she stops” (Schwartz, 2004, p. 78). Schwartz argued that satisficing is a healthier strategy and Brockett (2006) has agreed. Schwartz’s third kind of decision makers are pickers. “With a world of choices rushing by like a music video, all a picker can do is grab this or that and hope for the best” (Schwartz, 2004, p. 75). Brockett (2006) wrote that, while each individual probably has a general tendency to favor one of the categories, it was very likely that maximizing, satisficing, and picking are domain-specific strategies.

There are echoes of both the Tough/Knowles model and the organizing circumstance model in these discussions of consumer choice. In fact, the formal field of decision theory has been having a very similar debate for years – while basic economic theory predicted rational decision making, by which they meant something very specific and mathematically axiomatic, observers noticed that consumers were doing something else. The problem was that the rational choice model required perfect information, both about the choices available in the environment and about the chooser’s knowledge and preferences, both of which are impossible in most real world situations (Kahneman, 2000). Simon introduced the concept of bounded rationality in the 1950’s (for which he received the Nobel Prize); this theory provided a new kind of optimizing in which a consumer satisficed, or decided when a choice was good enough (Schwartz, 2004). In both the models of self-directed learning and the discussions of consumer choice, two things are important – the goals, criteria and values of the decision-maker and the environment in which the decision is made.

### **Goals and Criteria**

It is important to remember that learners as a group can have many motivations for learning, and any particular learner may have multiple motivations. Houle (1988/1961), for example, concluded that lifelong learners fall into three general motivational subgroups: goal-oriented, activity-oriented, and learning-oriented. Park and Confessore (2007) refined these three groups into four – learning, social, required, and goal. Presumably, these motivations for learning affected learner decisions about learning projects and the criteria they used for choosing resources.

#### **Criteria for selecting learning resources.**

“Although self-directed learners must be able to identify, access, use, and evaluate available resources effectively, attention has not been generally focused on specific actions related to those skill areas” (Ricard, 2007, p. 61). The following criteria were mentioned in the studies on self-directed learning projects listed above. The list is sketchy, for three reasons. First, only one of these studies was explicitly looking at resource selection, and only a few were investigating the project process in detail. Therefore, most mentions of criteria have been fleeting at best. Second, none of these studies explicitly distinguished between the goals of the learning project and the criteria of the resource selection. This means, for example, that we have no way of knowing if the learners were selecting novelty resources to add variety to a project whose goal is primarily practical or if a learner undertaking a project for fun is seeking extremely efficient and accurate resources. And third, the reports from these studies rarely defined these criteria; it is not clear whether the respondents were not asked to define their terms or if they were unable to articulate definitions when asked. In either case, it is difficult to

compare criteria across studies. Still, even with these caveats, previous research projects have provided some indicators of the criteria used for learning resource selection.

Learners used some relatively objective criteria to evaluate resources. Simple efficiency was one factor in learner decision making. Houle (1988/1961) found, for example, that for goal-oriented learners, “the purpose is always what initiates the educational effort, and the means are selected on the basis of whether or not they will achieve that purpose” (p. 18). Rager (2004) found this as well. The accuracy of the information in a resource was another factor (Jones, 2006; Phares, 2006; Rager, 2004). In addition, simple resource availability was an issue, particularly when a learner were attempting to contact a person (Confessore, 1995; Tough, 1971) or when learners decided to visit a museum (Banz, 2009). And, of course, there were financial considerations (Ortloff, 2006; Tough, 1971).

There are, however, other factors at play as well. Learners appreciated novelty (L. L. Guglielmino et al., 2005) and variety (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991) when choosing resources. Many learners found joy or fun in the process of learning (Austin, 2008; Banz, 2009; Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Danis & Tremblay, 1988; L. L. Guglielmino et al., 2005; Phares, 2006; Redding, 1991; Steele, 1991), while others used learning to reduce fear (Rager, 2004); their resource choices may have reflected these emotions. Others found meaning in their learning pursuits (L. L. Guglielmino et al., 2005; Phares, 2006); they may have sought resources that assisted in that search.

Learners were also concerned with their positions in their communities. Consumer research has suggested that we wish to be unique, but not too unique, and to

have our choices reflect the identities we wish to project to the world (Iyengar, 2010). For example, one of Scott's participants said "The things you do portray who you are" (Scott, 2006, p. 9). Brookfield found that peer interaction, recognition and even competition influenced learner choices (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991); similar social effects have also been found by others (Austin, 2008; Banz, 2009; Danis & Tremblay, 1988; Ortloff, 2006; Rager, 2004; Redding, 1991).

On a more theoretical level, there is the question of whether learners are using the appropriate criteria for resource selection. Brookfield suggested that it might be possible for a learner to become rather technically proficient at something without recognizing the deeper conceptual issues that an expert might be concerned with (Brookfield, 1985b). Mezirow (1985) suggested that this is almost guaranteed, considering that learners are unable to see themselves from outside their current meaning schemes. Danis and Tremblay (1988), on the other hand, found that self-directed learners "are able to operate at the level of the transformation of meanings and their underlying values" (p. 191).

### **Evaluating learning outcomes.**

On at least some level, every learning resource is evaluated twice – first before selection and again during or after use. Logically, a learner would evaluate the resource against both the resource selection criteria and for how well it has contributed to achieving the goals of the learning project as a whole. Unfortunately, Brookfield (1984) pointed out, there hasn't been much focus on the evaluation of self-directed learning efforts. The program planning model proposed that the learner would self-evaluate learning outcomes, but didn't describe how or how well. The organizing circumstance model almost required by definition that self-directed learning outcomes, at least in the

early stages of mastery, would be sub-optimal – the selection criteria was almost entirely based on availability rather than quality. And, as described above, there hasn't been much attention paid directly to resource selection, either.

What do we know about how learners decide when they're done? In some cases, such as Rager's (2003) health care studies, there were external deadlines for action, and the learning stopped, or another round of learning began, on this external schedule. In Guglielmino's study, "personal satisfaction, not total mastery, sufficed for completion" of a learning project (L. L. Guglielmino et al., 2005, p. 89). Roberson and Merriam's respondents appeared to be using a simple "am I still interested in this" criteria for deciding whether to continue a learning project (Roberson & Merriam, 2005). And, of course, for many learners, learning pursuits never ended (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; L. L. Guglielmino et al., 2005; Scott, 2006).

Brookfield (1985b) asked if we can rely on adults to correctly evaluate their own learning, given the general propensity to judge ourselves less severely than others might. Tough (1971), on the other hand, seemed to have found that learners tended to be somewhat anxious about how well they were doing, suggesting that the bias might lean toward underestimating results. Confessore (1995) found that the level of reflectivity in evaluation depended on how focused the learning project was to begin with – learners with tightly focused projects tended to have simpler evaluative criteria than learners with less focused projects, who considered things such as the value of the process in addition to the degree of subject mastery.

Brookfield (1984, 1985b) offered the judgment of experts as a possible evaluation criterion and suggested that some learners deliberately join groups to take advantage of

the opportunity to receive peer feedback. Mezirow (1985) suggested this might be one way to offset the “tunnel vision” that can lead self-directed learners astray. Tough (1971) found examples of learners seeking out this type of feedback and validation. Of course, Brookfield (1993) muddied the waters by suggesting that self-directed learning could be seen as a political act, with the learner asserting that his or her own evaluations can be more authentic than those of the prevailing group opinion.

### **Environment**

The environment in which a learner operates is likely to affect the decisions the learner makes. Two aspects of the environment were of particular interest for this research, the community (or communities) in which the learner participates, and the internet.

For the purposes of this study, a learner’s community was defined as the people he or she thinks of as being interested in, an expert in, or related to the area of interest. Brookfield has called this a fellowship (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991). This community could include both local contacts and people the learner had never met in person, such as book authors or “blog buddies.” The fact that a learner participated in such a community did not, of course, mean that the learner was no longer self-directed. Tough (1971), Knowles (Hatcher, 1997), Spear and Mocker (1984), and others (Brookfield, 1984; Bouchard, 1998; Candy, 1991; Rager, 2004) have all pointed out that self-direction in learning does not mean social isolation in learning.

Learners might use others both as learning resources and as referrers to learning resources. Support for the idea that learners ask other people for information has been documented by many researchers (R. S. Caffarella & O'Donnell, 1987; Confessore, 1995;

Heisel, 1985; Jones, 2006; Ortloff, 2006; Phares, 2006; Rager, 2004; Roberson & Merriam, 2005; Steele, 1991; Steele, 1994).

In studies, learners frequently turned to readily available people before more “distant” resources such as experts or books, even if those resources were readily available and arguably more authoritative (Bouchard, 1998; Cross & Parker, 2004). Brookfield “concluded that many adult learners will look to other learners for information and support rather than to societies, organizations, and professional educators.” He noted, “subjects would mention influential books and magazines but would preface these comments by declaring their 'real' source of information was their fellow enthusiasts” (as cited in Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991, p. 186).

In their study, Danis and Tremblay (1988) found that learners tended to increase their use of networks of individuals as they increased their familiarity and comfort with their subject matter. Candy (1990) pointed out that there is probably some relationship between a learner’s preference for learning from people or books and his or her previous experiences with these types of resources.

If a learner’s contacts didn’t provide the needed information, learners asked them for references to other resources. Liddell (2008) found that female executives asked colleagues and mentors what they need to learn. L. L. Guglielmino et al (2005) found that people used subject matter experts to recommend or explain resources, as did Anderson (2006), Austin (2008), Johnson (2006), Ortloff (2006), and Rager (2004).

One complication to using people as resources is that, while a book or website may be more or less useful, it can rarely have the emotional impact that a personal contact can. This can be both positive and negative. Roberson and Merriam (2005) found

that pleasant encounters could enhance both a learner's knowledge acquisition and his or her motivation to continue, while Tough's research found that an unpleasant encounter could significantly discourage a learner and even derail a learning project, in the worst cases (Tough, 1971). Steele's (1994) dairy farmers, for example, were less likely to consult county extension agents, because "educators make them feel guilty" (p. 232).

But the people in a learner's community can be more than just human versions of books or magazine articles. The learner's peers can also provide important collaborative knowledge construction (Eneau, 2008; Moore, Houde, Hoggan, & Wagner, 2007) and evaluative functions (Bonham, 2000; Brookfield, 1984; Candy, 1991).

The other major environmental variable this project will consider is the internet. The internet provides both unprecedented access and unprecedented potential for confusion. Or, as Hiemstra (2006) put it, "the good news is that almost anything about which you are interested will be addressed in some way via multiple Web sites. The bad news is that almost anything about which you are interested will be addressed ad nauseam via multiple Web sites" (p. 57).

Several researchers have found that self-directed learners used the internet to find learning resources (Hiemstra, 2006; Johnson, 2006; Jones, 2006; Ortloff, 2006; Phares, 2006; Rager, 2004; Roberson & Merriam, 2005). Research done by Anderson (2006) showed that the internet's elimination of geographical limitations for resource providers has resulted in an enormous increase in the availability of resources (which he called the "long tail"); for example, where once a brick-and-mortar bookstore could only afford to carry a few of the newest, most popular sewing books, internet retailers can either afford



to carry hundreds of sewing books or to specialize in niches of the sewing book market that would never have been profitable before (such as Japanese pattern books).

In addition to making published content easier to find, the internet has also made it easier to publish content (Anderson, 2006). This has resulted in an explosion of tutorials, patterns, tips and discussions made available by people who wouldn't previously have been available as resources.

One downside to this environment of plentiful resources is that the quality of the resources varies widely (Brockett, 2006; Jones, 2006; Phares, 2006). "This problem takes on even greater magnitude because many Internet users assume the veracity of what they access and are not even aware of the need to critically evaluate the material they have electronically accessed" (Rager, 2006, p. 58). In fact, this type of critical thinking -- "identifying and challenging assumptions and exploring and imagining alternatives" (Brookfield, 1987) -- is one of the kinds of evaluative responsibilities that Brookfield and Mezirow worried that self-directed learners are unlikely to consider.

"For the technically astute, the organizing circumstance becomes a vast reservoir of electronically available information. Whereas learning projects were previously structured by the limited alternatives that could be found in the local environment, now vast worldwide resources are accessible. The limitation now appears to shift for those who can use the Internet to the skill of the self-directed learner in searching, locating, selecting, understanding and evaluating the seemingly endless array of resources that are electronically available" (Rager, 2006, p. 54).

**Japanese pattern magazines**

For a sewist, a set of sewing patterns can be a learning resource with several things to offer. As a group, they offer fashion ideas reflective of a particular time and place, ranging from the general, such as “women are wearing more dresses this year,” to the specific, such as “many dresses have pintucks for waist shaping instead of belts or darts.” Individually, they can be sources of detailed information on how to shape the top of a sleeve so the wearer can move her arm or how deep the facings should be on tailored jackets to keep the lapel looking sharp. And, of course, they provide templates for actually cutting out fabric and directions about whether to sew on the sleeves before or after sewing up the side seams. A beginning sewist may select a pattern, cut it out exactly as the template shows and sew it up following the directions as closely as possible, while a more experienced sewist might mix and match parts from several different patterns and assemble them in the order she prefers.

There are a number of pattern suppliers in the U.S., and they provide a staggering variety of styles, ranging from the very trendy to the classic to the unique. For many sewists, the range of styles available in patterns is wider than the range of styles available in ready-to-wear. Most fabric stores in the U.S., both brick and mortar and online, offer a selection of patterns, making them easy to find; prices can be as low as \$1.

In the U.S., most patterns are sold in envelopes with a set of tissue templates and a sewing guide. The templates come in a range of somewhat standardized sizes, much like clothing in a department store, and, like department store clothing, the standardized sizes fit some bodies better than others. Many sewists have experience customizing these

templates by pinching out the parts that are too big and adding tissue to the parts that are too small (Palmer & Alto, 2006).

There is an alternative way to approach pattern making. Rather than producing paper templates in standard sizes that can be customized to fit a particular individual, a designer can produce standard guidelines for transforming a sloper that fits an individual into customized templates (Amaden-Crawford, 2005). Although this is the less common approach in the U.S., there are several textbooks that show how to do this and computer software that simplifies some of the template production, although these are rarely stocked by local fabric stores.

The Japanese pattern books known in the U.S. as *Ms Stylebook* and *Lady Boutique* utilize this second approach. The text is written in Japanese and the measurements on the diagrams are in metric units. These books are sold in a few Japanese bookstores in the United States, and from international suppliers such as vendors on etsy.com and Ebay. Prices start at approximately \$15; in addition, for most purchasers, shipping charges can almost double the price. Because few United States cities have Japanese bookstores, most United States sewists learn about these books from magazine articles or online sources such as blogs and message boards (Gifford, 2005; Lipson, 2009).

The researcher chose to examine users of these Japanese sloper-based magazines because they differ from United States patterns in many respects, including pattern type, cost, language and availability. On the surface, it wasn't obvious what planning process, and which criteria, would lead a United States-based, English-reading learner to select expensive Japanese pattern books from among the wide array of pattern resources

available. Yet, these books have developed something of a following in the United States (Gifford, 2005). This goal of this research project was to investigate this apparent paradox to see what it could tell us about how self-directed learners choose learning resources.

### **Summary**

This chapter has reviewed the relevant theory and research regarding self-directed learners and their resource selections. The two relevant models, one based on the work of Knowles and Tough, the other based on the work of Spear and Mocker, agreed on the importance of the learner's goals and criteria, on the one hand, and the learner's environment, on the other, while differing on their relative importance. In this project, the researcher explored the relative effects of these factors on the choices made by a group of learners who have chosen a particular, somewhat unusual, learning resource.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Introduction**

In this study, the researcher explored the learning resource selection and evaluation practices of a particular group of home sewists who had chosen to acquire resources, Japanese sloper-based pattern magazines, that were expensive, hard to obtain, and written in Japanese, a language they neither read nor spoke. By exploring the experiences of learners whose behavior did not appear to be either a straightforward search for efficient resources or an acceptance of readily available resources, the researcher hoped to gain some insight into how self-directed learners select and evaluate learning resources. Because the purpose of the study was to examine one particular kind of experience in detail, the researcher chose a qualitative research design. This chapter will present the rationale for this type of research design, the particular form it took, the types of analysis the researcher planned to conduct, and the steps the researcher took to maximize the quality of the study results and to minimize any risks to the participants of the study.

### **Research Questions**

The specific research questions that guided this study were:

- Are these Japanese pattern magazine users deliberately planning their learning progression? If so, how does this planning work? If not, are they selecting learning activities at random?
- Do self-directed learners use criteria to choose new resources, and if so, what are these criteria?

- How does an environment of plentiful, easy to access resources affect decision making and choices?
- Do self-directed learners use criteria to evaluate resources, once tried, and if so, what are these criteria?

### **Selection of Methodology**

The researcher chose to conduct this research using a qualitative design because this was the most appropriate way to explore the research questions. “Qualitative methods facilitate study of issues in depth and detail” (Patton, 2002, p. 14). Lincoln and Guba (1985) wrote “qualitative methods are more sensitive to and adaptable to the many mutually shaping influences and value patterns that may be encountered” (p. 40). Patton (2002) contrasted qualitative research, which “is particularly oriented toward exploration, discovery and inductive logic” (p. 55) with experimental designs that require the investigator to “decide in advance what variables are important and what relationships among those variables can be expected” (p. 56). This made qualitative research the more appropriate approach for a study exploring the breadth of the range of participants’ values and criteria for resource selection.

Further, the data collection was conducted with an interview facilitated by the researcher. Lincoln and Guba (1985) described the relative strengths of the primary qualitative research instrument, the human researcher. The human as research instrument is particularly useful when “it would be virtually impossible to devise a priori a nonhuman instrument with sufficient adaptability to encompass and adjust to the variety of realities that will be encountered” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 39). In addition, an interview that included open-ended questions, conducted in person by a researcher,

permitted the exploration of context (Patton, 2002). The ability to explore the context in which resource decisions are made was particularly important because the research questions included issues of process, which implied timing and sequencing, and environment. The researcher expected that both timing and environmental issues were both part of and influenced by the context of the resource decisions being made, thus making context a central focus of the study and personal interviews the best way to explore them.

### **Study Population**

The researcher conducted interviews with thirteen individuals selected using purposeful sampling. “Unlike survey research in which the number and representativeness of the sample are major considerations, in this type of research the crucial factor is not the number of respondents but the potential of each person to contribute to the development of insight and understanding of the phenomenon” (Merriam, 1998, p. 83). Purposeful sampling complemented the goal of studying a particular learning activity in depth. “Studying information-rich cases yield insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations” (Patton, 2002, p. 230).

Participants were selected from among American and Canadian, non-Japanese speaking sewists who had acquired at least one copy of a Japanese sloper-based pattern magazine such as *Ms Stylebook* or *Lady Boutique*. These criteria were selected because acquiring this particular resource, which was expensive, hard to find and in a foreign language, seemed counterintuitive and therefore potentially interesting. This was an application of what Patton (2002) calls “intensity sampling” which “involves the same logic as extreme case sampling but with less emphasis on the extremes” (Patton, 2002, p.

234). “In essence, the logic of extreme group sampling is that extreme cases may be information-rich cases precisely because, by being unusual, they can illuminate both the unusual and the typical” (Patton, 2002, p. 234).

There was no requirement that the participants had used a pattern in the magazine to make a garment. This made it more likely that the interview sample would include participants with a variety of goals, by not specifying a priori that one of the goals be to make a garment directly from the magazine. It also increased the likelihood of including people with both satisfying and unsatisfying experiences with the resource, which might have added breadth to the consideration of resource evaluation.

In addition, the difficulty and expense of the acquisition process of these particular resources made it more likely that the participants had deliberately and explicitly considered the reasons to pursue it (at the time, few Americans had the opportunity to buy a Japanese magazine as an impulse purchase). The researcher expected that this deliberation would produce richer discussions of priorities, values and decision making processes.

There was one aspect of snowball sampling (Patton, 2002) involved in carrying out this research. The interview included a discussion of how the respondent learned about these resources and if that respondent had, in turn, introduced anyone else to them. If any particular individuals were mentioned, the researcher planned to attempt to recruit them for the study in an effort to get richer descriptions of how news about a resource moved through a community of learners.

Participants were recruited in person, through messages posted on internet message boards serving sewists, and by email messages to people known to the



researcher to have obtained qualifying magazines. The initial recruiting messages included a brief description of the type of person being sought and a general invitation to participate in the study. Once potential participants responded, the researcher followed up with messages confirming eligibility and providing more information about the participants' responsibilities and rights, including the general topic of the interview, estimated time requirements, and audio recording and confidentiality. Example recruiting and confirmation messages are shown in Appendix A.

The researcher accepted all volunteers who met the basic eligibility requirements and were able to schedule an interview within the data collection period. There was no basis on which to make assumptions that demographic variables, such as age, sewing experience, or area of residence, would have any impact on the results. Data about such demographic variables were collected; it was possible that relationships between such variables and patterns in resource selection practices would emerge from the analysis.

In a perfect world, the researcher would have conducted interviews until the body of data reached saturation or redundancy; that is, when additional data was not expected to yield additional information or insight (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). Unfortunately, there is no formula for determining beforehand when that point will be reached (Merriam, 2009). For this project, the researcher planned to complete a minimum of 15 interviews. The researcher expected this to provide a good compromise between the theoretical need to explore the subject thoroughly and the practical constraints of time and researcher experience. Because analysis was started as the interviews continued, the researcher was able to judge whether the total number of interviews and the recruiting strategies would yield the desired results. If preliminary

analysis suggested that additional interviews would be helpful, perhaps to confirm the importance of a demographic variable or to explore a chain of resource referrals, the researcher would have recruited, scheduled and conducted additional interviews with targeted individuals. As it happened, the researcher received four recommendations for interviews; three of these individuals were unavailable and one individual had already been interviewed.

### **Data Collection**

The data the researcher collected was in the form of interviews. This was both appropriate and necessary for this project, where the central purpose was to make explicit the implicit evaluation and tradeoffs the respondents made about resource selection. “We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things” (Patton, 2002, p. 341).

There were two particularly relevant risks involved with this form of data collection for this project. First, “qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit” (Patton, 2002, p. 341). In this project, the researcher designed the selection of respondents to increase the probability that respondents had thought explicitly about these issues and could articulate them.

Second, these interviews were conducted over the telephone. Although telephone interviews offer several attractive features, including the ability to interview respondents who are widely dispersed geographically and the ability to record the interviews without intrusive equipment (Opdenakker, 2006), there are some potential disadvantages to this

form of interviewing. These include reduced non-verbal cues and increased potential for the respondent to be distracted by her surroundings (Novick, 2008; Opdenakker, 2006); in particular, the potential for the lack of non-verbal cues to interfere with rapport and interpretation has caused concern (Novick, 2008). A literature review by Novick (2008) found no studies that confirmed that telephone interviews produced inferior data; in fact, the few studies she located that addressed the question directly found that telephone interviews were at least as good as face-to-face interviews. The researcher decided that telephone interviews were necessary to reach a small and widely dispersed sample; the subject matter was unlikely to cause the type of response that would make non-verbal cues especially important.

### **Interview Design**

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews using an interview guide. “The interview guide helps make interviewing a number of different people more systematic and comprehensive by delimiting in advance the issues to be explored” (Patton, 2002, p. 343). The researcher prepared an interview guide, which appears in Appendix B. The interview was semi-structured. There were a few structured questions intended to get the same kinds of information from each participant, regarding age, length of time sewing, and participation in online sewing communities. There were also unstructured questions regarding the participant’s experiences and thoughts; “this format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic” (Merriam, 2009, p. 90).

**Pilot Interview**

The researcher planned to conduct two pilot interviews. Merriam (2009) said pilot interviews are important to the quality of the study, because “not only do you get some practice interviewing, but you also quickly learn which questions are confusing and need rewording, which questions yield useless data, and which questions, suggested by your respondents, you should have thought to include in the first place” (Merriam, 2009, p. 95).

The researcher conducted two pilot interviews, one in person and one via telephone. The personal interview took place in a quiet back room of a coffee shop and was recorded. The researcher conducted the telephone interview using a Skype call to a telephone (without video) and recorded it using the CallGraph utility for Skype. The researcher used the pilot interviews to test the interview protocol and procedures. The interview procedures worked well – the length of the interview and the quality of the results from the telephone interview were comparable to those of the personal interview.

The researcher revised the interview protocol, adding two main questions and several prompts after reviewing the transcripts of the pilot interviews. The new questions were designed as orientation questions, helping the respondent and the interviewer establish the context for further conversation and setting the stage for later, more specific questions. Specifically, in the transition from discussing Japanese resources in particular to the more general discussion about resource choices, the respondents were asked to describe their resource libraries; this grounding question helped the respondent switch focus from the particular to the general and provided the researcher with information that made it easier to customize the next section of the interview.

As the interviews progressed, the researcher changed the interview once more to probe a theme that was emerging from the preliminary analysis. After the fourth interview, the researcher added the direct question “How do you choose the next thing you want to learn?” late in the interview; the purpose was to confirm the initial findings that the respondents were aware of doing most of their planning on a project-by-project basis.

### **Interviews**

The researcher conducted the rest of the interviews at a time and place convenient for both the researcher and the respondent. Each interview took approximately one hour. All of these interviews were conducted over the phone. The researcher took some handwritten notes, primarily to note subjects or questions to be visited later in the interview, to provide feedback to the respondent, and to enable the creation of a brief summary at the conclusion of the interview (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. In addition, the researcher wrote a field note after each interview containing any observations or reactions.

For each interview, the researcher sent a confirmation email containing information about the purpose of the research project and suggesting an interview date and time (see Appendix A). At the appropriate time, the researcher used the Skype computer software to place a phone call; all calls were recorded using the CallGraph utility for Skype. Although the researcher suggested using the Skype video option to all participants, only one participant had the necessary hardware to allow a video interview; it was the researcher’s assessment afterward that any benefit the video may have provided was more than offset by the degradation in audio performance caused by the

increased load on the computers. The recording software failed to record one interview (Danielle); the researcher reconstructed the interview from memory immediately after the interview was over.

Each interview started with a brief overview of the project and reminders about audio recording and the right of the participant to skip any question or stop the interview at any time. This was followed by the questions from the interview protocol, which included some demographic information and ended with the general inquiry if the respondent had anything else to add on the subject of learning. All participants agreed to respond to email inquiries confirming quotes made during the interview. The researcher concluded the interview by inviting and answering questions from the respondent and offering to send a summary of the research findings at the conclusion of the project.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis began with the first interview. Miles and Huberman (1994) “strongly recommend early analysis. It helps the field worker cycle back and forth between thinking about the existing data and generating strategies for collecting new, often better data. It can be a healthy corrective for built-in blind spots. It makes analysis an ongoing, lively enterprise that contributes to the energizing process of fieldwork” (p. 50). The researcher audio recorded all interviews and had them professionally transcribed. As each transcript was returned, the researcher began analysis using the computer software AnSWR (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007).

The researcher used techniques originally attributed to developers of grounded theory to conduct the analysis. This analytical approach involved the use of comparison, both at an incident to incident level (sometimes called constant comparison) and at a

property and dimension level (sometimes called theoretical comparison), to work through the three stages of analysis: description, or conceptual labeling; the grouping of concepts into well-defined categories, with properties and dimensions; and the linking of categories into an explanatory or predictive theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Although it was unlikely that this exploratory analysis would produce a theory, the grounded theory techniques of constant comparison and the creation of categories have been generally accepted for qualitative analysis projects (Merriam, 2009).

The first stage of analysis, conceptually called description or conceptual labeling above, is usually called coding. The researcher read each interview transcript closely for passages that seemed to refer to individual concepts relevant to the study. These passages were assigned codes; “codes are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 56). The computer software helped manage this by offering tools to maintain lists of codes and a database of textual passages that have been assigned to each code; when needed, the software could extract and display all of the passages that had been assigned to a particular code, allowing the researcher to compare passages between interviews (Basit, 2003; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007). Based on the results of the literature review, the researcher looked for concepts such as process, criteria and environment during the first steps of coding. There was no need for the researcher to pretend to start from scratch -- as Miles and Huberman (1994) said, “as researchers, we do have background knowledge... We know some questions to ask, which incidents to attend to closely, and how our theoretical interests are embodied in the field. Not to “lead” with your conceptual strength can be simply self-defeating” (p. 17).

The second stage of analysis was to group the concepts into well-defined categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this stage, the researcher sought to find themes and trends that seemed to describe patterns in the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The computer software assisted in this process by offering rapid data retrieval and display, but did not actually conduct any analysis (Basit, 2003; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007).

The third stage of analysis was to find an explanatory framework that covers the patterns in the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The researcher was not expecting to generate a new theory with this project; instead, the goal was to compare the patterns in the data with the existing theories in the literature to see where these theories seem to be most useful and where they may require updating or revising. This was consistent with what Miles and Huberman (1994) called a deductive strategy for qualitative analysis.

### **Credibility and Transferability**

“To have any effect on either the practice or the theory of a field, research studies must be rigorously conducted; they need to present insights and conclusions that ring true to readers, practitioners, and other researchers” (Merriam, 2009, p. 210). In a qualitative study, quality is generally discussed in terms of two concepts – credibility, which roughly corresponds to internal validity in an experimental design setting, and transferability, which corresponds to generalizability (Merriam, 2009).

The credibility of a study is the extent to which readers accept that the conclusions are supported by the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). There were three techniques that the researcher used to improve the credibility of this project.



The first important approach to improving study credibility was to practice what Shank and Villella (2004) call participatory accountability, which means that “almost by nature, qualitative researchers enter into some form of partnership with the participants in their studies” (p. 51). This kind of accountability requires an ethical obligation of the part of the researcher to honestly represent the participants and their worldviews (Shank & Villella, 2004). To implement this accountability, the researcher used member checking, a technique “whereby data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are tested with members of those stakeholding groups from whom the data were originally collected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314). Patton (2002) considered this a form of analytical triangulation. In practice, this meant verifying the accuracy of interview transcripts and checking back in with respondents to confirm that quotes were accurate and placed in context and that conclusions were appropriate.

The second approach to improving study credibility was to engage “in a systematic search for alternative themes, divergent patterns, and rival explanations” (Patton, 2002, p. 553). During data collection, this means the researcher used the results of preliminary analysis to refine both the interview questions and respondent selection to increase the variability of the responses and to find possible negative cases; these techniques are called maximum variability and negative case sampling, which Merriam defined as “purposefully seek[ing] data that might disconfirm or challenge your expectations or emerging findings” (Merriam, 2009, p. 219). During the primary analysis period, the researcher sought to formulate and test multiple, perhaps contradictory, organizing themes and test them for support in the data.

Because the researcher had identified two models that apply to the phenomenon under study, this search for alternative explanations took the form, for instance, of gathering evidence that both supported and conflicted with the Knowles/Tough model of a self-directed learner who plans a learning project several steps in advance and comparing it to the evidence that supported and conflicted with the Spear/Mocker model of environmentally constrained learner. Patton (2002) called this “theory triangulation.”

A third approach to credibility, particularly in qualitative research, is reflexivity (Merriam, 2009). This meant, primarily, that the researcher must be upfront about the strengths and weaknesses of the primary data collection and analysis instrument, namely, the researcher herself. One potential weakness, in particular, was that the personal knowledge that led the researcher to an interesting situation to explore, in this case the use of hard-to-find, hard-to-use learning resources, could also lead a researcher to approach data collection and analysis with preconceptions (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Avoiding this required that the researcher be aware of, and explicit about, any biases and assumptions about sewists and self-directed learning; for example, it was important not to allow her self-identification as a sewist to unconsciously lead to a picture of sewists as more farsighted and logical than the evidence supported. To facilitate this self-awareness, the researcher maintained a reflective learning journal about the research process.

Boote (2008) also argued that, to be acting reflexively, a researcher should be continually aware of, and responding to, the needs of the potential consumers of a research project. Because the audience for this research project consists primarily of educators, this meant that during every interview, and regularly during analysis, the

researcher asked herself “where is the learning in this story?” Patton (2002) recommended actually asking potential audience members to review preliminary analysis results as another form of analytical triangulation.

The applicability or transferability of a study is the extent to which the conclusions of study can be applied to situations or people not included in the study population (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991). According to Lincoln and Guba (1995), “the naturalist cannot specify the external validity of an inquiry; he or she can provide only the thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility” (p. 316). Therefore, for this study, the researcher endeavored to provide rich, thick description, which Merriam (2009) defined as “a description of the setting and participants of the study, as well as a detailed description of the findings with adequate evidence presented in the form of quotes from participant interviews...” (p. 227). In particular, the researcher considered the kinds of information a likely reader would need to consider the reasonableness of comparing the results from this study to other situations; the researcher expected this information to include general demographic information about the participants, as well as more specific information about the participants’ learning environments, goals, and attitudes.

### **Protection of Human Rights**

Because this research involved human respondents, the researcher had the responsibility to ensure that the rights of the respondents were protected. Kansas State University has a formal set of procedures for the protection of human rights. These procedures include training modules for researchers, templates for informed consent

forms for respondents, and a review of research proposals by the Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects. The researcher received permission to conduct this research from the Kansas State University Institutional Review Board (Appendix C).

### **Summary**

How do self-directed learners make choices about learning resources? What kinds of criteria do they use when deciding to pursue an unusual resource? To explore these questions, the researcher designed a qualitative research project, centered on a semi-structured interview administered to a purposeful sample of self-directed learners who had obtained a particular learning resource. By analyzing the interview transcripts, the researcher sought patterns and themes that could allow educators to more insightfully connect our theoretical models of the self-directed learning process with the lived experiences of the learners themselves.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Introduction**

This chapter presents the results of the research. The first section consists of an overview of the research sample, including the sampling criteria and a brief description of the study respondents. The second section contains the findings of the analysis, including summaries of participant responses and direct quotes to support the presentation of the themes that emerged from these interviews.

### **Sample Selection**

The researcher recruited participants from two online sewing community sites and several personal sewing blogs using a combination of general message board postings and personal email messages. Thirteen interviews were scheduled and completed. All participants, except for the first pilot participant, had obtained at least one copy of a sloper-based Japanese pattern magazine; the first pilot participant had obtained several other Japanese pattern magazines. All interviews were conducted in August and September of 2010.

### **Characteristics of the Sample**

All of the participants in this study were women living either in the United States or Canada. As required by the research design, none read Japanese and each had (or once had) at least one copy of a sloper-based Japanese pattern book, except for Andrea, the first pilot interviewee, who had other Japanese pattern books. The ages of the respondents ranged from 25 to 53; this sample was younger than the population of sewists in the United States. According to surveys conducted by the National Sewing

Council, “the average age of a sewer – and this has been true for 20 years – is 55 years old.” (McFarland, 2010, p. 40). All of the participants were identified and recruited via the Internet, which may account for the relative youth of the sample. Some have been sewing since childhood; others only started to sew in the last two or three years.

Specific information about the individual participants will be provided below; all names are pseudonyms to protect participant privacy.

**Andrea** was 37 years old and lived in medium-sized Midwestern city; she had a bachelor’s degree. She learned to sew in home economics, which she hated; she returned to sewing when her daughter was born. She reported making some of everything – garments, toys, home decorating items, etc. She was writing a popular blog, had written freelance articles for some sewing magazines and had taught a few classes locally. She didn’t belong to any local sewing groups because her family schedule made attending regular meetings difficult.

**Bonnie** was 50 years old and lived in a medium-sized Midwestern city; she started but did not complete a Master’s program in music. She learned to sew from her mother and 4H leaders, and her preferred sewing projects were garments, although she had done home decorating projects. She was a member of a local sewing group, was writing a sewing blog, and was a founder and moderator of one of the online sewing community sites.

**Cindy** was 41 years old and lived in a large Midwestern city; she started but did not complete a doctoral program. Cindy learned hand sewing from her mother, but didn’t learn to use a sewing machine until her late twenties. Her preferred sewing projects were fashion sewing, particularly lingerie and sleepwear. She belonged to a group of sewists

who got together to sew once a month and participated regularly on one of the online sewing community sites.

**Danielle** was 41 and lived in a smallish town in the South. Her grandmother tried to teach her to quilt, but she didn't get interested in sewing until she decided to make a quilt when her grandmother got cancer. She quilted exclusively for several years, but had transitioned to fashion sewing in the last two years. She belonged to the American Sewing Guild, a local crafting group and was starting a branch of the Craft Mafia; she was also very active on two online sewing and crafting community sites.

**Erin** was 50, had a bachelor's degree and lived in a major Northeastern city. She had been sewing since she was a teenager. Her preferred sewing projects were garments, although she occasionally sewed for the house or her children. She learned to sew from her mother, grandmother and junior high school Home Economics courses. She didn't belong to any local sewing groups, but had a sewing blog and was active on one online sewing community site.

**Fiona** was 25, had a bachelor's degree and lived on the East Coast. She started sewing approximately three years before the interview. Her preferred sewing projects were garments, although she had also done home decorating and gift projects. She learned to sew while working at a historic site that required period clothing. She didn't belong to any local sewing groups, but was very active on one online sewing community site and had met up with some of the people from that site to go fabric shopping.

**Gabrielle** was 36 and lived in a major East Coast city; she had a graduate degree. She learned to sew from her mother. She exclusively sewed garments and accessories.

She was a member of a fashion sewing club at a local store, was writing a very popular blog, and participated actively on one online sewing community site.

**Helene** was 49 and lived in a major East Coast city. She had a college degree. She taught herself to sew when she started a business making Jewish ritual textiles; she also sewed garments. She had a blog and contributed to several online sewing community sites.

**Ida** was 36 and lived in a major West Coast city; she had a college degree. She learned to sew from her mother-in-law, and preferred sewing garments. She was a member of the American Sewing Guild and a local BurdaStyle group. She had started a couple of sewing blogs but deleted both of them; she also took over a small online community site for English-speaking users of Japanese patterns when the owner, a friend, had family issues, but she found managing the site to be too much work and had shut it down. She read one of the other online community sites but did not contribute often.

**Josephine** was 45 and lived in a major Midwestern city. She had a college degree. She learned to sew from her mother, who took dressmaking classes in high school and did piecework in the garment district. Lately, her preferred sewing projects had been quick bag, garment and gift items. She was a member of the American Sewing Guild and maintained a blog for the local chapter; she did not have a personal blog. She read a couple of online sewing community sites but did not contribute often.

**Karen** was 53 and lived in a suburb on the East Coast. She started but did not complete a master's degree in engineering. She learned to sew from her mother, who did alterations professionally. Her preferred sewing projects were fashion, although she had done a lot of quilting and some home decoration projects. She was an officer in her local



American Sewing Guild chapter and a member of a local craft collective. She wrote a blog and read a couple of online sewing community sites but did not contribute often.

**Lisa** was 33 and lived in a major city on the West Coast. She taught herself to sew approximately four years ago after seeing the costumes at a Renaissance Faire; she sewed only garments. She joined the American Sewing Guild, but quit because she didn't find much in common with the other members; she did have a few local sewing friends and participated in one of the online sewing community sites.

**Maria** was 41 and lived in the Midwest; she had a doctorate. She learned to sew from her mother, and sewed mostly garments those days. She met regularly with a group of local sewists she met online; she used to participate regularly in one of the online sewing community sites but hadn't much lately because of concerns about changes in the tone of some of the message board conversations.

### **Findings**

While analyzing the transcripts of the thirteen interviews, the researcher identified a number of themes that were repeated by several respondents. These themes will be presented below, arranged as they apply to the research questions. Participant responses appear in two formats, charts and direct quotes.

**Research Question One: Are these Japanese pattern magazine users deliberately planning their learning progression? If so, how does this planning work? If not, are they selecting learning activities at random?**

When asked directly, almost all the respondents described their planning process as following a project-by-project design with no particular long term direction. However,

when the researcher looked more closely at some of the language the respondents used, particularly when describing their resource libraries, she found some evidence that these learners had a general mental map of the entire learning domain, with some loose ratings of topics and techniques by interest and skill level, which formed a backdrop against which individual projects were selected and planned.

### **Planning Project by Project.**

Eleven of the respondents said that they primarily planned their sewing learning project by project; the end product was the primary driver, with the acquisition of new techniques something of an afterthought.

**Andrea:** And that's how I kind of make my pattern book selections and things like that. It's just, "Oh, I really want to do that," and give it a try. I'm very impulsive, I guess, it sounds very impulsive, but I'm not an impulsive person otherwise, but... This is my hobby and I am very impulsive with that, you know?

**Cindy:** Right when you called, I was looking at some designer Djellabas from Saudi Arabia and thinking, "Oh, how am I gonna replicate those ideas or get that kind of idea?"

**Erin:** The second one is probably more of what I'd like to do. Like for instance if I decided I want to make a pair, a bunch of pair of pants or jeans or something like that, I would look for people that have done that before or books that have techniques specific to that garment.

**Fiona:** Yeah, I mean pretty much it's like, if I see something and I want to make it, then I will figure out what I have to do to make it.

**Gabrielle:** Definitely, the latter. I am a practical-oriented experiential person. I don't generally, now that I'm out of school, pursue intellectual pursuits just to pursue them. I haven't any room.

**Helene:** ...An idea will hit, and I'll end up doing something that I'll think like, "What the hell am I doing?" [laughter] Figure it out as I'm doing it. I learned a lot of techniques for my student because she knew nothing. Like her third lesson, she wanted to make a dress out of the knit with the bodice knit being made out of strips of woven knit. And we did it. And I was like, "How the hell do you engineer this?" But we figured it out.

**Ida:** That's my goal. I want to make a pair of pants and jeans for myself because those are hard to find.

**Josephine:** Then since joining with this ASG group, I'd taken an heirloom sewing class with them. So that kind of got me into heirloom sewing. I picked up... I started playing with the serger. I picked up the serger on Craigslist. And so now I've bought a couple of books on serging techniques. So it's kind of as things have kind of come along that I've added to my library, and they're just kind of hodge-podgy I guess.

**Karen:** It is just what inspires me or what I feel interested in, and it can go all over the place.

**Lisa:** I have, I guess, short term goals. My biggest thing right now is I want to learn how to make corsets, but that's a long-term learning experience.

**Maria:** Nope, because it just turns up if I see something I want, I want to make, and it just happens to have a technique that I am not familiar with or I'll, say,

alterations that I need to make that I'm not sure how to make it, and that's how I decide it's time for me to learn something new.

### **Long-term (Multi-project) Planning.**

When asked directly, only one of the respondents admitted to having a long term plan for their learning, and even this was really more of a theme than a plan.

**Helene:** My husband's grandmother worked in the Schmatta trade. And she died when my husband was three months old. He never met her, but the story about my husband's grandmother is that she used to be able to make clothes without a pattern. She never taught my mother-in-law and I thought that was totally fascinating. And I'm also into like cultural history and history I read old cookbooks and old childcare books from the '20s and like the whole home economics movement. And sort of like anthropologically, politically I'm really interested in how these things that were sort of traditionally woman's work got all scientificized and why that happened and how that happened and how it changed things. ... And also there were a lot of babysitters from the islands who work in... I lived in New York on the Upper West Side. And one of the babysitters said, "My mother learned how to sew without a pattern." And she showed me a couple of basic things. And it just blew my mind. And then I met another babysitter whose mother was sent in, like to some other island in the Caribbean to learn how to sew without a pattern. And she learned like tiny bits. I kept like grilling her like, "What do you know from your mother?" And I realized that it was this body of knowledge that used to be transmitted orally and it's hard to write it down in a

book. So I have like tried to recreate, on my own, like how one makes clothing without a pattern.

### **A General Map of the Domain.**

However, almost all of the participants used words that suggested that they had a larger sense of the sewing universe, their current skill set, potential areas of interest and associated difficulties, and approximate trade-offs between time and task difficulty. They appeared to use this orientation as a screening tool for selecting projects and when purchasing learning resources for future use.

**Andrea:** Or they have a lot of questions about, "I've never tried them. How hard are they?"

**Bonnie:** Because I thought okay, I'm going to get it now while I can get it and then I'll have it ...

**Erin:** No, I am buying them because I think there are a good book and I will use them at some point.

**Danielle:** ...but time and sewing skills get in the way.

**Fiona:** Pretty much I bought this book called tailoring and it's about how to make tailor jacket. I haven't really made a tailor jacket yet but I know that I will. And when I had it, I also bought a shirt-making book and well... More towards men's shirt. When I make a button-down shirt, I don't think that it's going to be really interesting, it'd really be an useful reference. So, they all have their time when they will get used. ... And I, actually, work very close to FIT. But for one thing, those classes are geared toward fashion students. I've heard of people who took a class there, and while they found it enjoyable, at the same time, these were geared

toward people who are going to be designers, pattern-makers, professionals and not toward the home sewer. So there's some information that's more than what you need or not enough of what you do need. ... And still a little bit collecting phase and starting to also know what interests me and what I can do well enough to know what not to buy myself. Either so that I don't buy something that I don't need.

**Gabrielle:** I don't know how to put any fly zip which is sort of an embarrassing gap in my abilities that I would like to remedy someday. ... Well, I actually bought two Mrs. Stylebooks as well. But it actually doesn't really appeal because you have to start with the sloper and draft your patterns from your sloper, and that's just beyond my ability and interest.

**Helene:** And part of it is because I've learned it like backwards way. But there's some skills where I'm like way ahead of most people on the planet. And there are other things like I don't know nothing. And most people have learned in a more organized way, like they took Home Ed, they took a sewing class. I'm like I can't fit in anywhere with like in a class because I'm so all over that.

**Ida:** But I mean, it's also because I'm not really that interested in very, very complicated designs. So I like unusual, not really like very complicated things, like that whole saga to do just one outfit. No, thanks. [laughter] It doesn't really fit my lifestyle. I'm not that kind of person, so I tend to like... Though I like unusual designs I'm not... I don't like to do like Gone With the Wind [laughter] on a project. I'm just... I mean, if it's something I like, if it takes me more than a week I get... I can't do it. It's... To draft the pattern for about a week, it's just not feasible.

It's just not good for me. And then I'm like, I'm forever drafting patterns. So, I do take in... I do take that into consideration. How long will it take me to draft a pattern? How long will it take me to sew? ... I'm not an expert. I'm probably above intermediate level. I'm not advanced or definitely not couture, but I'm afraid, who would call themselves couture? [chuckle] ... And I'm really trying to get to sewing pants and jeans, and I want to get a good fit on that. That's my next goal; get me up another level high.

**Josephine:** Although this morning, I was looking for some tailoring classes. Just kind of thinking... Part of it is also I was laid off in May so I have plenty of time. If I was working full-time, I don't know if I'd be looking necessarily into these types of clothing.... It's that there's this little... I'm having this conversation with one of the ladies in my group who keeps telling me, "If you don't use these couture techniques, your stuff is always going to look homemade." And I keep trying to push back, no, you can know everything but then you get into an analysis paralysis. So, it's this conversation with her and then in my own head of, "Okay, do I know... What do I know" because it's the realization of man? I know... I think I know a lot of stuff, but again, some of this stuff, because it feels inherent is -- and it's not formal training -- what is it that I'm lacking. It's kind of interesting in that respect. But again, part of it... A lot of it has to do with being laid off and having lots of time off my hands.

**Lisa:** Until I've gotten in two years, three and four, I found out how it starts to go. Perhaps I should understand what the directions say. Maybe, there's a logic to

what they're asking me to do." Most of the time I feel like I'm still too new to offer up much, when people ask for like fitting help and stuff online.

**Maria:** And then I found out that I had to have a sloper and it was... Then you take measurement off of that and I thought maybe my drafting skills weren't really ready for it yet.

### **Life Gets in the Way.**

Because this was leisure learning, the respondents reported having to fit it into the other parts of their lives. The overall level of learning activity ebbed and flowed as learners' lives changed; sometimes that change was a significant life change, such as becoming a mother or a widow, sometimes the change was change in a person's work/life balance and sometimes that change was simply a time when other things seemed more interesting or important.

**Ida:** I used to have a large closet and then having a large family, my closet started shrinking. So, I started adopting the concept of what I sew needs to match my current wardrobe. So I try to do a... I don't know if it's called sewing with a plan or what, but I do try to incorporate my future project with the project that I have in the past.

**Fiona:** I mean I can't just sew that fast. So... Not with like a full time job and other interests. So... Yeah, I mean, I think most sewers have the problem of you always have more aspirations than you have time to fulfill. .... Yeah, it's mostly just clothing. I mean, when I re-did my bedroom a few years ago, I sewed. I bought curtains and then... Bought them really long so I could cut them off. And make lounges and a pillow or two. And I've done little things here and there for



other people, have made little projects. I guess that's I'd say....I mean there are things where maybe I'll decide that this isn't the time for it. I'm sure like if have a wedding to go to in two months, I'll probably try some other dress

**Bonnie:** I haven't bought a lot of patterns sewing books this last year. My whole life has changed. My husband died. ... But it means that I don't need the clothes that I really thought I did, before I probably didn't need them either, but that I did and I wasn't in the mood to sew or anything particularly. But, I guess it also means that I am much more careful with what I spend simply because I really didn't have a budget before. I could just buy what I wanted to and it was you know, it was no big deal. .. But I don't know, you know, I don't how old you are or how many cycles of sewing you've been through but I mean it seems like everybody has times when you just don't sew for a while.

**Andrea:** No, I really need to do ASG, but I find it hard with my husband's schedule and my kid's schedule to get away. It's like, I've either got my little one with me or I'm doing something for my big one. So, having a thirteen year old and a two year old is complex with...

**Gabrielle:** And the skirt is a little crazy. I don't know if I can wear it to work or not. So, it's more of like an intellectual exercise than making clothes for every day and I make all of my clothes for the moment until my life changes but so far my life has not change. So I find that Burda is a good source for every day wearable, fashionable clothes that look like me. .. And then my first like five or six years out of law school, I was... I just think that not being student and I'm working like a

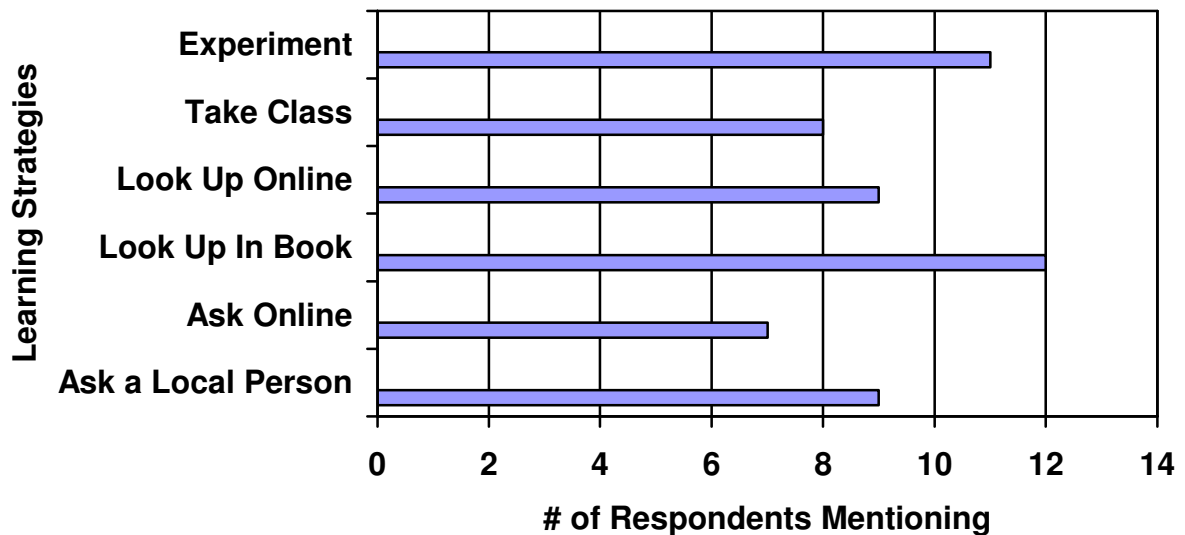
dog at a law firm and so I didn't sew. But I left that job and went to a much more sewing job about five years ago and just didn't..

**Josephine:** Although this morning, I was looking for some tailoring classes. Just kind of thinking... Part of it is also I was laid off in May so I have plenty of time. If I was working full-time, I don't know if I'd be looking necessarily into these types of clothing.

**Learning Strategies.**

When they do select a project that stretches their skills, these learners used a combination of strategies for achieving their goals. These are the strategies that were mentioned:

**Figure 4.1. Learning Strategies Reported by Participants**



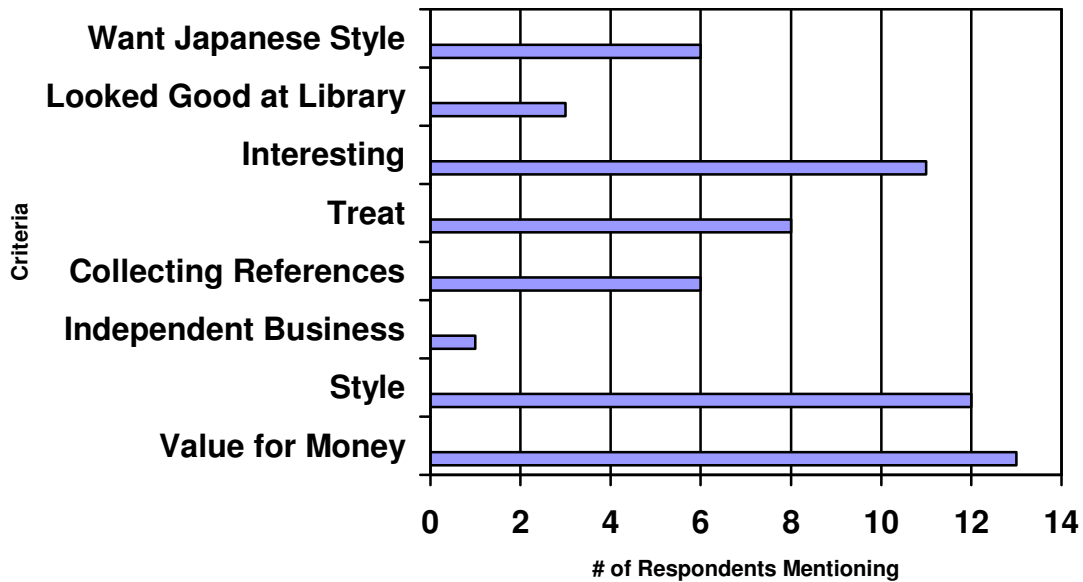
In general, these learners reported choosing a project, acquiring the materials, and starting it; only after the learner encountered a problem did she select one or more learning strategies. Only in the case of taking a class did the learning strategy precede

beginning a project. While this might appear to negate the claim that these learners are planning, several reported that the sequence was deliberate – they were deliberately planning to attempt the project and experiment with techniques before referring to reference materials. According to Bonnie, “I think that half for the fun of sewing is figuring out how you're going to do something and then making it work.” It appeared that the project plan was flexible, but that the learners did have a sense of what they would do if experimentation failed and were confident that they could find the necessary learning resources.

Overall, these respondents were aware of planning their learning project by project, but were not as conscious of the mental mapping they were doing. They were used to scheduling their learning projects around the other events in their lives, and expected that their interest and activity levels would fluctuate over the years. Once they started a project, they preferred to start with experimentation, but had a plan for researching solutions to problems that appear.

**Research Question Two: Do self-directed learners use criteria to choose new resources, and if so, what are these criteria?**

The discussion that follows includes criteria mentioned when considering the Japanese pattern books and other resources.

**Figure 4.2. Criteria for Selecting Learning Resources**

These criteria will be discussed in more detail below.

#### **Value for the Money.**

This issue was discussed by all thirteen respondents because the researcher explicitly asked about it. Cost considerations appeared to fall into several general categories, including flat affordability, calculations that include other criteria, and some rationalizing.

Six respondents mentioned cases where total cost alone nixed, or could have nixed, a purchase decision:

**Andrea:** And I kind of... Well, I stalked eBay for months, looking at books before I made the plunge. Because the books are very expensive. They're anywhere, at the time, they were anywhere from like 25 to, well, you can go really way up there.

**Bonnie:** But, I guess it also means that I am much more careful with what I spend simply because I really didn't have a budget before. I could just buy what I wanted to and it was you know, it was no big deal. And so, I would do probably more things just for fun or just because I thought it would be neat to have.

**Erin:** This was pretty good. And it came pretty quickly, like usually these things, are really expensive because of the shipping costs from wherever it comes from, which is why I tried to see if I get one in Toronto... I think it came to about \$22.00 including the shipping. So I didn't find that expensive.

**Fiona:** If they had been insanely expensive or the shipping had been really expensive, I wouldn't have gotten them. But the books were only \$35.00. So I figured it wasn't a ridiculous expenditure.

**Helene:** The Vionnet book I had heard about when it came out and I couldn't afford it. And I really wanted it and I couldn't afford it.

**Ida:** Second is my budget at the time. Sometimes, I will put it on my wish list and I will get at the time that I have extra cash. I don't... Yeah, I like to put things on a wish list and then if I put it on a wish list and I wait for a while, I realize that I think about some more and it's like, "Hmmm... It's kind of not working for me anymore," and then I let it go.

Other respondents mentioned doing calculations such as cost per pattern:

**Cindy:** And they cost too much, I mean who are these people kidding? We can just go to McCalls and get the pattern for 99 cents and it'll be almost the same.

**Bonnie:** I mean I think there were subscription's horribly expensive, and I wouldn't do that because I don't use that many. In fact, I think that that one that

we did is the only one I've ever actually made out of I got 3 or 4 issues of the thing, at this point and that's all I'm ever gonna have I imagine.

**Erin:** And considering it's got... I don't know how many... They're alphabetized. It's probably got twenty patterns in it.

**Fiona:** You needed to get so many patterns for not very much money

And being free or perceived as cheap was enough for some resources to get brought home:

**Gabrielle:** And then the big 4. I mean I was in the United States and so I can always get them first. A \$1.99 for Simplicity, Burda, \$3.99 for Vogue. So... But financial investment for me is very low

**Helene:** So now also I go to, you know I went to Kinokuniya for a while and then I discovered Book Off which has half-price like you know used Japanese books and magazines and I go there and I go to their sewing section and they're like depending on how at the date they are, they're anywhere from like \$3 to \$10 per weight.

**Lisa:** And you know a good portion of my books come from online and they're used so they cost me, I can get worse, maybe 15, 20 bucks, there were a couple that were harder to find that I paid more for but they're considered more rare books, but they're cheap so it's like okay, for five bucks. I can order it and look at and if it doesn't work, I'm only out five bucks. If I order it and it shows me something new, cool.

**Ida:** I pretty much take what is given to me for free. [chuckle] I don't buy vintage books unless it's given to me. And it's like, "Oh, this is really interesting," and

then I keep it. That's how I got sort of my vintage books ... I used to be nice, to be go crazy with the sales and then I realized, "Oh my gosh! [chuckle] Now I know why they put it so cheap." People just love to get a bunch of them and then just throw them away and I felt like, "I just threw away \$5 right there."

But the most common case was for the cost to be considered in conjunction with other criteria:

**Andrea:** And it was just... It was something I hadn't seen, I have never seen it since, that particular book, and it was something that was... I mean I had been... I had been trolling eBay for like a good couple of months, before I actually made a purchase. So it wasn't something I had seen before. It was like... It was like \$37. It was just a big... That's an expensive book. I buy off of eBay, not eBay, Amazon so I mean, I'm not paying full price for my books.

**Cindy:** It's rare that I will look at a pattern and think, "I don't need this." It's more likely that I will look at a pattern and say, "I don't think it's worth the money."

**Danielle** asked herself if it worth the money compared to other available resources.

**Ida:** And I think the illustrations are neat and just right. They're not... And they're easy; they're cheap to be had than the ones that are out there now.

**Erin:** I like the fact that they're very... They're good patterns. And they've got lots of sizes in them so if I'm sewing for myself and my stepdaughter, I can use the same pattern.

**Erin:** I feel it's a fairly small investment, for what I get out of it.

**Erin:** And there's a practical aspect of, if I'm buying a pattern and I actually do use it that is a lot expensive and better quality than I can buy in a store. So whether I use it or not, overall if I amortized on my patterns over the garments that I've made, it's probably still worth it price-wise.

**Fiona:** I was, "Oh, this is really cool." Because the styles are like, you know a lot of the kind of... Some of the more funky stuff that I like. So, I was these are really neat. I was debating getting them because the sizes are so much smaller, but these are just so cool, I'll make it work.

**Karen:** I find this question difficult to answer because I have a very good job and I make nice money. My husband has a good job, he makes very good money. We're comfortable and we have money for extras. So to me a magazine subscription to a foreign magazine, which costs maybe a hundred dollars a year, is not extreme, but it would be for some people. I mean that would be a horrible expense so I don't really know how to answer the question. I think it's worth it. It's spending money, it's my hobby money and that's how I choose to spend it.

**Josephine:** I probably had a little bit of sticker shock in the beginning. But it was one of those... Because just in the realm of thinking of when you buy a pattern and especially you see if you can buy a pattern with coupons and stuff like that. But then at along the same time I was looking for patterns for a volunteer project that I do where I make large size -- and when I mean large size I mean 6X's prom dresses -- so I did find some that were specialty, not your standard I guess Big Four pattern company, so when you go off the grid a little bit, they do get a little



more expensive. So, I mean, that kind of weaned me into thinking that "Well, and then this is a book, it has several patterns into it."

**Josephine:** One of the first things you do is you sit there and go right and I spend 90 Bucks [chuckle] It's like printed off on his, on someone's home printer and it's all handwritten by him, and some of it... Half of it is more theoretical. But you sit there and you read it a second and a third time. ... Then it was also the "You know what, this is pretty unique. I'm not going to be able to find this." It's kind of like the idea of I can either walk into Macy's and buy something that everyone else has or I can look for an independent designer which is what I love about Etsy. So I think that's why I kind of talked myself into it or rationalized it.

**Lisa:** Yes, they're expensive. They're not something I would normally want to spend money on that much, that much money... Especially, since it's in the foreign language and what not but it's the only resources I knew to get that kind of information. I didn't know of any other possible way to kind of get that same, to have a pattern, to have pictures, and even though I can't understand the written Japanese language I can follow their picture directions kind of well for the ones that they have so for me, it's a valuable resource even it's a little more money that I normally want to spend.

### **Style.**

Twelve of the thirteen respondents said they look at project style when choosing sewing resources:

**Andrea:** *Female*...I've done three of them and I'm like, "that's really cute!"

**Bonnie:** They're much more sophisticated styles.

**Cindy:** I like folk wear. I like the different ethnic wear and I wear a lot of ethnic wear such as... Right when you called, I was looking at some designer Djellabas from Saudi Arabia and thinking, "Oh, how am I gonna replicate those ideas or get that kind of idea?" So, in other words, I go between the closest you can get to European designer ideas that you can get from patterns such as getting it from La Mia boutique which... Or Patrones, it's just that clothes in Patrones are usually too small. And even La Mia boutique are usually too small but Patrones are so far too small that I have to withdraw it completely. So those are... My aesthetic is either European designers translated into home patterns or copied off of European designers or ethnic designs copied off of by folk wear and modified by me.

**Danielle** considers whether the pictures or projects cool looking or special. She also like the detail and precision of Japanese pattern books compared to what she calls European patterns

**Erin:** But, looking through, I saw a garment that I really liked and I figured out what book it was from and I ordered that book, just specifically for that.

**Fiona:** very kind of scrappy and funky and that's kind of stuff I love... I guess I could try to figure it out, but these are a little funky and they try to kind of make things with cool shapes and the patterns aren't typical.

**Fiona:** Do I like it. I mean, individual patterns, it's kind of like, "Oh, do I like it? Is there an element that I could use, might help". The Burda patterns, I mean, I kind of found online sewing communities that, about year and half ago. And that summer everybody was talking about Burda and how great it was. And I was looking at it and "That was a pretty cool coat."... I like stuff that's interesting, but

not too pretty. I mean, I'm relative young, I mean I'm 25. So, I like stuff that's just little bit funky and stuff that I can make that I wouldn't necessarily find in a store. Or, is like something that I could find in a store. Like is at least like on trend. So maybe not like, "Oh, I saw a jacket exactly like that", but it's in line with what's fashionable

**Gabrielle:** So I find that Burda is a good source for every day wearable, fashionable clothes that look like me. ... Well, based on the name, I guess, it has really cool drapings. It has sort of, almost like an extremely evolved pannier look on the thighs, and I am sensitive about my belly and my hips. One thing I really like about Japanese patterns is that, I guess, they're all so skinny that you don't have to prove you're skinny by wearing fitted clothes...

**Ida:** First I look at if it's something I can really truly wear and if it's my personality, my lifestyle.

**Josephine:** I probably veered towards the Vogue Patterns in terms of, I like the styles of them ... And it's just something because the style that they were showing were unique. And I'm very much... I have a graphic design background. So one of them that I found was very structural. One of them looks like cubes coming out of the dress.

**Karen:** It was the Lady... It was The Stylebook, which is very avant-garde, the styles are very Issey Miyake, drapey, weird seeming, not traditional clothes, so it was very interesting to look at and see how they went from that sloper to the design details in the garment. But they weren't really garments I could wear. I work outside of the home in an office environment, it's conservative. So if I wore

some drapery clothing, [chuckle] I was in my nightgown. So then, there was another magazine, somebody had described it on a bulletin board as being for old married lady, and I think that's what the translation actually comes out to be for the title, it's really Mrs. Stylebook. I'm getting too confused, but the other one, I decided to get an issue and it's not as flashy, it's printed on newsprint, a lot of the patterns. The pictures aren't as fashion forward, it looks like a slightly less professional job, the models aren't as glamorous. But all the clothes in it were more traditional items like I would wear like skirts and blouses and dresses, some of them are rather sedate, but it was more in line with what I wear and make. So, I really enjoy that magazine ... And since the book is published and distributed, it starts to age. So I have a really good book from the 1940s, I have one from the 70s and they're great for basic pattern drafting but the garments that they show you how to draft [chuckle] at are not real fashion-forward. And that was the other advantage of the Japanese magazine is they're current fashion. That's the only place that you can find drafting instructions for current fashion.

**Lisa:** The style in the middle of the 50's fits my body style better. I'm an hourglass shape so that's where 50s were so it's much easier for me in some ways to use one of those patterns because it's meant for my body shape. I love... I love the look; I love button outfits, loads and loads of buttons. There's like usually variations and see in outfits of the buttons and little details on them that you don't get with the clothes today. So and I love pockets in dresses. Dresses should have pockets.

**Maria:** They fit well. They're... They're drafted well, they're very stylish. They're usually about 6 months ahead of where we are.

**Maria:** Well, it was different. I was looking for something that wasn't mainstream, that was just different.

### **Source is Independent Business.**

One respondent mentioned considering the type of business producing a resource, with a preference for independent businesses:

**Erin:** Well, I like the fact that they're independent

### **Collecting References.**

Six respondents referred to the idea of collecting references on a subtopic of interest:

**Andrea:** So I just kind of look at it as "This is my little collection." I have a huge collection of books, English and Japanese. And I just kind of look at it and I use it as a - the book, I'm using it for reference when I want to make something. So it's always there. So if I want to sew something up at midnight, I've got the pattern and I've got the fabric, I can do it if I want to. So...

**Fiona:** Because I only started sewing about three years ago. And still a little bit collecting phase

**Gabrielle:** But I enjoy like rifling through my patterns and... Looking at the details and I will sometimes read the instructions of the pattern that I won't be sewing anytime in the immediate future. To see what's the interesting construction details are.

**Ida:** Inspirations. And, you know, they're all Japanese. They're somewhat Jalie patterns that are just like, if I could collect... I tend to collect the patterns. I mean sometimes, you know, why not? [chuckle] Why not? I don't know.

**Josephine:** And so I also like to gather reference materials. [laughter] So that's where they kind of came into play and it became... It started to get a little obsessive. ... Then since joining with this ASG group, I'd taken an heirloom sewing class with them. So that kind of got me into heirloom sewing. I picked up... I started playing with the serger. I picked up the serger on Craigslist. And so now I've bought a couple of books on serging techniques. So it's kind of as things have kind of come along that I've added to my library, and they're just kind of hodge-podgy I guess.

**Lisa:** I get hooked on something and then I research it... If you search for things, Amazon likes to suggest stuff and then, you know you can always look through eBay books that old and the current and I find the title on there then I'd go look on Alibris and Amazon and Abebooks and all that and then they usually provide suggestions, so one thing leap frogs to the next thing that leap frogs, to the next thing, and "oh, this person has a second book called this... " You know.

### **Getting a Treat.**

One of the most commonly mentioned aspects of getting resources was that learning for hobby purposes is a pleasure, so getting learning resources for that learning is also a pleasure – getting these resources is a treat:

**Andrea:** Oh, my gosh! Well, I was kind of giddy because it was a huge...

**Andrea:** So, that was my first experience with the magazines... With Cotton Time. Loved it, loved it, and thought that was the coolest magazine ever! They're huge and they're thick and the pat...

**Bonnie:** And a lot of things are sort of reference books and if you're like me, you're probably sit and read sewing books.

**Danielle** considers herself a “sewing book ho.” She has automated her purchases with magazine subscriptions, and then when the subscriptions aren't due for a while or she needs “a fix” she buys books.

**Erin:** But I haven't... Sometimes it takes awhile once I lust after things and I go and get it and then it... I think their books are really beautifully made. So part of what attracts me to it is maybe the quality of the publishing, too. Like the Japanese book that I got, it's really beautiful. Like as a book; the pictures are beautiful. I mean, the girl wrapped it in fancy paper to send it to me. Like there was a whole presentation that was part of it, that was intriguing. And the Taunton books I like that. Like when you open it up, the photography is really beautiful and it's really clear and well laid out and the binding is functional part of the book. So I am drawn to kind of those kinds of books. ... There is a little bit of mystique for discovering something totally new. Like in the Japanese books, it is like, "Wow! There is a whole world of stuff out there in other countries that I don't know about; stuff that have to have" or want to know about it because it is intriguing. Growing up in the North American Culture and having the patterns and stuffs. And then finding out about Burda and it's like, "Wow! People in Europe approach this in a different way." It is a whole different, interesting

cultural expression of the same art forms. So I mean that is part of what intrigues me about the Japanese stuff, is that... Like trying a different food, right? Which is good. A pattern book. [chuckle] Exotic.... But I get more than that out of it. I always have a stack of sewing magazines or something by my bed, and you know I'll flip through those like I would read a book.

**Fiona:** Yeah, pretty much. I opened it up as soon as I got home. I had actually... We don't look at our mail go to our houses in my town. Small town, so we actually go pick it up at the post office. I hadn't picked up the mail for a few days and I got all these packages. I was really excited and I knew that one was definitely the Japanese pattern. So I opened it right away and took a look through most of the books and I was really excited about it.

**Gabrielle:** And when I travel, I like to get sewing type souvenirs. So, that's the Japanese pattern book. I also got some fabric from Japan, some fabric in Malaysia and Hong Kong and Paris, Greece. And I'm about to go to Turkey, so I will be looking for textiles there.

**Karen:** So to me, this was just like a treasure that arrived every month with all these wonderful patterns I can make

**Lisa :** Yeah. So I went there and that's kind of become my end-all be-all shop stop for things I want because if they don't have, 9 times out of 10 they can get it for me so it'd be special orders. So they're my pimp of choice for Japanese stuff. ... And then I think the only exception after that is I love ball gowns so if I can find a ball gown pattern, I'm like, "Ooh, yes... " ... When I first got into hoarding, I was pretty crazy



**Interesting.**

Style was good, but learners were also looking for “interesting,” which appeared to be a combination of novel and thought-provoking:

**Andrea:** So I continued to buy some of those when the project looked interesting.

**Bonnie:** it looked interesting

**Cindy:** Not because I think I don't need another one, if they come up with another one with some new ideas that I need, sure I would get it.

**Erin:** There is a little bit of mystique for discovering something totally new. Like in the Japanese books, it is like, "Wow! There is a whole world of stuff out there in other countries that I don't know about; stuff that have to have" or want to know about it because it is intriguing. Growing up in the North American Culture and having the patterns and stuffs. And then finding out about Burda and it's like, "Wow! People in Europe approach this in a different way." It is a whole different, interesting cultural expression of the same art forms. So I mean that is part of what intrigues me about the Japanese stuff, is that... Like trying a different food, right? Which is good. A pattern book. [chuckle] Exotic.

**Fiona:** And still a little bit collecting phase and starting to also know what interests me and what I can do well enough to know what not to buy myself. Either so that I don't buy something that I don't need.

**Gabrielle:** At least till the time I see something interesting, I pick it up.  
... Most of the patterns, the shapes are so crazy. And the instructions have illustrations that even with that, like, I couldn't even figure out in most cases what was up and what was down.

**Helene:** I looked at the pictures. I looked at it and it made no sense to me but I was fascinated.

**Ida:** And it's like, "Oh, this is really interesting," and then I keep it. That's how I got sort of my vintage books.

**Josephine:** And it's because it was so structural and I had never seen anything like that, and then, of course, it kind of got into my graphic design part because of... And I think what attracts me to it like, the Pattern Magic ones is the architectural-ness of it. And then just... It was, again, there's this... I've got this page earmarked in the book where it speaks, "How did the freaking heck did you do that?" [chuckle] And it's staring at it you sit there and go, "I get it". On one level I get it.... In his way of doing things, there is a sense of you don't know what you're going to get. And you kind of have to be open to that. ... Then it was also the "You know what, this is pretty unique. I'm not going to be able to find this." It's kind of like the idea of I can either walk into Macy's and buy something that everyone else has or I can look for an independent designer which is what I love about Etsy. So I think that's why I kind of talked myself into it or rationalized it.

**Karen:** So it didn't meet my need quite in a way I wanted to but I learned a lot about how she drapes these dresses. The pattern pieces looked grotesque and weird but when you put them all together, it's a normal dress with a waist and a nice full skirt. So it was a learning experience too.

**Lisa:** The only times I don't is when it's a uniquely-made garment and I want to understand how they made it, what technique they used to make that piece. And then I'll buy the pattern just so I can learn how they did it.

**Wanted Japanese Style.**

A few respondents mentioned looking for Japanese style in particular:

**Andrea:** And I was like, "That is so cool," because I think, for me, the whole Japanese patterns have a very distinct look to them. If you're talking about little cushy stuff, well, and even the clothing, I think, is very distinctive. But it is very distinctive and you can't find on an American patterns and I thought I want to try that.

**Bonnie:** I think the Japanese pattern books... One thing that I liked about it and I think the girls that are doing them like is that they are a little more avant-garde in the way that you expect Japanese fashion to be avant-garde.

**Danielle** thinks Japanese patterns are more complex and have better details. One magazine will have several "blow-your-mind" innovative designs.

**Gabrielle:** So like when I tried to cook Indian food it just taste like American food with cumin and turmeric in it. [laughter] ... So when I made the Japanese pattern books, they really look like Japanese clothes. Like they look like Japanese street fashion, which is really cool but actually not my style.

**Lisa:** I learned about a lot of it through the website Pattern Review. I'm think in one of them, like the Gothic Lolita and stuff. I was talking about the fact that I love the style, but didn't know how to make it and wasn't sure how to even get resources or anything and someone said, "Hey if you go... " I think it's called Kinokuniya, you can get magazines or over here and they have patterns and I was like, "Ooh!" But they're Japanese but as long as you can size it up and pitch guesses then you've got patterns and "Let's go. Okay. Great!"

**Library.**

Three respondents mentioned using the public library when considering new resources. In some cases, the learner avoided making a purchase by using the library copy; in other cases, the learner confirmed that the resource is worth purchasing.

**Erin:** Like I am a little more careful now and I would probably tend to look to a library before I would purchase something now, too.

**Fiona:** But I usually know that I usually end up getting a book because if I heard it was good I'll buy and I read the reviews or I check it out at the library first to decide if it was something I was interested in.

**Josephine:** So now my MO is to, whenever possible, go to the library and look through the book to see what it is. And then, if I find it valuable, I'll buy it myself or copy off certain parts of it.

A fourth respondent meets with her sewing group at the local library branch.

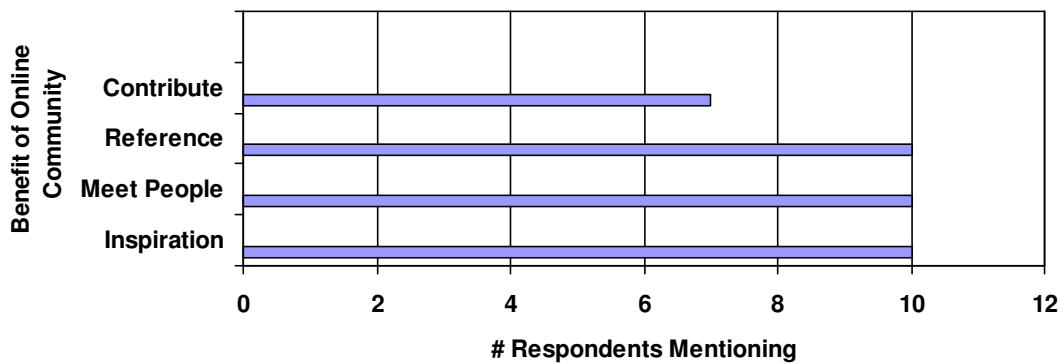
In summary, then, these learners were looking for style, either Japanese style in particular or their style in general, value for the money, good reference material, and materials that are interesting, defined as novel and intellectually challenging. A surprising number reported using their local libraries.

**Research Question Three: How does an environment of plentiful, easy to access resources affect decision making and choices?**

**Community.**

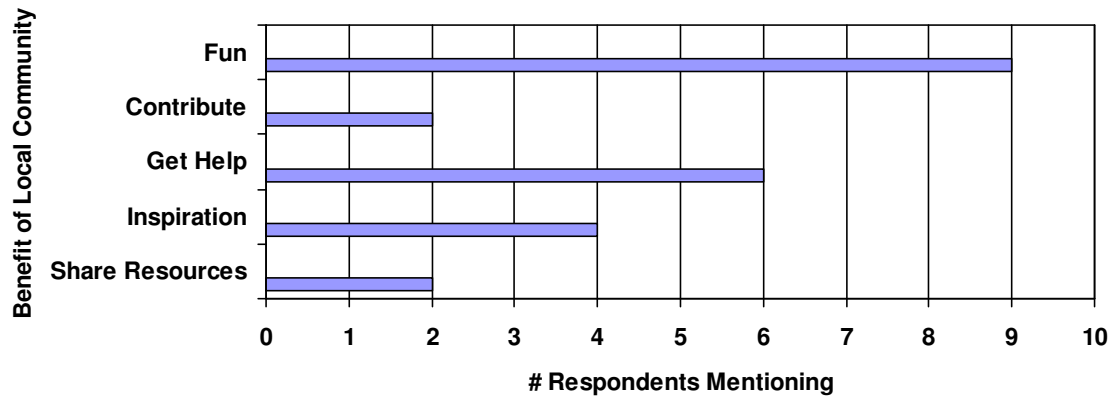
As one would expect from a research sample recruited online, these participants consider themselves part of the online sewing community. They reported receiving several benefits from their participation in this community:

**Figure 4.3. Reported Benefits of Participation in Online Communities**



These benefits were not limited to information about resources or answers to questions.

Perhaps more surprisingly, most of these participants also reported involvement in local sewing communities as well; those who did not consider themselves to belong to local communities attributed it to a lack of local opportunities rather than disinclination. Local communities provided the participants with many of the same benefits as the online community:

**Figure 4.4. Reported Benefits of Participation in Local Communities**

Again, the benefits were both social and practical.

#### **Online Learning Activities.**

That the benefits of the online communities were so similar to the benefits of local communities is due to the strength and dynamism of these online communities. These communities have evolved beyond simple bulletin boards and photo albums into places where learners can find many of the same kinds of relationships and opportunities that were previously only face-to-face. The participants in this research mentioned:

- Reading about other people's projects
- Shopping on Etsy.com
- Shopping on Ebay.com
- Shopping on Amazon.com
- Blogging
- Commenting on someone else's blog
- Using an internet search engine
- Participating in a craft swap (where people exchange packages of handmade items)
- Selling through Amazon.com, Ebay.com or other sites

- Posting sewing patterns
- Reading discussion threads in forums
- Participating in a sewalong (where several people sew the same pattern at the same time, discuss it online, and post pictures of their progress)
- Looking at pictures from fashion week
- Emailing individuals
- Moderating a sewing community
- Contributing a tip to an online community site database
- Reviewing a pattern on an online community site database
- Reading an article at an online community site
- Posting a question on an online community site
- Answering a question on an online community site
- Searching the databases at an online community site
- Managing a contest at an online community site
- Organizing a shopping trip with other members of an online community site
- Browsing the web by following links
- Participating in PR weekend (a weekend of classes, shopping and eating organized by one of the online community sites)
- Taking an online class
- Downloading a free pattern from an online community site
- Watching an online tutorial video

- Entering a contest at an online community site
- Writing an article for an online community site
- Participating in a wardrobe refashion challenge
- Browsing Amazon.com book recommendations

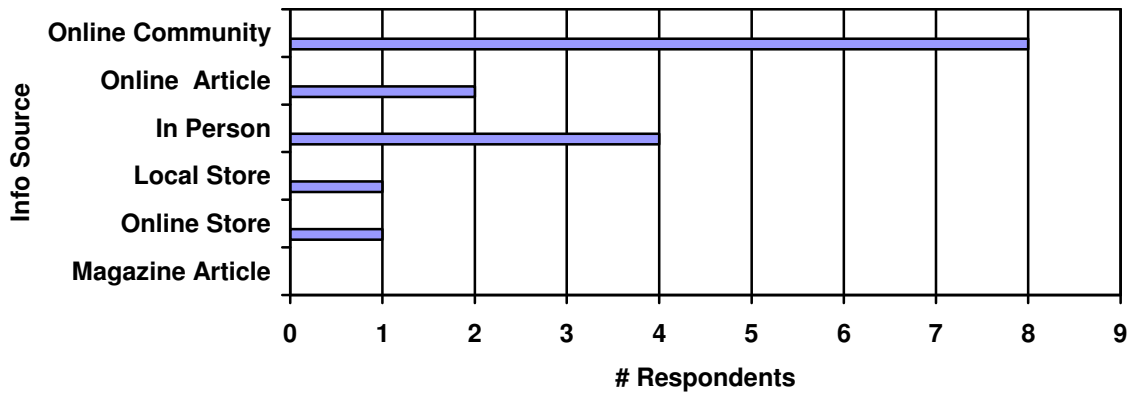
The online community sites mentioned by these respondents were managed primarily by the learners themselves; the only “expert” involved provided technical support and website programming. Interestingly, the community site operated by one of the most popular magazines was not mentioned by these respondents as one they frequented; they preferred the sites that were not owned by the experts.

### **Resource Referrals.**

Word of mouth has always been an important way to learn about resources; with the advent of online communities, it is easy for any learner to hear about obscure resources because they are not limited by their local communities. Eleven of the respondents first heard about Japanese sewing resources from an online source; one of the other two found it in a bookstore recommended by a friend she met online.



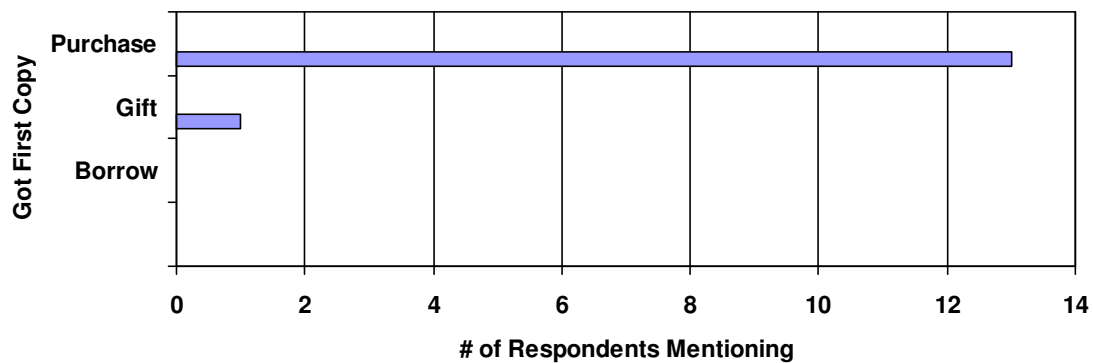
**Figure 4.5. Source of Original Information about Japanese Sewing Resources**



Interestingly, no participant reported having learned about these resources from articles that had been published in print magazines. Retail stores were also not influential in introducing this resource.

On the basis of this online chatter, all thirteen respondents bought copies of the resource; the one respondent who received a copy as a gift received it at about the same time she ordered some for herself.

**Figure 4.6. Manner in which Respondents Got their First Copy of Japanese Sewing Resource**



Twelve of the thirteen respondents made the decision to obtain this resource without having seen a copy first.

### **The New Normal.**

#### ***Ordering Online.***

One thing the online community in general has normalized is the purchase of resources online. And once you've made the big step from buying in a store to buying online, buying from a Japanese vendor on Etsy.com isn't that different from buying from a United States vendor on Etsy.com, and paying for shipping and waiting a week for your purchase becomes standard. The interesting thing about what these respondents said on this subject is how uninteresting their stories were:

**Andrea:** This particular vendor was an American vendor that had just a number. I think they were getting rid of their collection or whatever. But now the ones that I shop through are strictly Japanese vendors. Just because they always have the newer magazines and they can get any book you want, typically if it's still in print and some out of print ones. There's a couple in the United States but there's no difference in price and the shipping from Japan, I found is pretty quick. Like you get it in a week.

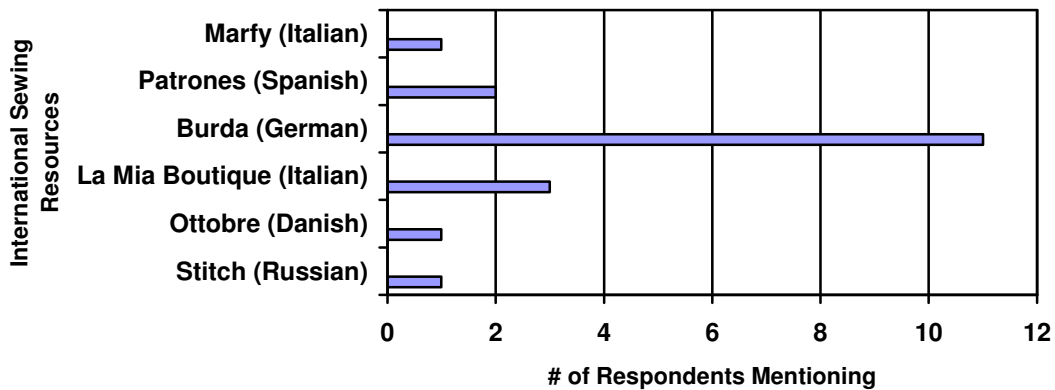
**Erin:** So, I ordered it online. I actually asked a couple of people and I got it through a seller that sells things on at Etsy

**Maria:** Actually, I got it off the classifieds on Pattern Review

#### ***International Sewing Resources.***

Another thing the online sewing community in particular has normalized is the use of international sewing resources. All thirteen of the respondents mentioned using at least one other international (non-Japanese) resource.

**Figure 4.7. International Sewing Resources Used by Respondents**



Burda appeared to be a “gateway drug” for all of these learners – the main Burda magazine is available in an English translation, which makes it seem familiar, but the directions are terse and the translations imperfect, so learners must practice working things out for themselves, after which it doesn’t seem as important what language the resource is written in.

Three respondents specifically mentioned that prior familiarity with a non-English sewing resource helped make the Japanese resource less intimidating:

**Andrea:** Even though it was in another language, I had done a few patterns in...

Like Burda that has patterns and they moved their Easy Fashion to German. And so I went ahead and worked with those patterns even. So I figured, if I get some other foreign pattern-making experience, I could give another language a try.

**Bonnie:** I had already sewn with Burda World of Fashion magazines back when you could only get them in the German. And my German is limited kind of... I’m

a singer and so I've had to study German and Italian and French and you know, Latin and stuff, but not with the idea of speaking it or learning, you know, contemporary vocabulary and certainly not sewing vocabulary. And so, I was kind of at ease to doing that and just figuring it out.

**Cindy:** I heard about it on [patternreview.com](http://patternreview.com) in an article by I believe Miss Celie, who at that time was calling herself Cidell, and she was discussing a variety of pattern magazines that came from overseas and I already had some of these magazines and I said, "Well you know, maybe I could try the Japanese pattern magazine."

Further support for the idea that the online sewing community was normalizing the use of international sewing resources for their members is the reaction those members got when they showed these resources to sewists who weren't as strongly involved in the online community.

**Bonnie:** I have, I did a program for my local sewing guild this last year on alternate pattern companies or alternative pattern sources. And so I took along everything I had that wasn't, you know, the big four basically. ... And there was a gal that wanted to borrow the Mrs. Stylebook issue that I had brought along and she made one of the blouses that she copied out of it ... Well, our guild's pretty old, actually. And other ladies weren't particularly interested, and I have to say that most of them aren't sewing very much anymore just because they don't need that many clothes and they are sewing stuff for their grandkids and stuff.

**Danielle's** local group showed no interest, not even in talking to vendors and authors as peers.

**Ida:** Yeah. And that's intimidating to them so I don't take it

**Josephine:** I talked... I took them to my neighborhood group of the ASG, the American Sewing Guild. That's the blog that I write for our neighborhood group and I've taken them to one of them which everyone just kind of oohed and aaahed. Few people had heard about them... So the ones who are in their late 30's and younger probably, I think they were a little intimidated, not because of their sewing skills, just because it's the... I think it's just... It was so unusual. It's, kind of, my first reaction of, "Whoa, that's interesting and it's not even in English," [laughter] that's a lot to take.

**Maria:** Oh well we have a sewing group, and I brought it to sewing group to show them what it was like because they haven't seen the magazine before ... Nobody wanted to try it ... Because, it just looked too complicated.

### **Randomizing.**

In addition to managing the enormity of the internet through ties with the online sewing communities, these learners liked to have a little fun with it. Four respondents mentioned doing things that could be considered deliberately re-introducing a random element into their resource selection.

**Andrea:** Typically I just kind of run across things through a search. It's just like I do a lot on the internet. [laughter] I probably shouldn't waste so much time on the internet and you can find everything. So I usually just kind of stumble across things.

**Josephine:** Often times, I'll kind of a roulette thing in Amazon. Just see what kind of books come up.

**Karen:** I might get just to see what they're like. The Russian one, I only have a three-month subscription, just to see what it's like.

Lisa: If you search for things, Amazon likes to suggest stuff and then, you know you can always look through eBay books that old and the current and I find the title on there then I'd go look on Alibris and Amazon and Abebooks and all that and then they usually provide suggestions, so one thing leap frogs to the next thing that leap frogs, to the next thing, and "oh, this person has a second book called this... " You know.

So, the impact of the internet has been, first, to enable learners to obtain almost any resource quickly, and, second, to facilitate the development of online learning communities. These communities, managed by the learners, have offered learners resource referrals and created new norms for resource use, in this case by introducing U.S. learners to resources published in other countries.

**Research Question Four: Do self-directed learners use criteria to evaluate resources, once tried, and if so, what are these criteria?**

**Keep Everything.**

The first thing that became very clear is that these learners try *not* to evaluate their resources! At least, if evaluating something is considered the first step to getting rid of it. Twelve of these thirteen learners preferred to hold onto everything, at least until they ran out of space. Then they applied simple and minimally-evaluative criteria like weeding

out duplicates, outdated fashions, and materials related to things that no longer interest them:

**Andrea:** If it's costume I always keep it, no matter what the size. I really like costume sewing, so I have a tendency to keep anything that's a costume pattern.

**Ida:** I don't get rid of any Japanese books. I don't... Okay, I'll take that back. I do remember getting rid of a couple just maybe two or three. But I don't like to do it because I spent so much money on them. And I do like them. And I try to go back to them and they inspire me. And they're also good. They have good crafts for beginner sewers which I like to teach beginner sewing.

**Bonnie:** Do I ever get rid of things from my sewing library? Very, very rarely.

**Cindy:** I'm so dragon-like about my books that I can tell you which one I got rid of. ... Basically though, nothing gets gotten rid of, no. They better not. I mean, they have my name in these things and I don't want them to go anywhere.

**Fiona:** I like having them

**Lisa:** Books, I've have had a harder time letting go. [laughter] I've been a reader since I was 6, so books are like; I have 3 book cases, so books are kind of a constant in my life. Its like, "Can we have that book? Really, it does-it needs a home, it needs to stay."

### **Space.**

It appeared that the evaluation of resources is frequently triggered by space issues; this meant that resources were evaluated in comparison to the others the learners owned, rather than against any objective criteria:

**Andrea:** I'm making room. Usually I wait until I do a huge purge.

**Ida:** I keep them in a box. You know those filling box that have a lid that you can get it Staples or Home Depot? If I get... If I have more patterns and I can fit in that box, it's got to go

**Bonnie:** And I still got patterns from, you know, when I was in a college and things that I get a lot of storage room. And so it's not like I can't keep them if I want to.

**Erin:** I mean, I just recently unpacked some stuff I had in storage, and now with the kind of space I have allocated for books is pretty full. So if I was going to add something, I'd have to think a lot about it. I think I would try and figure out if I can replace something existing with it.

**Gabrielle:** I mean they don't take up that much room. I culled them out earlier this year. If space was ever an issue I have to be more ruthless ... The doors were so jammed because I couldn't get any more patterns.

**Lisa:** I try to keep my collection to a certain number of boxes and, you know, kind of a, if one comes in and the box is full and something has to go out.

### **Duplicates.**

**Cindy:** But when I do, I will get rid of a pattern if looking at it I realize I already have another pattern like that...

**Erin:** I mean, I just recently unpacked some stuff I had in storage, and now with the kind of space I have allocated for books is pretty full. So if I was going to add something, I'd have to think a lot about it. I think I would try and figure out if I can replace something existing with it.



**Josephine:** Like, I bought this book "Design It Yourself Clothes". It's sitting here on my couch looking at this. And it's pattern-making simplified. And part of it, I think I resisted buying it because it's the... I read a lot of these books and even the heirloom sewing book. I read a lot of these books and think, "My mom taught me this."

**Karen:** I might get rid of old patterns or books that have been republished and updated, I get rid of the old versions.

**Lisa:** And and you get a whole lot of stuff and then you go okay, that's not really that good, you know, there's something actually better so now I don't need this book anymore. Or you realize, "Oh, I have... Somehow gotten 3 of the same pattern. "Well obviously I don't need two. You remember that I bought that pattern, because clearly I like it because I bought it three times.

#### **Lost Interest or Need.**

**Andrea:** And it might be things like, I bought this for my daughter, that's no way it's going to fit now. Or this is out of date or out of style, I don't see that's ever coming back. So it's easy to get rid of those types of things. I

**Danielle** purged once when she switched from quilting to fashion sewing, but even then kept things if she thought "what if I need it?"

**Erin:** So I would through and go maybe on my kids' pattern. I don't need them anymore. Like the kids are too big. Sell that are a little bit old.

**Erin:** Just things that I didn't feel that I would use anymore; more general books than specific books. I like real specific stuff.

**Helene:** I'm ready to think about getting rid of some of the Burda magazines. And I'm just realizing that the books I don't care about anymore.

**Helene:** But because I sew, a lot of people gave me quilting books. I don't really care about quilting. And making teddy bears, I'd rather kill myself. If I wanted to make a teddy bear I would, but I wouldn't look at the stupid book.

**Josephine:** And just also, my interest level, at one point I was very much into, I think, Jacobean crewel work and if you ask, not so much anymore, chucked all those.

**Lisa:** When it comes to fabrics and patterns, you go through stages and there are things that you fall in love with and you're like, "Oh, I have to have this." And then, when you go back to review what you've got, you're like, "Okay. I'm done with that phase and I really don't need to keep that anymore,"

### **Why Keep?**

Why do learners hang on to things? These learners said they might need something in the future, or that they might regret letting it go, particularly if the resource was expensive or otherwise hard to replace. Conversely, the things that were easily replaced were the ones that could go.

**Ida:** And if I really wanted them I could just buy another one.

**Cindy:** Or in terms of kid's clothings, my niece that I like to make things for, may be too big for it now, and I don't need that many patterns, I mean, I keep a couple just in case somebody has a baby or whenever you need something, but I don't need that many patterns that you can't even fit. ... A few years ago, I've gotten rid of a few sewing books and then I hated myself. I got rid of the Illustrated Book of

Hassle-Free Sewing and then they came out with a remake of it and everybody was wearing some of them. I am like, "Oh, you idiot!" Fortunately, I kept Son of Hassle-Free Sewing.

**Erin:** I just buy them knowing that at some point they will come in handy. It's like this, Threads Magazines or the Burda's. You'd look through one and go, "You know there's nothing really in there and then 2 months later you go back to it and go, "What was I thinking? This is great. It is amazing. This is exactly what I need right now."

**Fiona:** Pretty much I bought this book called tailoring and it's about how to make tailor jacket. I haven't really made a tailor jacket yet but I know that I will. And when I had it, I also bought a shirt-making book and well... More towards men's shirt. When I make a button-down shirt, I don't think that it's going to be really interesting, it'd really be an useful reference. So, they all have their time when they will get used.

**Josephine:** I think as long as I can always go back and find something in it. I mean, I have books from when I painted a mural for somebody. It was a reference book for some floral designs. And because I'll pick it up and still find something in it to keep me interested, just kind of have an idea starter in it. I think that's what the value I get. If I can pick it up... So I think I can pick it up a month later and still get an idea starter for something.

**Karen:** They're just... I may go back and make one. I've done that probably horribly out of style but it was something I wanted to try or a technique or style I

wanted to make so I gone ahead and made it. ... It's my treasures, especially the ones that are unique like the Vogue designer patterns.

**Andrea:** Those are also 99 cents, typically, or something. So, it's a whole lot easier to get rid of those. If you need to get it again and it's still in print, you can... It's easier to get rid of the ones that I've been holding on to, that are the English books, magazine, patterns, whatever it might be, because they're easier to find than what these are. I think they're a little bit harder to find and harder to come across. They're unique.

**Danielle** purged once when she switched from quilting to fashion, but even then worried about "what if I need it?"

**Helene:** Like, will I be sad if I can't look at it again? I mean, I also have this hysterically funny series. Actually, I found it on the street. "The Golden Hands Books" from the '70s. And they are like... The illustrations and the photographs are hysterically funny, because they are so ugly. It's like atrocious beyond belief.

**Josephine:** Well, because I also think that if I get interested in it again that I can look up on the Internet and find it for inspiration. That's the thing that, kind of, becomes more inherent to me. I'm still someone who likes to have things at my finger tips. But I also have realized... I got through periods where I don't want have a lot of stuff [chuckle] so I will keep things bookmarked or referenced into... On my computer hard drive.

**Lisa:** So, I get hooked on "Okay, how do I make lingerie, there's not many lingerie patterns with all the different things that I want to do." Here are some vintage books for the lingerie, here's some more recent ones, if they give me

anything, great.

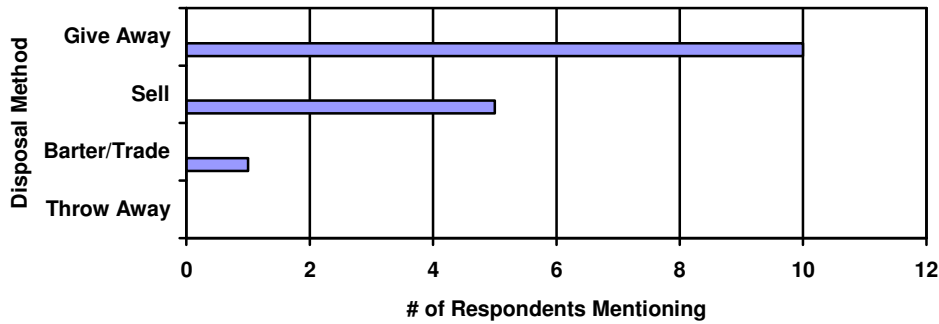
One lone respondent is fairly casual about trimming her library:

**Maria:** What I haven't used, maybe what isn't in fashion anymore, what I've already read and feel like I've consumed the information and I don't need to reference back to it.

**Disposal.**

And finally, if these learners made the heart-rending decision to get rid of something, they passed it on to someone else:

**Figure 4.8. Manner in which Respondents Disposed of Purged Resources**



None of these respondents mentioned throwing something away because of a poor evaluation.

**Other Criteria.**

Emotional attachments to their belongings aside, these learners mentioned several criteria that made the difference between favorite and not-so-favorite resources.

***Didn't Work for Me.***

The criteria most participants agreed on was whether the garments in sewing resources could be customized for their own body shapes and lifestyles with they

considered a reasonable amount of effort. One possible reason why these participants seemed somewhat casual about trying new resources is that there is a fairly high failure rate with pattern customization – if you are used to most of your resources not working well for you, then you are more likely to spread a wide net looking for new ones:

**Ida:** You know what they are - Butterick and Burda. Oh, Burda, that was really not my thing because I'm very small. I have an Asian body type. I don't know, some people don't use body type like this but I've been taught Asian body types and European body types, and I suppose Asian body types are smaller. But you know that's... I don't know... That's... I just tend to use that explanation because when someone... When I say Asian, people tend to think small. [laughter] And I'm very small, and very petite and skinny. So Burda didn't work out for me even though I liked their style. And I hated working with commercial patterns because I couldn't ever figure out how to make them smaller. I couldn't, at that time, figure out how to do a bust cup width adjustment - small bust cup adjustment

**Bonnie:** Because it was a nice skirt and I've made it a couple of times and it turned out great, but the skirt is probably would be one of the few things I would make out of that because the Japanese figure is the shape that I am. I'm pretty busty and they're not in general. And so if I'm gonna have to draft the whole thing and then do a lot of alterations on it, it might not really be worth my time to do it unless there was something really particular that I wanted to do.

**Cindy:** But I couldn't use it or not very easily because looking at the measurements inside, I would have been a 6X by their pattern standard, and that was way larger than the draft that they had in the pictures were in any way

intended to accommodate. Also, I'm seeing that the styles, and by the way, in the US Styles, I'm a 22 or 24 as far as pattern, big for a pattern companies whatever and in Burda, about 50, but in that, I was going to be a 6X and furthermore, not only was the clothes was going to require a whole lot of drafting and re drafting to be able to fit more than expected,

**Fiona:** I mean, some of the American pattern companies will have cute stuff, but there's like they put too much ease in terms of patterns. In which, when I was first starting to sew, I didn't know that. So, I would make the pattern that my...

According to my size and after making them "Why is this huge!". And you know being really confused by that. And now that I know better, I mean... And now I know with any pattern I'm going to make unless... I may need to do various ways of determining how's it going to fit me. With Burda I tend to have less of a problem with like it being totally off.

**Helene:** I'm not built like a Japanese lady. I'm 5'7", I'm broad shouldered. I have boobs. I have hips. I have a belly. I have three kids. I'm not built like them. So, I can't construct something shaped like that and have it look okay on me. I'm built like a peasant lady. So Eastern European peasant. So, if I put on the clothes that they have in Cotton Friend, I'd look like a tuba. I can't wear those clothes. They're beautiful. But they're beautiful if you're slight and have no boobs and have no hips.

**Karen:** I used to be able to make patterns right out the envelope and they fit fine. And as I got a little bit older, things started shifting and it was a little bit more difficult to fit myself. And I really like patterns, I can go out and buy patterns on

sale, I got the Burda magazines which have patterns in them. So I had plenty of patterns and I just thought, "Well, I don't want to get into drafting or anything like that." But when I started having fitting problems, somehow I'd read on another bulletin board about the Japanese pattern magazines and the drafting, it started to occur to me that if you draft... All those patterns in that magazine are built off a sloper, which you have to draft from your measurements to start off with. And so, I said it was like a light bulb went on, "Oh, if I make the sloper to fit me, then I can use these drafting instructions to make any kind of garment and it'll fit me great."

**Lisa:** The style in the middle of the 50's fits my body style better. I'm an hourglass shape so that's where 50s were so it's much easier for me in some ways to use one of those patterns because it's meant for my body shape

***Good Information.***

There were several other things people liked about resources, which are grouped here under the category of "good information" because, while everyone liked good information, not everyone agreed on how to define it. For example, some respondents preferred vintage texts with lots of ideas presented sparsely, which others preferred newer texts with fewer ideas presented very visually:

**Andrea:** The whole book and the thing that was the biggest surprise for me was even though you don't have to know the language in order to make the things inside. I think I was kind of scared off initially by getting anything because I didn't know what I was getting myself into. There are so many pictures and diagrams and things like that, it's easy to get away with not knowing this much.



**Ida:** I like the pictures. I like her shortcuts. I think the pictures aren't clear. I think she should update it. [chuckle] Oh, getting old. It's still nice but come on do the fourth edition or whatever. [chuckle] I think David Coffin, very detailed and I like his writing styles. Kind of, I don't know. I don't know what to call it. Just I like his writing styles.

**Bonnie:** But my very favorite sewing book is a little old book that has just a few line drawings in it called, Sew the French Way. And I think, my copy was printed in England. I don't know if they ever printed it here. And I think it's from like the fifties. ... Well, the author obviously a pseudonym, is Lina Jacque instead of **Jacqueline**. And yeah, and that's all there is for the name of it. And I guess the impression was that, somebody that works in a couture in Paris for somebody, and just did this book to kind of put down the techniques that they used for various things. But, it's very much a book for somebody that already knows how to sew because it's really bare bones on how to do stuff. But it's really helpful.

**Erin:** I think their books are really beautifully made. So part of what attracts me to it is maybe the quality of the publishing, too. Like the Japanese book that I got, it's really beautiful. Like as a book; the pictures are beautiful. I mean, the girl wrapped it in fancy paper to send it to me. Like there was a whole presentation that was part of it, that was intriguing. And the Taunton books are like that. Like when you open it up, the photography is really beautiful and it's really clear and well laid out and the binding is functional part of the book. So I am drawn to kind of those kinds of books.

**Helene:** I did recently buy a good new pattern drafting book by this woman named Cal Patch. It's a very good book. The clothes are not fabulous but she's really good at explaining... She's really good at explaining how to draft the pattern. ... The older books are much more information rich and that sort of information is there. I mean, like now you'll have a book on pockets. But in the old days you would have this big, fat book with three illustrations and tons of techniques. .. Because I mean I have an issue with a lot of the newer books. A lot of them... They have this gorgeous photography that's like very close up and beautiful. And it's beautiful to look at but it gives you no information that you need. And also a lot of the newer books are very low on content. They tend to deal with... Now, I don't know if it's the age of people with kind of limited attention span or the book would have like one little teeny topic and that's it. And I feel that you get a bigger bang for your buck with the older books even if the illustrations are atrocious.

**Karen:** Well, a couple of books actually explained draping and tailoring a lot better than current books. And I would read about people who'd purchased them or had them in their libraries and they'd review them online and then I would go out to the older, the stores where they look for old books and see if they had copies available

**Lisa:** I have loads of vintage books, a lot of times they talk about techniques and ways to do things that you don't get in the newer books

When deciding whether or not to keep a learning resource, these respondents were focused on the future – they evaluated their resources in terms of whether the resource

might be useful in future projects, either because it could be customized for their personal styles or because it contained good information, rather than whether they had used the resource yet.

### **Summary**

In these interviews, the thirteen respondents discussed their experiences with Japanese pattern magazines, their sewing libraries, and their sewing communities. They said they were looking for style, intellectual challenge and novelty, value for the money, a good set of references, and to give themselves a treat. They didn't consider themselves to be long-term planners, but did use language that suggested that they weren't quite the project-by-project planners they thought they were. They learned about resources from their online communities, and were quite comfortable with online ordering, even from foreign countries. And finally, they really didn't like to get rid of resources, once they had them, and generally waited until they ran out room before purging their libraries of duplicates, out-of-style resources and resources on topics that no longer interest them.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Overview**

This final chapter presents the results of this research project into the resource decisions by a particular group of self-directed adult learners. The chapter includes a restatement of the research problem, a discussion of each of the research questions, a review of some implications of the findings of this project, and recommendations for practice and further research.

#### **Restatement of the Research Problem**

To date, the research on self-directed learners hadn't looked specifically at the choices these learners make as they select and evaluate the resources they will use in their learning endeavors, particularly when those learning endeavors are embedded in a social environment that offers a wide variety of choice. This produced the potential for a partial understanding of resource selection by self-directed learners. This study investigated the learning resource selection and evaluation practices of self-directed learners who, while learning for enjoyment, had selected resources (Japanese pattern magazines) that would appear to make the learning experience more difficult or expensive than necessary in an attempt to discover what these learners were looking for and how they made their resource decisions.

## Discussion

**Research Question 1: Are these Japanese pattern magazine users deliberately planning their learning progression? If so, how does this planning work? If not, are they selecting learning activities at random?**

Most of the participants in these interviews described themselves as project-by-project planners; they chose a garment, outfit or accessory they wished to make, and then identified any skills or techniques they would need to acquire or refine in order to make the item. When asked outright, they did not consider themselves to be doing any long-term planning. However, when discussing their resource decisions, most of these respondents did use language that appeared to reveal that to some degree they did place themselves and their current projects on a larger landscape of sewing skills and techniques. They also reported using resources that were not directly related to their current or past projects. How does this fit with our classic models of self-directed learning?

### **The planning model.**

Tough (1971) defined learning projects as “a series of related episodes, adding up to at least seven hours. In each episode, more than half of the person’s total motivation is to gain and retain fairly clear knowledge and skill, or to produce some other lasting change in himself” (p. 7). Most of the projects described by these respondents would qualify, except perhaps for the length. In his long list of possible “pre-learning” steps, Tough stated that the learner may make assessments of current skill and motivation levels, and conduct a cost/benefit analysis of acquiring skill improvements. This is

somewhat consistent with the mental map this group of learners appeared to be making. And, Tough's steps included an assessment of whether or not the proposed learning project is feasible in the context of the learner's family life, work and other responsibilities.

So how do we reconcile the consistencies with the Tough model with the fact that these learners denied that they were planning? One possible explanation is that leisure learners moved so quickly through Tough's assessment and cost/benefit steps that they didn't really recognize the activity as something that rated being called planning. Alternately, Tough himself said that not all learners pass through all steps of his process; however, if these learners weren't conducting these assessments, why were they building mental maps? If planning is unconscious, is it still planning?

What we know about the workings of our unconscious decision making suggests not. Experiments have provided evidence (Gilbert, 2006) that when people make decisions at an unconscious level, they are strongly influenced by environmental factors that they wouldn't consciously include in their planning; however, when asked about their reasons for these decisions, they will articulate answers that seem reasonable or socially acceptable (like having planned) – they are unaware of the environmental factors. It is possible that this accounts for some of the long lists of steps that studies like Tough's have generated. The evidence is that we cannot understand learning decisions without understanding the environment in which they are made.

### **The organizing circumstance.**

Does this mean that the environmental model of self-directed learning, Spear and Mocker's organizing circumstance, is a better fit for what these learners described? The

questions about the Tough model raised above are very similar to the questions that Spear and Mocker (1984) used as the impetus for their research:

“although self-directed learners apparently did not do detailed preplanning ... their efforts could not be characterized as random or nonrational. Indeed, there was evidence of definite order, deliberateness and logic in the process. These observations led inevitably to the questions: ‘How do self-directed learners get started on, and then pursue their learning if 1) they are not aware of the specifics to be learned and 2) they have no plan for engaging in the learning process?’” (p. 3)

The model that they described, the organizing circumstance, places a particular emphasis on the environment in which the learner is situated.

The organizing circumstance model follows from four inferences (Spear & Mocker, 198), three of which fit the learners interviewed for this research fairly well. First, there is a triggering event, which can be as simple as finding a garment or pattern that looks appealing. Second, the “structure, methods, resources and conditions for learning” (p. 4) are naturally included within the sewing project, as they are dictated by the features of the garment and the techniques required to construct them. And third, “learning sequences progress, not necessarily in linear fashion, but as the circumstances created during one episode become the circumstances for the next necessary and logical step in the process” (p. 5). For example, a formal sewing course might have a unit on zippers, logically covering all of the most common methods of zipper installation, but for any particular project, the pattern indicates one method and that is the only one that the learner uses.

Unfortunately, the fourth inference doesn't apply to the learners in this study. The organizing circumstance model relies on the fact that the "circumstance tends to provide a single or, at best, very few resources or opportunities for learning that are reasonable or attractive for the learner to pursue" (Spear & Mocker, 1984, p. 4). It is this presentation of limited choice at each step that creates the sense of organization to the circumstance, and in the world of virtually unlimited resources, it no longer applies. In the vignettes illustrating the working of the model, Spear and Mocker described how individuals based their initial learning experiences on a book found at home or the limited selection available at a local library, or conversations with or lessons from a person or persons available locally. Today, however, a person whose interest is piqued on any subject can turn to the internet and be presented with hundreds of books, or online community sites with hundreds of thousands of members, all of which are almost equally available and many of which are free. The circumstances are no longer providing much organization.

### **Mental Maps and Filters.**

The learning projects described by these learners are consistent with aspects of both the planning and the environmental models. These learners were reacting to a triggering event, such as finding an appealing project, consistent with the environmental model. They were doing their learning in episodes, or projects, as modeled by both the planning and the environmental models. Before beginning a project, they assessed their interest level, current skills and lifestyle issues to determine that the project was feasible; this is consistent with the planning model. Once they began a project, they used the



parameters of the project to determine what resources they needed to complete the project, which is also consistent with both models.

There were three aspects of these learners' experience that weren't adequately addressed by the planning and environmental models. The first was the role of the mental maps they appeared to have constructed. The second was the question of prioritization and selection – how were these learners choosing the projects they wished to attempt next? And the third was why they purchased and kept resources that were not directly linked to the projects they were currently working on or had already finished?

We know that the human brain naturally seeks to arrange data into semantic networks and schema, which are mental frameworks “for organizing knowledge, creating a meaningful structure of related concepts” (Sternberg, 1999, p. 263); in these interviews, almost all the respondents used words implying that they had some sort of mental map, regardless of their level of sewing expertise. Research into the nature of expertise has suggested that as people develop from novices into experts, they develop more sophisticated, detailed, and useful sets of categories for organizing what they know about their areas of expertise (Chi, 2006) – in other words, their mental maps get better. The glimpses of the mental maps created by the learners in this research suggested that in addition to encoding relatively objective information such as types of fabrics and how to draft patterns, their mental maps included extremely personal assessments of relative difficulty and interest.

When choosing a learning project, it appeared that these learners used their mental maps as a type of filter – they only considered projects that overlapped with the areas on their mental maps that were of acceptable difficulty and interest. This allowed

these users to manage the environment of abundant resources without becoming overwhelmed by choices or acting at random (some of the responses found by consumer researchers such as Schwartz (2004) and Iyengar (2010)). At the same time, they were also improving their mental maps by selecting resources not specifically related to their current projects and by becoming involved in learner communities. In other words, the users were filtering their environments, and using their experience within the environment to improve their filters. This circular relationship has been noticed by others working in the field of self-direction; for example, Brockett and Hiemstra are revisiting their Personal Responsibility Orientation model to strengthen the role of context (Brockett, 2010). These filters will be discussed further in later sections.

With respect to the learners in this study, the planning model and the environmental model both offered useful perspectives on the learning process but didn't completely explain it. This was particularly true when it came to explaining the interplay of the learner's mental maps and the larger environment when it comes to planning and resource selection.

**Research Question 2: Do self-directed learners use criteria to choose new resources, and if so, what are these criteria?**

Why did these learners choose this particular type of learning resource? First, this section will consider the reasons that were *not* mentioned, and then examine the reasons that *were* mentioned.

These resources were not chosen as the result of a criteria- or need- based search for resources. Only one respondent reported wanting a particular style of clothing, conducting a search (which included posting a query on an online sewing community

site), and finding that Japanese pattern books satisfied her need. One other respondent said that as she learned about Japanese pattern drafting, she thought it might be a solution to a general problem she had been having. The other respondents all reported learning about the resource first, then making a decision to purchase based on fairly limited information about what it could provide and in some cases, despite the fact that some of what they knew about the resource (it was in Japanese and it required drafting) were things they considered drawbacks.

These resources were also not chosen as part of a particular project. None of these respondents reported deciding to make a particular garment or type of garment, and then finding the resources to make that garment in a Japanese pattern magazine. Even the respondent who did conduct a resource search was looking for something to shape her general style of sewing rather than for a specific project.

When it comes to these, and the other resources in these participants' libraries, three factors seem to be most important, at least as reported by this sample: the appeal of the content, the sense of getting a treat, and desire to assemble a reference library.

Content, referred to in this context as the style of the garments in the books and magazines, was mentioned by all the respondents. Some were particularly interested in what they perceive as "Japanese style" and some were interested in individually appealing items, but all wanted resources with styles that reflect their own lifestyles, bodies and reasons for sewing. Further, all of these learners presented very active, constructivist approaches to this content. Only one respondent made a garment exactly as presented in the books, and that was as a test to understand its unusual construction; all of the respondents planned to modify the garments or to extract ideas or details for use with

other garments. So, for these respondents, the appeal of this particular resource was its potential to spark future projects, not for its literal project directions. This did not appear to be a result of sewing experience; two of the participants have only been sewing garments for two or three years.

A second important factor for these participants was the sense of giving themselves a treat or present. They mentioned how much fun it was to find a package from Japan in the mailbox, the pleasure of nice paper and well-styled photographs, the intellectual challenge of working out the diagrams without being able to read the text, the ability to take their sewing to a child's soccer practice or to read in bed and the fun of "fantasy wardrobing." Notice that the resource didn't need to be used to construct a garment to qualify as a treat: the pleasures came from the physical appeal to the senses, the intellectual challenge and the novelty of the resources, not just from their usefulness.

The third important factor for these participants was the idea of collecting references on topic areas they expect to be working in. This seemed to happen in two loose stages. The first was a more active stage, where a learner, newly introduced to an area of interest, researched and acquired some of the resources currently available on the topic. The second was a monitoring stage, where the learner read or heard of a new (to her) resource in an existing area of interest and decided whether or not to acquire it. While this didn't appear to rise to the level of formal planning, it did support the idea that these learners had a general sense of the types of sewing they were interested in and where they were likely to want to work in the future; they were using these resources to improve their mental maps.

Cost was clearly a much less significant factor for this group of learners, entering the decision process after a learner had made a favorable judgment about a resource. And, frankly, it appeared to be a highly personal, malleable and manipulatable criteria -- there were instances of respondents justifying the same resource purchase by saying “look at how many patterns you get in one book” *and* by saying “there’s one pattern in there that’s worth the money.” The only time the cost absolutely ruled out an otherwise highly desirable purchase was when it was quite high (in the specific example reported by a respondent, the book was \$150). Of course, this finding is strongly influenced by the fact that the sample consisted of people who did choose to spend the money to buy this resource. It appears that the effect of pricing on resource acquisition is variable and learner-dependent.

These learners were looking for resources that fit into their personal lifestyles, could be considered a treat, and helped them improve their mental maps. They didn’t appear to consider cost to be an essential factor.

**Research Question 3: How does an environment of plentiful, easy to access resources affect decision making and choices?**

The simplest and most straightforward way in which an environment of plenty affects resource decision making is that it is possible for learners to obtain a much wider range of learning resources than may be available locally. Internet tools such as Etsy.com and PayPal have removed many of the mechanical and linguistic barriers to acquiring resources from anywhere in the world, and it did not appear that any of these participants thought twice about doing it.

These learners were members of at least one sewing community. They were all recruited online, so almost by definition were members of at least one online sewing community. Most were also members of local sewing communities; those who weren't expressed a wish that they could find one. They reported receiving several benefits from these communities, including access to resources, the chance to help other learners and contribute to the community, inspiration and motivation, and the fun of hanging out with people with similar interests. These are the same benefits reported in a survey of over 2600 members of six other online community sites (Kuznetsov and Paulos, 2010); that survey also found that members of online communities seek out local communities.

Most of the communities favored by these learners were organized by the learners themselves. While there were chats and courses offered by "experts," the bulk of the activity was driven by the members, who posted reviews of patterns and tools, carried on conversations in message boards and blog comment threads, posted tips and tutorials, and even organized and judged contests. These learners had a sense of ownership of the community, and a sense of responsibility to it. Many of the learners interviewed for this research reported contributing to the community, and some made comments that indicated that they were policing themselves, making contributions on topics they were knowledgeable about and staying silent on topics they were not yet competent in. Two respondents with no particular computer experience reported stepping in to manage online community sites when it appeared that they would otherwise disappear.

Japanese pattern resources, the focus of this research, illustrated this learner-driven characteristic nicely – the publishers and authors of the resources were not active in the English-language learner communities, and there were no "experts" pushing their

use. The only mainstream magazine articles that mention these resources were never mentioned by these respondents. The discovery and dissemination of this type of resource has been a learner-driven phenomenon.

A recent MacArthur Foundation project called this kind of learning community a participatory culture. “A participatory culture is a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one’s creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices. A participatory culture is also one in which members believe their contributions matter, and feel some degree of social connection with one another (at the least they care what other people think about what they have created)” (Jenkins, 2009, p. xi). Other members of the MacArthur Foundation Digital Media and Learning research team considered this kind of participatory learning to be the present, not the future, of learning, for almost everyone in the global north except formal education programs (Davidson & Goldberg, 2009).

The types of online activities these respondents reported, which included simple internet searches, contributing to databases of tips and product reviews, reading and writing blogs and organizing contests and shopping trips, are consistent with the types of skills the MacArthur Foundation research team have identified as “new media literacies” (Jenkins, 2009, p. xii) that are required to participate in these communities to maximum benefit:

- Appropriation: The ability to meaningfully sample and remix media content.
- Multitasking: The ability to scan the environment and shift focus onto salient details.

- Distributed cognition: The ability to interact meaningfully with tools that expand mental capacities.
  - Collective intelligence: The ability to pool knowledge and compare notes with others toward a common goal.
  - Judgment: The ability to evaluate the reliability and credibility of different information sources.
  - Transmedia navigation: The ability to follow the flow of stories and information across multiple modalities.
  - Networking: The ability to search for, synthesize, and disseminate information.
  - Negotiation: The ability to travel across diverse communities, discerning and respecting multiple perspectives, and grasping and following alternative norms.
- (Jenkins, 2009, p. xiv)

Most of the respondents in this study reported learning about Japanese pattern resources from the online community, and all reported participating in the online conversation about these resources once they had acquired them. In addition, those respondents who had local communities also attempted to share these resources with local friends, often finding that what their online friends thought was just another resource was something their local friends thought was strange and intimidating.

This disconnect between the online and local communities could be explained in two ways. One possibility is that this reflects the long tail effect, in which the sheer number of people online allows those few individuals who are interested in an obscure resource to find and support each other (Anderson, 2006). The other possibility is that this reflects network effects – that people in a community share information and that, as



information spreads, new norms are created (Christakis, 2009). The fact that only one of these learners was familiar with this type of resource before participating in the online discussions would seem to support the idea that the group created the interest in these resources. If so, this would be a way in which the environment, in the form of these online communities, was influencing the mental maps of these learners.

Social network research has suggested that the friends of your friends can make you vote, or fat, even if you personally don't know them (Christakis, 2009); in this project, it appears that the sewing friends of your sewing friends can put a Japanese pattern book in your hands, even if you've never heard of them. Those participants who had local communities all reported bringing Japanese pattern resources to local meetings and passing them around.

It is this effect that led Christakis and his fellow network researchers to believe that most small groups are better off if they are not too tightly knit, which can cause them to become isolated and stagnant, and when at least some members have ties to other parts of the larger network, which allows them to act as channels for new ideas to enter the group (Christakis, 2009). If this is true, then it would not be unreasonable to think that having a least one member of a local learning community also belong to an online learning community would increase the amount of information about resources for all local community members.

These interviews did not reveal any of the consumer confusion or overload that has been studied by consumer researchers like Schwartz (2004) and Iyengar (2010) or educators like Rager (2006) and Brockett (2006). The researcher can think of several possible explanations for this. It is possible that the researcher was insufficiently skilled

at detecting and pursuing traces of consumer confusion, although it seems unlikely that the traces would have been subtle for all respondents. It is possible that consumers in general are getting better at handling the information firehose that is the internet; there is no way to know if that is the case in this particular study. It is possible that the kind of individual who purchases a Japanese sewing resource has already mastered the skills that allow her to confidently navigate the plentiful selection of resources; if true, it would mean that this mastery is independent of sewing experience, because some of these respondents had been sewing for only a short time. Iyengar (2010) suggests that decision making skills are linked to increased domain knowledge, so this explanation also seems unlikely.

A likely possibility is that the community as a whole is providing some of the knowledge necessary to evaluate these resources, allowing for individuals with less personal experience to make better informed decisions than they might make alone. Davidson and Goldberg (2009) consider this to be one aspect of participatory learning – a shift from relying on individual assessments of authority and value to accepting and participating in collective credibility, “developing methods, often communal, for distinguishing good knowledge sources from those that are questionable” (p. 27-28). In other words, instead of having to develop their own rules for evaluating the accuracy and relevance of learning resources, these learners could share the responsibility with the community. This requires trust, but may reduce stress.

An additional likely possibility is that when the decision is a relatively low-stress, low-consequence one, consumers just don’t get as anxious or confused as they might when researching a medical condition or professional issue. This would be consistent

with the finding that one of the main things these learners were looking for was a treat, for which the information available online could have been sufficient to make a confident decision.

**Research Question 4: Do self-directed learners use criteria to evaluate resources, once tried, and if so, what are these criteria?**

When these learners ran out of room for their libraries and evaluated their resources, there were some clear patterns in their choices. First, they tried to minimize their pain with the easiest choices, purging duplicates and things that were outdated. Next, they looked at their resources and kept the ones that they could see themselves using in the future – and “using” meant finding inspiration or enjoying rereading as well as looking up a technique or cutting out a pattern. And finally, they consoled themselves by passing their resources on to other learners, either by selling or gifting, rather than throwing things away.

These learners didn’t readily get rid of learning resources, even though they all reported having unused resources in their libraries. Why did these learners hold on to their resources? There are two possibilities. First, as previously discussed, they acquired many of these resources as general tools to support their mental maps rather than for particular tasks, so as long as the mental maps were still useful, the resources would be, too.

Second, their answers were frequently in line with two ideas from classic decision theory – they were trying to avoid loss (Tversky, 2000) and minimize regret (Schwartz, 2004). Thus, they reported that they might need something in the future, or that they might regret letting it go, particularly if the resource was expensive or otherwise hard to

replace. (It's not clear how often this concern was grounded in actual experience with regret.) This would explain why some respondents considered how easily a resource could be replaced when deciding what they should keep.

All of these respondents said they evaluated their resources in batches, usually when they needed space, but sometimes when they needed books to take to a swap event or when they decided that a particular subject area was no longer interesting. This means that the evaluations were most likely comparative – “which of the books in my portfolio have the best heirloom sewing techniques” – rather than strictly criteria based – “does this particular book meet my needs for heirloom sewing techniques”?

When it came to evaluating resources, these learners treated their resources as a portfolio rather than as individual items. While their first choice was to maintain the portfolio, if it needed trimming, usually for size, they used forward-looking criteria such as what would be useful for future projects or entertaining for future reading when deciding what to keep and what to purge. And when a resource was purged, these learners almost always passed it on to another learner rather than disposing of it.

### **Implications**

This exploratory study examined the choices made by a specific group of learners. The recruitment criteria required that the participants be sewists, from the United States and Canada, who had obtained a copy of one of a few relatively expensive and hard to find Japanese sewing resources. The actual participants were women who ranged in age from 25 to 53; most had a college degree and several had started or completed graduate programs. The following implications are drawn from their experience. Because these

respondents may not be representative of all sewists or other self-directed leisure learners, these implications may or may not apply to them, as well.

- 1) *This learning was fun and these resources were treats.* These learners were sewing for fun and they could find fun in all aspects of the learning process, including their resources. They appreciated resources that offered more than just technical information – they enjoyed reading about new resources, anticipating their arrival, feeling the paper and looking at the pictures, puzzling out intellectually challenging content, sharing their reactions with other learners and dreaming about future projects. They enjoyed having resources and didn't begrudge the space needed to store them.
- 2) *These learners planned one or two projects at a time using their mental maps as a filter.* These learners did not describe themselves as having a plan for much more than their current project and maybe the next one, but they were not choosing projects at random. When a project opportunity presented itself, these learners evaluated it considering its general appeal, their current skill set and the time they had available (considering skill and time to be imperfect substitutes.) Importantly, they also considered their desired skill set; if a project required skills or techniques they didn't wish to acquire, the project was rejected or amended.
- 3) *These learners craved community; community shaped their learning.* For this group of learners, it was not enough to say that being self-directed doesn't mean learning in isolation (Candy, 1991). These learners craved community, participating in learning communities both online and off, if available. They received inspiration, information, motivation and fun, and they found satisfaction in helping others. In return, these

communities were distributing information and developing norms that affected the learning decisions of the learners who participated.

- 4) *Self-directed learning could elicit a range of emotional responses.* The learners interviewed for this study expressed joy and excitement about their resources; learners interviewed in other studies have expressed anxiety, frustration and empowerment (Rager, 2006).
- 5) *Online communities formed by these learners were real communities.* Learners participating in these communities weren't just sending messages and posting pictures; they were making friends, finding support and inspiration, cooperating on projects and competing in contests, and forming norms that weren't shared by non-members.

### **Conclusions**

So what should education practitioners take from these findings? Because of the exploratory nature and small sample size of the study, it is hard to generalize. However, for practitioners who are producing resources for leisure self-directed adult learners, the researcher suggests considering the following recommendations for your target audience:

1. Give your resources multi-sensory appeal. These learners were not looking for the most strictly efficient delivery of technical content. Instead, they appreciated humor, history, attractive graphics and illustrations, and nice paper. Remember that these learners enjoy both the journey and the destination -- your resource should contribute positively to both.
2. Make sure that your resources can continue to engage learners after the first reading or use. Many of these learners reported keeping resources because they

- were inspirational or aspirational. Learners may return to resources that present a wide array of examples or show opportunities to move to more advanced applications.
3. Consider how your resource might fit into a learner's potential portfolio. Most of these learners had considerable libraries. They also used the references available on the internet. This may give you, as an author, the freedom to present information on more obscure or advanced topics.
  4. Find the communities where your learners participate. The learners in this research found out about resources from others in the community, both locally and online. While you are planning and developing your resource, the community discussions can give you valuable information about who the learners are, what they are currently using, what they like, and what they want. When it's time to release your resource, getting it discussed in the community will introduce it to many new learners.

For educators who are preparing learners to be more self-directed, the researcher suggests considering how the following might be appropriate for your target audience:

5. Encourage your learners to attend to the development of both their general mental maps of the entire knowledge domain and their detailed understandings of specific areas of interest or need. The learners in this research used their general maps to understand and evaluate the random opportunities (am I interested in a new pattern resource?) and problems (if I get this resource, I'll have to learn to draft patterns) that cropped up as they pursued their particular interests.

6. Prepare your learners to take best advantage of available learning communities.

The learners in this project all reported receiving multiple benefits from participating in learning communities, both local and online. While these independent learners don't need to have educators start and manage communities for them, they might benefit from some guidance on how to find and belong to communities. Learners could consider what communities can offer, how to get the most out of their communities and what kinds of contributions the communities require to stay vital.

### **Recommendations for further research**

1. It is clear that the question of the nature of the planning done by self-directed learners has not been resolved. The findings of this exploratory research, that learners appeared to underestimate the amount and kinds of planning that they do, would seem to indicate that the use of after-the-fact self-reporting in research projects may be misrepresenting how learners really approach a learning project. We need more studies that follow the learning process in real time, perhaps using learning journals. It might also be fruitful to use learners' personal libraries as a vehicle into understanding their mental maps of knowledge domains.
2. This study examined the experiences of a small number of learners. We need studies that extend the examination of resource choices to other groups of learners, including those who do not participate in online communities, those engaged in other types of leisure learning, those of other age groups and education levels, and those with different levels of expertise in their chosen learning domains.



3. The participants in these interviews revealed that their learning resource purchase decisions were affected by some of the same issues that influence other purchase decisions. This initial evidence suggest that educators might have something to learn from the field of consumer research. We need more research into the extent to which this research applies to, and could benefit, adult learners.
4. During the literature review, the researcher found that many of the studies on self-directed learners and their resources were conducted with learners facing significant decisions, such as selecting a cancer treatment plan, developing an education plan for an autistic child, or preparing to lead a non-profit organization. Some of these studies found a degree of anxiety about the both the quality and quantity of learning resources that was not reflected in this study of leisure learners. We know that stress and emotion affects learning, but we need further research on how high-consequence and/or short-timeframe learning situations affect decisions about learning resources and strategies, particularly with respect to managing the enormous variety of resources available online.
5. Another difference between this study and previous ones is simply the passage of a few years. The internet has a history of changing rapidly and increasing in importance. We need further research on how adult self-directed learners are adapting to this useful but ever-changing environment.
6. The learners in this research preferred online community sites that were managed by the members, but two respondents mentioned problems within the sites. One of the problems was one of tone and etiquette, but the other problem related to the tension between having a website that is legally owned and operated as a for-

profit business but whose content is provided for free by the members of the online community. While this is a legal and technical issue that is faced by many parts of the social internet, it also has implications for learners; the adult learning community would benefit from case studies chronicling the development of these online community sites and the ways they do and do not manage disputes and conflicts of interest.

7. Content producers are now able to choose between a wide variety of formats and distribution channels. Magazine publishers are experimenting with web and mobile app versions of their paper magazines. Book publishers are distributing books on e-readers. Content experts, who would have contributed to magazines or traditionally-published books in the past, can now consider self-published online videos, DVDs, books and websites. Any enthusiast can blog and contribute to online communities. Each of these formats has advantages and disadvantages for the learner. We need both qualitative and quantitative research on when which learners prefer efficient, searchable resources such as online forums and DVD compilations of magazine back issues, when they prefer interactive resources such as online and in-person classes, and when they prefer more tactile or portable resources such as traditional books and magazines.
8. Finally, the internet has changed our social networks, whether or not we choose to participate in social networking sites such as Facebook.com. Research on social networks has shown that the structure of personal networks and the ways in which they are managed can have dramatic effects on how information, norms, and innovation are dispersed through the network. We need research on how learners

and educators can effectively characterize and manage their networks to maximize learning and avoid isolation.

### **Conclusion**

Resource decisions by this group of self-directed learners were a complex mix of the deliberate and the unconscious, information seeking and pleasure seeking, personal preferences and community influence. Both of adult education's classic theoretical models about this type of learner's planning methods appear to have some insight into these decisions; both fail to fully represent the planning experience as described by the learners interviewed for this project. Newer models, such as that being developed by Brockett and Hiemstra, are increasing the importance of context; these new models need to account for the manner in which the individual shapes her the environment and vice versa. The results of this exploratory study suggest that adult educators need to look to other fields, particularly the decision theory, consumer research and social networking fields, for insight into how these resource decisions get made and how these decisions influence the learning process.

## **Appendix A: Participant Recruitment**

### **Sample Message Board Posting**

Message Title: Do You Use Japanese Pattern Books or Magazines?

Message Body: Have you ever owned or read a Japanese garment pattern book or magazine such as Ms Stylebook or Lady Boutique? I am doing an academic study on adult learning and would like to interview you. The interview would take place over Skype or the phone and would last about an hour. I want to hear why you were interested in the magazine in the first place, and what you thought – good or bad. You don't need to have made a garment from it. All interviews will be anonymous. Please email me at [julialangel@cox.net](mailto:julialangel@cox.net) by August 20, 2010. Thanks!

### **Sample Email**

Message Subject Line: Would you be willing to talk about Ms Stylebook/Lady Boutique?

Message Body: I've been reading your blog/website and I see that you have read/used Ms Stylebook/Lady Boutique. I am doing an academic study on adult learning and would like to interview you. The interview would take place over Skype or the phone and would last about an hour. I want to hear why you were interested in the magazine in the first place, and what you thought – good or bad. You don't need to have made a garment from it. All interviews will be anonymous. Please email me at [julialangel@cox.net](mailto:julialangel@cox.net) by August 20, 2010. Thanks!

**Sample Confirmation Email**

Thanks for volunteering to help me with my project. I am a graduate student at Kansas State University, working on a doctorate in adult education. For this study, I am interviewing approximately 15 home sewists who have some experience with Japanese pattern magazines. I know that you are probably not an “expert” in these patterns – that’s what I’m looking for! You don’t even need to have made a garment from the magazine – just to have gotten at least one copy and looked at it.

I’d like to schedule an interview with you. The interview will take about an hour, and will cover some basic information about you and your sewing, how you learned about Japanese pattern magazines, and what you thought about your experience(s) with them. The questions should be painless, but if you are uncomfortable at any time, you can either skip a question or stop the interview. I’ll be audio-taping the interview so that I can have a transcript to help with my analysis, but the tape and transcript will never be used for anything else.

Once I’ve finished all the interviews, I’ll do some analysis and write my paper. I will probably quote you in the paper, but I won’t use your name. If it’s all right with you, I may call or email you while I’m writing to confirm that I’ve interpreted something you said correctly.

If you would like to read the final paper, I can send you a copy. I should be finishing up in November (I hope!)

If you’re willing to continue, I’d like to schedule an interview for <insert time and date here>. If this doesn’t work, please suggest a time that would work better for you.

Thanks, Julia Langel 316-733-4780 or [julialangel@cox.net](mailto:julialangel@cox.net)

(PS – If you'd like to check up on me, my advisor at Kansas State is Dr. Jane Fishback, who can be reached at 785-532-5554.)

### **Appendix B: Interview**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project. I am conducting interviews to find out how people find out about, decide to use, and evaluate certain less-common sewing resources. During this interview, I will ask you several questions about your sewing history and experiences. The answers you give me will be used in my doctoral dissertation and may be published in a scholarly journal; any references to you or direct quotations will be disguised by a pseudonym.

Participation in the study is entirely voluntary, and even if you agree to participate, you may choose not to answer any question that makes you uncomfortable.

Do you wish to proceed?

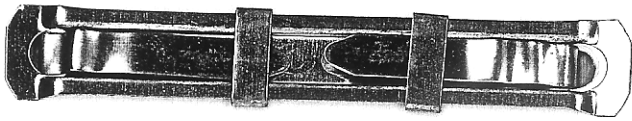
- How did you first learn of Ms Stylebook? What was your first impression? Did you act on it? (Did you run right out and get one?)
- Tell me the story of getting your first issue. (What factors did you consider difficulty, expense)? (How long did it take to make a decision to get one?)
- How do you read the book? How many times have you read it? (Skim? Read? )
- How have you used the book? What have you gotten out of it?
- Have you made a garment? Tell me about making your first garment from the book. How did you choose which garment to start with? How did it go? If you ran into problems, what did you do? Was the garment a success?
- Have you gotten any additional issues?
- Have you made any additional garments?

- Have you shared the book with anyone – helped them get a copy, suggested a pattern to them, etc? Did they learn about it from you? Have you posted your project on a blog or site like [patternreview.com](http://patternreview.com)?
- Do you have a favorite pattern line or source? What is it? What do you like about it? How does it compare with Ms Stylebook?
- Do you have books or patterns you've never made anything from? How do you feel about that?
- What sorts of things are in your sewing library? (Clusters – how do they come about?)
- Do you ever get rid of things from your sewing library?
- How long have you been sewing?
- What kinds of sewing do you like best?
- How did you learn to sew?
- How do you learn now?
- How do you pick the next thing to learn? (Planning? Problem solving? )
- Do you belong to a local sewing or fiber arts group?
- Do you have a sewing blog? Why?
- Do you participate in online sewing communities like [patternreview.com](http://patternreview.com) or [Stitcher's Guild](http://Stitcher's Guild)? Why?
- How long have you been sewing?
- What is your age?
- What is the highest level of formal education you have completed?



Thank you for helping with this project. Would you like to see the executive summary of the final report? If you have any questions about this project, you may contact me at 316-733-4780 or my project advisor, Dr. Jane Fishback, at 785-532-5554.

**Appendix C: IRB Approval**




**COPY**



University Research  
Compliance Office  
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Manhattan, KS 66506 -1103  
785-532-3224  
Fax: 785-532-3278  
<http://urco.ksu.edu>

TO: Jane Fishback  
Educational Leadership  
355 Bluemont

Proposal Number: 5326

FROM: Rick Scheidt, Chair   
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: December 23, 2009

RE: Proposal Entitled, "Doing It the Hard Way: Self-Directed Learners and the Use of Unexpected Learning Resources"

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects / Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Kansas State University has reviewed the proposal identified above and has determined that it is EXEMPT from further IRB review. This exemption applies only to the proposal - as written - and currently on file with the IRB. Any change potentially affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation and may disqualify the proposal from exemption.

Based upon information provided to the IRB, this activity is exempt under the criteria set forth in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, 45 CFR §46.101, paragraph b, category: 2, subsection: ii.

Certain research is exempt from the requirements of HHS/OHRP regulations. A determination that research is exempt does not imply that investigators have no ethical responsibilities to subjects in such research; it means only that the regulatory requirements related to IRB review, informed consent, and assurance of compliance do not apply to the research.

Any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, the University Research Compliance Office, and if the subjects are KSU students, to the Director of the Student Health Center.

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