An Exploration of Passionate Vocational Learning in Adulthood

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An Exploration of Passionate Vocational Learning in Adulthood

by

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Abstract

Fortunate adults are able to spend a great deal of their lives doing work they feel suited to perform; they are working in a vocation. As an adult educator, I am interested in understanding how adults find and form their vocations and, in particular, how adults become passionately engaged in vocational learning. This study provides an exploration of the life experiences of six adults, including myself, who are all self-professed passionate learners in their vocations. The research draws upon underlying theory from the psychology of human motivation, interest development, vocation, vocational identity and narrative identity, in addition to the theory of transformative learning. I use Narrative Inquiry as a research methodology to reveal the experience of the participants who have become passionate learners in their vocations. I develop vocational narratives for each participant to provide the life context for the participant’s vocational decision-making. I further isolate narrative threads from each vocational narrative, which are smaller narratives on vocational development and tend to reoccur throughout the lives of the individual. They provide insight into each person’s vocational decision-making. In response to the research questions, I organize the experience of each participant in six zones of activity, which enable the reader to visualize how, over time, each participant has developed and learned the skills, values, goals, and roles associated with their vocation. I named the six zones Vocational Interest, Disruptive Events, Choosing and Entering Vocation, Vocational Identity Development, Vocational Learning and Possible Stagnation.

In the study, I show how vocational interest sometimes emerged from the early lives of the participants. I also provide insight into the way vocational interest developed, in some cases, into vocational identity; for example, when an individual interested in nursing became a nurse. I show how participants sometimes encountered disruptive events in their lives, which may well have
triggered periods of both transformative learning and vocational change. I develop evidence that some participants may have experienced transformative learning as the process by which they created new vocational identities. Finally, I show how some participants developed multifaceted collections of vocational identities, as in nurse-educator-counsellor.
Acknowledgements

I offer my heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Gordon Nixon, who first helped me see the possibility of doctoral studies, and whose personal leadership blazed a trail for me. I also have particular appreciation and gratitude for my supervisor, Dr. Colleen Kawalilak, whose support, enthusiasm, conscientious guidance and encouragement brought me through the highs, the lows, and the sometimes dark pathways of this work. Finally, my deep appreciation goes to my committee members, Dr. Janet Groen and Dr. Peggy Patterson, who brought their own style and precious insight to this work.
Dedication

I dedicate this work to Louise Ayres, my loving life partner, who has walked with me, made space for me, and propped me up over the life of this project.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The notion of students learning passionately in their vocations resonates loudly with most vocational educators even though it relates to the murky areas of human motivation, feelings, emotions, identity, social habits, relationships, culture, and spirituality. Over the past several decades, researchers in various fields have contributed to the discourse on passion, vocation and learning; these scholarly contributions have shed new theoretical light on this topic. In the case of children, the literature clearly shows that a variety of motivational factors influence student engagement and learning (Wigfield, Cambria, & Eccles, 2012; Wigfield & Wentzel, 2007). How adults learn, as noted in the literature, involves factors, influences, and processes that differ from learning in childhood (Brookfield, 1986; MacKeracher, 2004; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2006; Mezirow, 2012), and the distinctions need to be made clear in order to examine the topic. The introduction of motivational factors adds another dimension to adult learning, focusing on why adults learn (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2012), as do the concepts of vocation and vocational identity (Dik & Duffy, 2009; Duffy, Allan, Bott, & Dik, 2014; Erikson, 1963; Marcia, 1966; McAdams, 1985; McAdams & Olson, 2010; Waterman & Waterman, 1976), which to a strong degree, reflect what many adults learn from a vocational point of view (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2007, 2011). This research aims to contribute to the discourse and to advance our understanding and knowledge, as scholars and practitioners, of the complexity inherent in the adult learning processes. The research examines the experience of adult learners who have become passionately engaged in the adult learning process, who have developed vocational interests, made vocational choices and undertaken intensive action towards learning in their chosen vocations.
In Chapter One I describe the background and context of the study; how I locate myself as researcher-participant; a statement of the problem; the purpose and significance of the study; the research questions; the research design and underlying theoretical framework; and finally, terminology and definitions that describe some linguistic nuances used throughout this research.

I have been, and continue to be, a passionate adult learner in my vocation. I believe this area to be of fundamental importance to the adult learning field and an area worthy of further research.

**Background**

I organized my exploration of passionate vocational learning under the abbreviated headings of *why we learn, what we learn, and how we learn* as adults. The question of *why we learn* concerns motivational theory to the point of passion. The question of *what we learn* rests on my particular concern regarding vocational interests, vocational choice, and vocational identity. Adult learning theory influenced the question of *how we learn* as adults, based on transformative learning theory in particular. Finally, I developed a view that further understanding of human experience in terms of passionate vocational learning was most appropriately explored by studying the individual life narratives (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) of people who were themselves passionate learners in their respective vocations.

**Motivational Psychology (Why we Learn)**

The subject of human motivation has been of frequent concern in the field of psychology (Ryan, 2012). Indeed, several theories of motivation today make up the rich fabric of research in that field. For the purposes of the work at hand, I chose self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000, 2012), which is both prominent in the field and includes a theoretical construct for passionate involvement in an activity (Vallerand et al., 2003).
Self-determination theory posits that all humans have three innate psychological needs that include the need for: competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In general, the more an individual is able to fulfil these needs (and in particular, the need for autonomy), the more intrinsically motivated or energized toward a particular activity the person will become. In a case where the person is highly autonomous in their decision-making and, therefore, intrinsically motivated, they will often develop a passionate involvement in that interest (Vallerand et al., 2003). Vallerand et al. (2003) defined passion “as a strong inclination toward an activity that people like, that they find important, and in which they invest time and energy” (p. 757). In cases where a person integrates an activity into his or her identity in an autonomous manner, but propelled by an external influence to take on the activity, that person also becomes self-determined and may become passionate about the activity just like an intrinsically motivated person. For example, a young person given a guitar and externally influenced by a parent to learn to play may eventually self-identify as a guitarist.

**Interest, Vocation and Vocational Identity (What we Learn)**

The object of the person’s motivation, the “thing” they act toward, in both intrinsic and integrated extrinsic motivation, is an *interest*. The psychology of interest origination and development is relatively sparse (Krapp, 2002), although there has been work done in that area for over two decades (Krapp, Hidi, & Renninger, 1992; Silvia, 2006). One of the more advanced models of interest development hypothesised the development of interest through the *situational interest* phase to the *individual interest* phase (Hidi & Renninger, 2006) but, at this time, I have found no extant theory on the sources of initial interest generation. Nevertheless, Krapp (2002, 2007) theorized that changing interests may be closely related to individual concerns such as *personal growth* and *identity formation*. Krapp and Prenzel (2011) speculated that interest may
develop from childhood exposure and then dwindle or solidify, depending on the *experiences* of the child. If the child’s interest endures through to adolescence, it integrates with the child’s personal aims and identity. Otherwise, interests may begin at any time in the person’s life.

Many researchers have noted the influence of working life in adulthood (Super, 1982; Terkel, 1974). More recent efforts have refined the related concepts of vocation and calling (Dik & Duffy, 2009; Duffy et al., 2014) as they relate to the way people use their time, as opposed to their involvement in paid work only. Concurrently, and for many years, other researchers have been delving into the related concepts of identity development (who I am) and vocational identity development (who I am, vocationally) (Erikson, 1963, 1968; Kroger & Marcia, 2011; Marcia, 1966; McAdams, 1985, 2011; Skorikov & Vondracek, 2007, 2011). The theory of narrative identity (McAdams, 1985, 2011; McAdams & McLean, 2013) has suggested a layer of reflective activity, in which individuals author their own identity from the past through to the future while making sense of and internalizing their experiences, goals, values, and beliefs. This activity is continuous for adults from late adolescence through to late old age (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 2011). Periods of dramatic change in identity formation seem similar conceptually to the critically reflective, transformative learning process (Mezirow, 2012) often cited in the literature of adult learning (Illeris, 2014a). Researchers have also formulated theory that the motivational processes (or energizing processes) for identity formation are the same factors that energize other forms of adult human activity such as learning (Deci & Ryan, 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2013).

**Adult Learning (How we Learn)**

There was rich theory developed in the field of adult learning beginning in the 1920s with the work of Lindeman (1926) and Thorndike (Thorndike, Bregman, Tilton, & Woodyard, 1928),
in which the authors advanced the idea that adults could and should continue their learning practices beyond childhood. Knowles’s (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2011) work on *andragogy*, originating in the 1970s is available and used today (Holton, Wilson, & Bates, 2009). Knowles based the work on a set of assumptions about learning that I find were a mixture of his beliefs about motivation and learning, but contain little theory about the learning process (Merriam et al., 2006). Knowles (Knowles et al., 2011) did suggest “the role of the learner’s experiences” (p. 64) as an essential ingredient in the adult learning process.

Other theorists in adult learning have produced models to describe the learning process. Jarvis’s (2006, 2008) model emphasized the importance of experience and introduced the concept of disjuncture; Garrison’s (1997) model discussed self-directed learning. Garrison’s model included a component of motivational theory, although it was not developed extensively, and he recognized the need for more research in learner motivation. By the time Garrison’s model was published, the attention of researchers in adult education had shifted toward both critical thinking and critical theory, as described by Brookfield (1987, 2005) and Freire (Freire, 1974, 2000), and to the transformative learning model described by Mezirow (2000; 1991). Mezirow’s transformative learning model took the attention of many researchers and was the subject of extensive enhancement and validation efforts (Taylor & Cranton, 2012). The original transformative learning model consisted of four main components: experience, critical reflection, reflective discourse, and action (Merriam et al., 2006). Although Mezirow’s (1991, 2012) transformative learning model was widely used and researched, it does not contain an explicit theoretical component to help us understand which conditions actually energize or motivate the operation of the learning process to the level of passion for learning. Kegan (2000) and Cranton (2002) also made valuable contributions to the transformative learning process model. Cranton
generalized the transformative process by describing non-linear process facets, which can be used in teaching for transformation. Kegan explained the difference between “informational kinds of learning” (p. 45) and transformative learning, which has at its heart a changed “way of knowing” (p. 46).

**A Perspective of Theory and the Human Sciences**

The development of motivation toward an activity of vocational interest (the development vocational identity) and associated learning are deeply complex human issues. They are idiosyncratic and peculiar to the life circumstances of each person. For researchers to understand these issues they must consider a multitude of factors including the person’s feelings, emotions, life experiences, and of course, social relationships such as family, community, and culture. Theoretical constructs, such as self-determination theory, vocational interest development, vocational identity theory, and transformative learning theory provide possible bases for understanding many of the component parts of passionate vocational learning in adulthood, but they are seldom if ever connected explicitly in the literature. Although these theories influence my understanding of the topic, they are insufficient to describe the vagaries of individual human experience. To examine my research questions, particularly those aspects relating to human experience, I have adopted the underlying philosophical hermeneutic position of Gadamer (2004) toward research in the human sciences. Gadamer described this position:

But the specific problem that the human sciences present to thought is that one has not rightly grasped their nature if one measures them by the yardstick of a progressive knowledge of regularity. . . . The individual case does not serve only to confirm a law from which practical predictions can be made. Its ideal is rather to understand the phenomenon itself in its unique and historical concreteness. However much experiential
universals are involved, the aim is not to extend and confirm these universalized experiences in order to attain knowledge of a law—e.g., how men, peoples, and states evolve—but to understand how this man, this people, or this state is what it has become or, more generally, how it happened that it is so. (p. 4)

My personal philosophical position is that to develop a deep understanding of the complex processes associated with passionate vocational learning in adulthood requires an exploration of the life experiences of individual persons. Furthermore, theory arising out of the study of human identity development posits that individual persons create narratives to make sense of their life experiences (McAdams, 1985, 2011; McAdams & McLean, 2013). I have therefore chosen to conduct research into the life and vocational narratives of individuals as a promising way to explore how individuals become passionate vocational learners.

**Statement of the Problem**

The development of motivation toward an activity involving vocational interest, vocational identity, and learning are deeply complex human issues. These issues are idiosyncratic and applicable only to the biographic life experience of each person. Developing an understanding of these issues requires the consideration of a multitude of factors, including the influence and meaning associated with various life events, the associated emotional content and the impact of social relationships, including family, friends, community, and culture. The research disciplines of human motivation, interest development, vocational identity, and adult learning have many theoretical constructs that relate to this area. However, they give little helpful insight into the experiences of individual adult learners regarding the genesis of vocational interest, of the development of vocational identity, and the relationship between
vocation and passionate learning. Further understanding of passionate vocational learning requires an approach that explores the life experiences of individuals.

**Purpose and Significance of the Study**

This interpretive study of individual narratives examines the relationship among passion for an area of vocational interest, the origin and development of vocational interest in the adult learner, and learner engagement in the learning process. I interviewed five participants, all of whom declared they were passionate vocational learners. I then interpreted their interview material and wrote a narrative account for each participant by following a constant comparative method (Charmaz, 2006; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I finally added my own narrative as a sixth participant in the research. I examined the research questions that follow using the content of these narrative accounts. The aim of this study was to contribute to the discourse in this area using an interpretive research methodology, which will enable an understanding of human experience not yet examined by other researchers.

My intention in doing this research was to understand and assist adult learners in becoming passionate about their chosen learning activities in their vocations, or in finding vocational interests or vocations that will engender their passionate learning as adults. My expectation is that passionate adult learners will be both fulfilled and satisfied through the vocational learning process, thus contributing to their sense of wellbeing as adults (Philippe, Vallerand, & Lavigne, 2009).

**Research Questions**

The primary research question that guided this study is: In the experience of adult learners, what is the relationship among passionate engagement in the adult learning process, developed vocational interest, vocational choice, and action towards learning?
Secondary research questions include:

a. How do adult learners interpret, describe, define, and experience passion?

b. Is there a relationship between choice of vocation and passionate interest? If so, what is the nature of that relationship?

c. How was vocational interest experienced (triggered, developed, and sustained) by adult learners?

d. What are some tensions and contradictions experienced by adult learners when they have not aligned passionate interest and vocational choice?

Educators in a post-secondary, vocational choice context were the primary target audience for this study. Insights drawn from the data may also provide individuals who are working with, mentoring, or coaching adults—counsellors, coaches, community development workers, or parents of young adults—with a deeper understanding of the interplay between passionate learning, vocational choice, and sustained passionate engagement in vocation.

**Introduction to the Research Methodology**

In order to respond to the research questions, I chose a methodology that enabled me to understand how individuals make sense of their life experience in connection with passionate vocational learning. *Narrative inquiry* is a way to understand the lived experience of humans and to draw upon that experience as a source of knowledge and meaning about the nature of the experience (Clandinin, 2007, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 1993, 2008; Rossiter & Clark, 2006). I chose narrative inquiry as an appropriate methodology to explore the experience and associated meanings that individuals hold toward passionate vocational learning in adulthood. I elaborate on the theoretical basis of narrative inquiry in Chapter Three.
Introduction to the Theoretical Framework

A great deal of theory formed the theoretical framework underlying this study. This theory provided much of the terminology and many concepts and theoretical constructs that enabled the research to build upon the work of others and to be widely understood (Anfara & Mertz, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The study drew primarily upon three large bodies of research. The question of why we learn to the point of passion is influenced by self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000, 2012). The question of what we learn, vocationally, drew largely upon the theory of vocation (Dik & Duffy, 2009; Duffy et al., 2014), vocational identity (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2007, 2011), and narrative identity (McAdams, 2011; McAdams & McLean, 2013). Finally, the theory of how we learn was based on the theory of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991, 2012). These framework theories, together with the research methodology of narrative inquiry, provided the basis for the knowledge developed by my research efforts.

Definition of Terms

I have included here some working definitions of words that I used in a particular way in my research.

Passion: Originally, the word passion was derived from the same root as another common English word, passive (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2010). Passion means:

- [mass noun] strong and barely controllable emotion: a man of impetuous passion
- [in singular] a state or outburst of strong emotion: oratory in which he gradually works himself up into a passion
- [in singular] an intense desire or enthusiasm for something: the English have a passion for gardens
- **[count noun]** a thing arousing great enthusiasm: *modern furniture is a particular passion of Bill’s*

  Origin: Middle English: from Old French, from late Latin *passio(n-)* (chiefly a term in Christian theology), from Latin *pati* ‘suffer’ (*Oxford Dictionary of English*, 2010)

  Notably, the root word (Latin derivative) *passio*, as used in Christian theology, is something that happens to someone. Christians applied this sense of the word historically to the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth, although we can still see the same nuances in the use of the word *passion* today. Robinson’s (2013) popular book encouraged people to find something, their passion, as though it is already “out there” to be found, secured, waiting for each of us. I expanded this notion to assume a more active interpretation of passion as “an intense desire or enthusiasm for something” (*Oxford Dictionary of English*, 2010).

  **Vocation:** The word vocation is a compromise among the various words I might have chosen, such as occupation, profession, job, calling, or work. Each of these words carries nuances and connotations I felt inappropriate for the meaning I wished to convey. The word “vocation” was chosen for the dictionary definition: “a strong feeling of suitability for a particular career or occupation” (*Oxford Dictionary of English*, 2010). Some authors have varied the definition to suit their research, and I described these differences where appropriate (Dik & Duffy, 2009).

  **Learning Process:** I referred to a learning process as the collection of process “facets” (Cranton, 2002, pp. 65-66) that are commonly used to describe how adults learn. Process facets are similar to process steps. However, process facets are not necessarily sequential and the learner may repeat the facets in an irregular fashion. The learner must cover all facets to some degree before the process is completed. Various authors have described their views of the
learning process, including Jarvis (2006), Garrison (1997), Mezirow (1991), and several others (Merriam et al., 2006). These models describe the learning process as somewhat organic with process steps that are iterative, idiosyncratic, and non-sequential, although eventually all process facets described by the various models are covered.

**Motivation:** A dictionary definition of the word *motivation* is: “A reason or reasons for acting or behaving in a different way” (*Oxford Dictionary of English*, 2010). Brookfield (1986) used the word *motive* in this sense in a chapter entitled: “Adult Learners: Motives for Learning and Implications for Practice” (p. 1). In this study, I used the words *motivational theory* or *theory of motivation* to refer to underlying theoretical constructions from the field of psychology.

**Energize or energizing** the learning process: I used these words in a way reminiscent of the natural sciences. I adopted “energize” from the field of motivational psychology (Deci & Ryan, 1985) where it is sometimes almost synonymous with the word motivation, although I find energize more meaningful. Basically, an individual energizes a learning process when that person moves from facet to facet in the process of learning. More importantly, I considered the theoretical description of the learning process incomplete unless the issue of what energizes the process is included in the description.

**Interest:** I used interest to mean a spark of attention toward a particular domain, subject matter, or activity that may eventually engage our emotions and energize activity toward the area of attention. According to Silvia (2006), “Theories of interest split into two fields: (a) interest as a part of emotional experience, curiosity, and momentary motivation; and (b) interest as a part of personality, individual differences, and people’s idiosyncratic hobbies, goals and avocations” (p. 4). The term *interest* may embrace both these fields. I used interest to cover mainly vocational interests in this study.
Adult: This study involves adult learners and I have used the definition of an adult developed by Mezirow (2000):

An adult is commonly defined as a person old enough to be held responsible for his or her acts. The assumption in democratic societies is that an adult is able to understand the issues; will make rational choices as a socially responsible, autonomous agent; and, at least sometimes, is free to act on them. (pp. 24-25)

Interpretivism: For this research, I employed interpretation and interpretivism in reference to “those approaches to studying social life that accord a central place to Verstehen as a method of the human sciences, that assume that the meaning of human action is inherent in that action, and that the task of the inquirer is to unearth that meaning” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 161, bold text in the original). In this context, the German word Verstehen itself has rich possible meanings, but most simply, it may be translated as “understanding” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 314). Gadamer (2004) suggested that Verstehen may be achieved through dialogue with the traditions of language (Schwandt, 2007), a position which I also adopted.

A Personal Reflection

“The re-visioning of work that engages our spirituality and our passion is perhaps the great paradigm shift of our time.” (Tisdell, 2003, p. 113)

As I prepared to conduct this study, I reflected on what draws me to this research topic. I frequently hear the word passion in my professional life. For example, at one time the advertising tagline used by the technical institution I work for was Further Your Passion. We emblazoned this tagline on every presentation slide and on all advertising and marketing materials. I often wonder whether our students (adult learners) actually further their passions, find their passions, or create their passions. Was it possible that our adult learners left our
institutions *passionless* but employable? People use the word *passion* so often and in so many contexts that I ponder whether it is in danger of being reduced to a meaningless, generic term. I am troubled by this possibility because the meaning and experience of being passionate about learning, and what it can mean in the context of human learning and interests, resonates deeply for me.

I draw from a rich reservoir of experience, from my position as a dean in a post-secondary institution. Indeed, this reservoir fuels my interest in this research topic. To elaborate, I was attending an information booth at our semi-annual open house a few years ago. Designed to resemble a tradeshow, this recruiting event regularly draws thousands of high-school students and career seekers of all ages and backgrounds. The institution usually receives several thousand applications to our various programs during this annual event. Late one afternoon, I noticed a young man wandering down the aisle between the booths, looking to the left and right, his bag of literature dangling from his hand. He stopped and spoke with me. I inquired about his interests and what program he was considering. The young man appeared uncertain; he mentioned several possible professions in disparate industries. Two things struck me about this young man. Firstly, I struggled to fathom how one could navigate a life without embracing any subject matter or domain of interest that might lead to viable employment. Secondly, I pondered the odds of this young man successfully completing any program he chose, without any special attraction or enthusiasm for the area. Eventually, the young man wandered off and I was left wondering whether more time, or perhaps better circumstances for conversation, might have allowed some interest or passion to emerge.

Other reasons, too, serve as my motivation to engage in this research topic, each of which would benefit greatly by a deepened understanding and appreciation of how one becomes a
passionate learner in a particular vocation. I frequently reflect on these reasons as an adult educator, as a parent of four children, and as an adult learner myself.

As an adult educator, I strive for high learner engagement. I want to support learners and encourage their passion for learning, in particular, around their vocation of choice. I maintain that support needs to be in place so that adult learners can make informed choices regarding employment options. My hope is that this decision-making process provides support for learners to connect their passions with career possibilities. However, I am concerned this might not be the reality. I once observed a focus group made up of students who had just entered one of the larger programs at my institution. I left our observation room discouraged by how little thought many put into their career choices.

From a parental perspective, I want my children to make engaging choices regarding their careers. Having watched and supported my four children grow into adulthood, I sometimes experienced frustration regarding their vocational choices. Their respective processes have spanned a continuum of being highly goal focused, to changing direction with little apparent thought, to floundering among all the possibilities while apparently being interested in none. The latter is particularly disheartening for a parent who strives to support the growth of their young adults as engaged, fulfilled, and self-supported individuals.

As a lifelong adult learner, I continue to experience passion for learning in a variety of disciplines, interests, vocations, and recreations. My passion for learning is a source of joy in my life and, at times, brings a strong element of fun, although often hard work as well. Nevertheless, I frequently meet people who appear to be devoid of passions and interests. I am also aware that passion brings tensions to the learning process but these tensions provide opportunities for growth.
Summary

Chapter One included an introduction to passionate vocational learning in adulthood. It discussed the background and context of research in the fields of motivational psychology, vocational psychology, identity development, and adult learning. This chapter introduced a statement of the problem, the research purpose, the significance of the study, my research questions, the theoretical framework and definition of terminology. In addition, I provided some insight into my personal motivation for doing this work. In Chapter Two I provide a deep exploration of the literature that includes a review of selected theories, paying particular attention to those aspects of theory that lead to, reference, or support passionate vocational learning.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

In Chapter Two I review the key literature themes that are the basis of my study of passionate vocational learning in adulthood. Much of the work described is theory-based, derived from various fields of psychology and learning. Long after I embraced the topic of passionate vocational learning, I came across a book on adult learning by Patricia Cross (1981), which decried the lack of theory supporting the adult learning questions of the day. The book described theory on the nature of *why* adults were learning, and also *what* and *how* they were learning. A few years later, Anne Hartree (1984), drawing upon Cross’s work, stated, “One might expect a ‘complete theory’ of adult learning to have three dimensions, how adults learn, what they learn where this is distinctive, and why they learn” (p. 297). When I read this statement, both the similarity and the enormity of what I was attempting to review in this chapter struck me—passion is the *why*, vocation is a specific and distinctive *what*, and learning is the *how*. I found solace in realizing that little of the theory I have reviewed had been developed, certainly not in its current form, when Cross and Hartree made their points.

The exploration of the literature begins with a review of self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000, 2011; Reeve, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000) a current, prominent, and well-supported general theory of human motivation. Self-determination theory offers considerable insight into *why* humans act, in almost any situation, including why we energize our learning. One branch of self-determination theory, also reviewed, has examined the issue of why some people become passionate about a particular area of interest, avocation, or vocation (Vallerand et al., 2003, 2008; Vallerand, Houlfort, & Forest, 2014).
I then review a small subset of what people learn on the topic of vocation and calling (Dik, Byrne, & Steger, 2013; Dik & Duffy, 2009; Duffy et al., 2014). After a brief discussion of the research on the psychology interest development (Hidi & Renninger, 2006; Krapp et al., 1992; Renninger & Su, 2012), I introduce the topics of vocational identity and narrative identity, which in my view provides a great deal of insight into who we become as individuals and why we concentrate on particular vocational domains (McAdams, 1985, 2001; McAdams & Cox, 2010; Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011).

I discuss the issue of how we learn by reviewing excerpts from the literature on adult learning. I examine five important theories or approaches to adult learning, some of which, now of largely historical interest, have common elements that may be formed into a process model of adult learning (Groen & Kawalilak, 2015; Merriam & Bierema, 2014; Merriam et al., 2006). I chose the transformative learning theory of Mezirow (1978, 2012), as augmented by Cranton (2002), to represent a theoretical adult learning process model describing how individuals learn, for the purposes of this research.

Readers should note that this literature review examines current theory chosen to assist in understanding individuals who are passionate vocational learners. I deliberately selected theory that gives insight into the learning of individual persons. I start the review by introducing self-determination theory, which shows why individuals become motivated about an activity to the point of passion.

**Theory of “Why” We Learn: Motivation to the Point of Passion**

I centred the discussion of why we learn on the current literature describing and exploring human motivation. Fortunately, over the past 40 years, a great deal of research has been carried out, which has produced a robust theory of human motivation called *self-determination theory*. A
theoretical construct was created in self-determination theory describing how humans become passionate about a particular activity. It was self-determination theory and it resonated with my own experience, drawing me into learning more about the human experience of passion for an activity.

**Rochester SDT Labs**

Self-determination theory (SDT) is a prominent line of research in the field of motivational psychology (Deci & Ryan, 2000, 2011; Reeve, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000), with a large body of research added to the field in recent years (Chirkov, Ryan, & Sheldon, 2011; Gagné, 2014; Ryan, 2012; Weinstein, 2014). The theory was built on the work of two leading researchers from the University of Rochester, Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000, 2011, 2012). Their body of research was initiated over 45 years ago with some of the early publications of Deci (1971) and is continuing with over 90 associated international researchers (“Self-determination theory: Faculty,” 2015). One of the hallmarks of self-determination theory is that it was tested empirically, and extensively, over its history (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000, 2011, 2012).

Self-determination theory was built around three posited innate psychological needs: competence, autonomy and relatedness. As Deci and Ryan (2012) elaborated recently:

*We define needs as organismic necessities for health. . . . We have posited that people require three specific psychological nutriments for healthy functioning: They need to feel competent in negotiating their external and internal environments; they need to experience relatedness to other people and groups; and they need to feel autonomy or self-determination with respect to their own behaviours and lives.* (p. 87, italics in the original)
The important link between the innate psychological needs identified by Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000, 2011; Ryan & Deci, 2000) to SDT theory was critical. According to the theory, the more a person perceives that an activity will fulfil his or her need for autonomy, relatedness and competence, then the more energized that person will be in undertaking that activity.

The understanding of innate psychological needs originated from the work of different researchers. The need for competence, to feel effective, was originally identified by Robert White (1959). The need for autonomy was derived originally from the work of De Charms (1968) arising out of his work on perceived locus of causality. Finally, the innate need for relatedness, to feel connected to others, to feel accepted interpersonally, was drawn from original work by Baumeister and Leary (1995). The SDT researchers brought the need for relatedness into SDT most recently, just before 2000.

My interest in self-determination theory arose because I was looking for a theoretical basis for understanding why certain people become passionately motivated toward a particular behaviour, specifically, learning. Self-determination theory provided a way to understand how human behaviour was motivated or energized (brought to action) through various types of motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000), mentioned below.

Figure 1 illustrates three essential types of motivation on a continuum starting from the left-hand side of the figure. *Amotivation* is a state in which people have no motivation to act (Deci & Ryan, 2000). *Extrinsic* motivation is a state in which a person is acting to achieve a goal that is different from the consequences of the action. For example, if a person is told he or she will be given a highly desirable reward after performing a task well, the goal becomes the reward, and the task performance is a consequence of the reward (Deci & Ryan, 2012). Deci and Ryan also described *intrinsic* motivation:
A more precise way of defining intrinsic motivation is in terms of the inherently satisfying internal conditions that occur when doing an intrinsically motivated behaviour, thus helping to sustain it. These inherent satisfactions (experienced directly as interest and enjoyment) derive primarily from experiences of competence and autonomy as well as, in some cases, from relatedness. (p. 88)

**Figure 1.** The Self-determination Continuum

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**Figure 1.** The Self-determination Continuum. Adapted from “Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being,” by Ryan and Deci, 2000, *The American Psychologist, 55*(1), 72. Copyright 2000 by the American Psychological Association.
The row of Figure 1 showing regulation of activity (the second row of bubbles from the top) is of particular interest in the type of regulation affecting extrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The bubbles labelled external, introjected, identified and integrated indicate the degree of external regulation influencing the individual’s behaviour. Externally regulated behaviour is entirely contingent on satisfying an external reward or demand and is essentially the type of motivation elicited by the operand theorists. Introjected regulation occurs by “taking in a regulation, but not fully accepting it as one’s own” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 72). An example might be personal feelings of guilt over a behaviour brought forward from parental influence in childhood. Identified regulation means the individual has started to see the value in a particular behaviour, even though it has still come from an external source. An automobile driver who slows down through a construction zone because he or she can see the safety risk in speeding has identified with the external regulation. Finally, integrated regulations have been “fully assimilated to the self, which means they have been evaluated and brought into congruence with one’s other values and needs” (p. 73). The same automobile driver may proceed very slowly through the playground zone, because she can see her own children playing beside the road.

The examples just mentioned show a snapshot in time in which an external regulation is identified or integrated by the individual. It should be noted that there is a process by which people progressively internalize regulation, values, goals, beliefs, and perspectives, discussed later in this chapter (Deci & Ryan, 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2013).

Those people who are fully self-determined are operating in the shaded area on the right hand side of the diagram. It includes people who have integrated or internalized the external regulation to the degree it is effectively part of them and inseparable from their intrinsic
regulation. It also includes people who are intrinsically motivated towards interests that are of their own origin.

The locus of causality row in the centre of the diagram refers to whether the person perceives the location of the cause of his behaviour to be internal to himself, external to himself, or simply having no cause (unintentional). People may move along the continuum, one way or the other, depending on two factors. The first is the particular situation they are facing at a particular time. The second factor may be more domain-oriented; for example, they may see the locus of causality differently if they are at school, home, or work.

The self-determination theory researchers also suggest that personality differences may cause people to inhabit one of the major orientations.

The autonomy orientation is defined as the degree to which people tend to be generally autonomous and also to interpret the environment as both being supportive of their autonomy and providing information relevant to choices they are making. When autonomy oriented, people regulate behaviour on the basis of interests and abiding values. (Deci & Ryan, 2012, p. 90, italics in original)

This suggests that many of those people operating on the right hand side of Figure 1, as a causality orientation, will act more consistently when following their own intrinsically motivated interests. On the other hand:

The controlled orientation indexes the level to which people are controlled across domains of their lives and interpret their environments as being pressuring and coercive. When control oriented, people are focused on rewards or punishments, both tangible and social in the regulation of behaviour. The impersonal orientation refers to a general sense of not being intentional or motivated and or seeing the environment as providing
obstacles to getting desired outcomes. When impersonally oriented, people feel little agency, and often fail to regulate their behaviour effectively. (Deci & Ryan, 2012, p. 90)

The bottom row of the diagram gives some idea of what may be going on inside the individual at different points along the continuum. The causality orientations have a considerable effect on the life-goals of the individual. As summarized by the researchers:

Many life goals can be grouped into two categories: intrinsic aspirations such as growth, relationships and community, and extrinsic aspirations such as wealth, fame, and image. Numerous studies further indicate that pursuit and attainment of the intrinsic aspirations is associated with greater well-being and less ill-being, whereas the pursuit and attainment of extrinsic aspirations is associated with less well-being and greater ill-being. (Deci & Ryan, 2012, p. 93)

Self-determination theory is broad ranging in its implications and the authors developed the research well beyond the brief summary included here. One area germane to my research interests deals with obsessive and harmonious passion. I now introduce these concepts.

**Dualistic Passion Model**

Vallerand et al. (2003) led a line of research branching out from self-determination theory that deals directly with *passion*. These researchers developed a dualistic model of passion, making a distinction between *harmonious* and *obsessive* passion. I illustrate the model in Figure 2.
Vallerand et al. (2003) defined passion as “a strong inclination toward an activity that people like, that they find important, and in which they invest time and energy” (p. 757). In reference to Figure 2, activities of intrinsic interest to the individual as well as relatively uninteresting activities may become passions for the individual. When an intrinsically interesting activity meets the definition proposed by Vallerand et al. (2003), it is then a passion.

As shown in Figure 2, an uninteresting activity may become a passion when it is internalized by the individual in either a controlled or autonomous manner (Sheldon, 2002). A harmonious passion arises when the activity is of intrinsic interest to the individual or when the internalization takes place in an autonomous manner (Vallerand et al., 2003). In this latter case, the person has freely integrated the activity into his or her identity and it becomes part of his self-definition. For example, people who play guitars or read might start to self-identify as guitarists and readers. The research showed that harmonious passion “was positively related to positive affective and cognitive (concentration and flow) experiences and to the absence of negative affect during and after activity engagement” (Vallerand et al., 2003, p. 765).
Obsessive passion follows from internalization that is controlled. According to the theory, “such an internalization originates from intrapersonal and/or interpersonal pressure either because certain contingencies are attached to the activity such as feelings of social acceptance or self-esteem, or because the sense of excitement derived from activity engagement becomes uncontrollable” (Vallerand et al., 2003, p. 757). Obsessive passion leads to a state of negative affect and the authors found it to be unrelated to positive cognitive states. Interestingly, people showing harmonious and obsessive passion were equally persistent at tasks, but the harmoniously passionate ones were able to disengage from the activities when positive returns ceased. The obsessively passionate individuals were unable to disengage and experienced negative affect as a result. Similar or consistent findings on harmonious and obsessive passion were found in various environments, including sport (Vallerand et al., 2008), mastery of goal attainment (Vallerand et al., 2007), well-being research (Philippe et al., 2009), and in the work world (Forest, Mageau, Sarrazin, & Morin, 2011; Vallerand et al., 2014).

**Summary.** The self-determination theory literature provides well-documented, empirically tested theory on why people might perform an activity such as learning and why those same people might learn with passion. I now discuss theory that underlies what people might learn and, in particular, the theory associated with vocational learning as a subset of all the possible domains of human learning.

**Theory of “What” We Learn: Vocation, Interests, Identity**

I begin the discussion of what we learn by reviewing the literature related to vocation and calling, followed by a discussion of the psychology of interest development. Next, I analyse the psychological process of internalization and how we make sense of our life experiences. This research returns to some of the perspectives based on self-determination theory but then moves
into human identity research and to narrative and vocational identity. I show the close relationship between the research on narrative identity, in particular, and a branch of personality development theory that offers some insight into vocational choice. The final topic explored is the practice of career counselling where practitioners have put to use a great deal of the research covered in this section, ideally helping people find an appropriate vocation and perhaps calling. At first blush, some of the topics in this section may seem unrelated but I believe there is a deep and somewhat surprising relationship among them that brings insight into how individuals become passionate learners in their respective vocations.

**Vocation and Calling**

Researchers Dik and Duffy (2015, 2013; 2009; Duffy & Dik, 2013) recently made an important contribution to framing a body of theory around *vocation* and *calling* in the workplace. The research team provided a useful function in clarifying the definitions of vocation and calling, and in bringing structure to research in the area. Here are the definitional contributions. Firstly, “a vocation is an approach to a particular life role that is oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness and that holds other-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation” (Dik & Duffy, 2009, p. 428; italics in the original). Notably, vocation in this sense does not require employment, but is rather a life role. The authors further defined:

A calling is a transcendent summons, experienced as originating beyond the self, to approach a particular life role in a manner oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness and that holds other-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation. (Dik & Duffy, 2009, p. 427)
The possible origins of a transcendent summons were explored further by the researchers using a population of 200 employed adults who felt they were called to their various professions (Duffy et al., 2014). The authors gave three options to the participants:

1. A calling by a higher power, the traditional sense of God calling the person to a role;
2. The notion that the adults by nature fit their professions perfectly, by virtue of their values, interests and skills;
3. A feeling of destiny as the source of the transcendent summons, a feeling that the person’s career was something they were “meant to do” or destined to perform, or in a sense something they had discovered within themselves.

Overall, the authors found the most common origin of the calling followed the perfect-fit definition, although many people endorsed all three sources of calling. Furthermore, those participants who felt they were living a calling showed a moderate to strong correlation to job and life satisfaction. Finally, the literature indicates that career counsellors tend to use the perfect-fit definition in their work assisting people in finding future work.

Dik and Duffy (2009) relied on the expression “purpose or meaningfulness” in their definitions of both vocation and calling. The reader may only understand fully the definitions of vocation and calling by first reviewing how Dik and Duffy used the words *purpose* and *meaning*. The authors used a definition of *purpose* as “people’s identification of, and intention to pursue, particularly high valued, overarching life goals” (Steger & Dik, 2010). They maintained an older definition of *meaning* as “the sense made of and the significance felt regarding, the nature of one’s being and existence” (Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006).

Up to this point, I have used the word *interest* in two contexts from the literature. Firstly, when an individual has interest in an activity or enjoys an activity, as shown in Figure 1, the
person is intrinsically motivated to do the activity and is often passionately engaged in the activity. Secondly, the literature mentions the people who feel called to a profession fit the profession perfectly, by virtue of their values, *interests*, and skills. I now explore the literature of interest development psychology to show how individuals may trigger and develop interests.

**Research on Interest**

**Dewey’s perspective.** Over 100 years ago, John Dewey (2008c) wrote a small book entitled *Interest and Effort in Education*. Dewey’s leanings toward a progressive educational philosophy (Elias & Merriam, 2005) are evident throughout this book and, as a result, some of his thought should be interpreted with that philosophy in mind. Nevertheless, Dewey was examining what he felt was an inaccurate perspective on education held by some at the time that “after the subject-matter has been selected, then the teacher should make it interesting” (Dewey, 2008c, p. 163). He then engaged in an exploration of interest that resulted in several insightful comments.

To begin, Dewey (2008c) recognized different levels of interest, such as interest due to “amusement or fooling or a temporary excitation” (p. 172), as opposed to “true interests are signs that some material, object, mode of skill (or whatever) is appreciated on the basis of what it does in carrying to fulfilment some mode of action with which a person has identified himself” (p. 173). In this latter statement, he visualized a higher level of interest as being both longer term and an individual choice.

Dewey (2008c) also recognized a relationship among motivation, interest, and learning. He described a motive to learn as “power to move,” (p. 181) which is similar to the word *energize*, the word I use synonymously with motivate. Dewey (2008c) further recognized both
the intrinsic nature and motivational impact of interest when, in describing teachers who attempted to provide inappropriate motivation, he wrote:

They looked for a motive for the study or the lesson instead of a motive in it. Some reason must be found in the person, apart from the arithmetic or the geography or the manual activity that might be attached to the lesson so as to give it a leverage, or moving force. (p. 182)

Dewey (2008c) itemized several categories of interest including physical activities and work, the latter he defined as “using intermediate means, or appliances, to reach ends” (p. 189). His other categories included intellectual or theoretical interest and finally social interest or “interest in persons” (p. 193). This list seems somewhat slanted toward practical ends and may reflect his progressive educational philosophy. Close to the end of his essay, Dewey reiterated that interest is constantly moving or developing “an activity that moves toward an end, developing as it proceeds” (p. 195).

In his concluding paragraph, Dewey (2008c) summarized his beliefs by stating:

If we can discover a child’s urgent needs and powers, and if we can supply an environment of materials, appliances and resources—physical, social and intellectual—to direct their adequate operation, we shall not have to think about interest. It will take care of itself. (p. 197)

This last statement resonates loudly with vocational educators (like me) who rely on this approach to deliver vocational education. Furthermore, this statement would be readily accepted by the self-determination theorists who might, hypothetically, reword it to say: If we can provide an autonomous, supportive environment (Reeve & Halusic, 2009), then the child’s needs for
competence and possibly relatedness will lead the child to develop his or her own interests, according to the opportunities available in the environment.

**Interest development models.** Researchers in the fields of psychology and educational psychology have produced what Silvia (2006) described as “a vast and eclectic body of work on interest” (p. 4). Silvia (2006) commented that the study of the development of interests was “marked by an excess of theories and a dearth of research” (p. 207). Another prominent researcher in the field, Krapp (2002), lamented that research into interest lacked “an overarching theoretical framework that could be used to summarize and systematically integrate results from different research programs” (p. 407). After I reviewed much of the recent material on interest, it was not difficult to conclude that the field has not advanced far from the days of Dewey. In fact, in a recent paper, Silvia (2012) returned briefly to praise the foundational work of Dewey. Silvia concluded by recommending the need for future research on “how idiosyncratic interests develop” (Silvia, 2006, p. 164).

Silvia (2006) divided interest theories into two main categories, which taken as a whole, he labelled the *interest-interests model*. The first category, labelled simply *interest*, considered interest to be an “emotional experience, curiosity and momentary motivation” (Silvia, 2006, p. 4). The second category was *interests*, which Silvia described as “part of personality, individual differences and people’s idiosyncratic hobbies, goals and avocations” (Silvia, 2006, p. 4). Silvia mentioned that these categories are roughly similar to *situational* and *individual* interest as originally defined by Krapp, Hidi, and Renninger (1992), three researchers in what is probably the most prominent line of research in the field, and to which I will now turn.

Hidi and Renninger (2006) developed the situational–individual interest model further (from the 1992 version) to create a four-phase model of interest development. This model was
rerestated more recently by Renninger and Su (2012) and still represents the current thinking in this line of research. The four-phase model shows a progressive deepening of interest from an initial momentary triggering (“that is interesting!”), to a more sustained or reoccurring interest (“there it is again, I keep seeing that”), to a more enduring state (“I am going to find out more about that”) to a well-developed committed state of interest, but always with the possibility of loss (“I am building the interest into my practice, I am getting good results”). The interest development process can stop at a particular level or disappear altogether if the person loses interest in the content. Renninger and Su recognized that the individual must trigger the development of interest, although there is virtually no theory on how this triggering takes place. In addressing this issue, as applied to children in a school environment, Renninger and Su stated:

> Interest appears to be both triggered and supported to develop when a task such as an assignment to set a goal for a class at the beginning of the term leads learners to find meaning for themselves, or when learners are allowed to take charge of shaping class activity. (p. 171)

The authors appear closely aligned to Dewey’s concluding comments quoted previously.

**Discussion of interest research.** The inductive four-phase model of interest development has itself been developed to provide a richer understanding of interest development than the situational–individual model first published in the early 1990s (Krapp et al., 1992). Nevertheless, the theoretical basis for the triggering and development of interest is still sparse, as suggested by the comments of Renninger and Su (2012), Silvia (2006), and Krapp (2002). One reason for the paucity of the models could be the very nature of interest itself. Several authors mentioned or implied the “idiosyncratic” (Silvia, 2012, p. 164) nature of interest and how each learner should be led to “find meaning for themselves” (Renninger & Su, 2012, p. 171). It appears that the
triggering and development of interest and its relationship to passionate engagement in learning is *particular to the biographic experience of each person* and that a better understanding of how interest develops may only be investigated one person at a time.

The research cited adds insight into the stages of interest growth but provides little insight into how individuals might trigger interest in a domain, activity, or vocation, or, in fact, what energizes the interest development process. I provide more insight into these questions by reviewing the internalization process inherent in self-determination theory (SDT) and in the psychology of identity formation.

**Energizing, Internalizing, and Forming Identity**

The SDT model shown in Figure 1 illustrates various states of internalization but it does not demonstrate how, over time, individuals might move through a state of identification to deeper internal integration and to eventually achieving fully internalized beliefs, values, skills, goals, and roles. I now describe a theoretical basis for the internalization process by starting with why internalization may take place, and then by providing one possible description of how the process itself is performed by the individual.

**SDT and internalization.** The SDT researchers have used their theory to suggest why the internalization process might take place (Deci & Ryan, 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2013). Firstly, they emphasized that humans are born without identities, and that identity formation is a developmental process that takes place in a cultural context. Secondly, they suggested that identity development is sometimes intrinsically motivated, arising out of innate inclinations, emerging interests, and curiosity (Deci, 1992) and that early avocations often lead to career and lifestyle choices (Krapp, 2002). Finally, they suggested there are many roles, tasks, and responsibilities that do not arise out of intrinsically interesting activities but that some of these
roles, tasks, and responsibilities may be taken into the individual and become personally endorsed as part of the internalization process, forming part of the person’s identity (Deci & Ryan, 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2013). The SDT researchers posited that the process of internalization is energized by the degree to which each individual perceives she can fulfil her own psychological need for competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2013). In summary, the psychological needs that energize our activities in general also energize the internalization process.

**Narrative Identity Theory**

The work of Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000, 2011, 2012) and Vallerand (2003) suggested that if a skill, value, goal, or role becomes fully internalized by the individual, then that person might develop a passionate engagement in that skill, value, goal, or role. Another question then becomes: *How do humans actually achieve full internalization* of the skill, value, goal or role; in other words, what process do people follow? In searching the literature, I identified one direct line of research that offers a plausible theory in answer to these questions. The line of research can generally be found under the name *narrative identity*, (Singer, 2004) and has undergone a rich development over the past 30 years, much of it based on the work of Dan McAdams (1985, 2001, 2009, 2011; McAdams & McLean, 2013; McAdams & Olson, 2010). McAdams’s work on narrative identity is part of a three-tier model of personality development. I first bring together a description of the broad concept of *identity*, and then describe narrative identity theory.

The simplest definition of identity is the way in which an individual would respond to the question: “Who are you?” (Vignoles, Schwartz, & Luyckx, 2011, p. 2). With more elaboration, a person’s identity is their own representation of the *self*, in terms of facets such as skills, values,

The original work by McAdams (1985) on what became narrative identity was done in an era when other researchers in the field of psychology, such as Bruner (1986, 1990), Polkinghorne (1988) and Sarbin (1986), were articulating the idea that human beings are story tellers by nature and that we inherently make sense of our lives through the creation of stories about our experiences. Further, as described by McAdams and Cox (2010):

By assimilating one’s life to a culturally recognized narrative, a person is able to make sense of his or her own behaviour and strivings over time and is able to convey the meaning of his or her life to other people whose cultural knowledge enables them to recognize and (ideally) affirm the narrative. (p. 169)

McAdams (2009) adopted the term narrative identity “to refer to the internalized and evolving story of the self that a person consciously and unconsciously constructs to bind together many different aspects of the self” (p. 404).

In their description of the process of narrative identity creation, McAdams and Cox (2010) called upon the concepts of the “I” and the “Me” originally put forward by William James (1892/1961). In essence, the I was the subjective aspect of the self, the part that dispassionately examined the self as an object, the Me. It was the I that stands back and integrates the experience of the self into the Me. The I “represents, critiques, manages, controls, edits reformulates, explores, improves, expands, develops and in most general terms, works on the me” (McAdams & Cox, 2010, p. 162). The Me then became an ever-changing, integrated, internalized representation of the self. In McAdams’ model, the I took on the role of author of the Me, and the Me is represented by the narrative, although the full Me is too vast to be adequately or
practically represented by words. McAdams and Cox (2010) called this process “the reflexivity of selfhood—the sense wherein the self is able to reflect on itself” (p. 162).

In summary, McAdams (1985, 2001, 2009, 2011; McAdams & McLean, 2013; McAdams & Olson, 2010) created a process model by which humans integrate and internalize life events and experience through the creation of a reflective narrative. According to this model, over time, the person will develop skills, values, goals, or roles, which under the right conditions will become fully integrated into the self or, in other words, form part of the person’s narrative identity. If the process continues, the person may engage passionately with the skills, values, goals, or roles.

McAdams and McLean (2013) gave a brief summary of research done using the narrative identity construct. Typically, researchers ask participants to tell stories about their own lives concerning the general areas of research interest, which researchers code to identify themes from the stories. The authors then describe some sequences of common themes that researchers have named, for example, the *redemptive sequence* by McAdams (2013). Another prominent author who has used the narrative identity construct is Hammack (2011) who described how cultural narratives about national politics, history, religion, and ethnicity are intertwined with the personal narrative identities of Palestinian and Israeli youth.

Vocational identity is the facet of overall identity, which is of particular interest in my research. Skorikov and Vondracek (2007, 2011), who are the primary authors cited in the following section, used the words *vocational* and *occupational* identity in their research. For clarity, I chose to use the word *vocational* exclusively.
Vocational Identity

The literature on vocational identity is sparse by comparison to the literature in the broader field of identity psychology (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2007, 2011). This is likely due to the way vocation fits cleanly in identity theory as a significant role within the “skills, values, goals, and roles” (McAdams, 2009, p. 404), that form the identity configuration. In effect, people develop occupational or vocational identities for the same reasons (to satisfy the innate psychological needs) and in the much same way as the person’s overall identity (narratively). I use the expression vocational narrative identity in my study to represent those elements of the individual’s narrative identity that link with their vocational elements.

Although the research into exclusively vocational identity is limited, researchers developed some interesting insights from the study of this domain. Firstly, there is little doubt that Erikson (1968) considered a growing sense of vocational competence and future direction to be an important developmental stage in the formation of identity, where youth can “become what they do” (p. 31), and which lends considerable support to establishing vocational identity as an entity. A more recent perspective viewed the vocational facet of overall identity as being focused on the control of career development (Skorikov & Vondracek, 1997) and therefore:

Serves as a principle cognitive structure that controls the assimilation and integration of self- and occupational knowledge and allows for making logical and systematic career decisions even when facing a serious career problem” (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011, p. 698; italics added).

As a last point, there is considerable evidence that exposure to vocational curriculum in schools (as opposed to purely academic curriculum) aids in the development of vocational identity (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011). Educators have often used activities such as
apprenticeship, internships, and job shadowing to assist in this process, particularly at the high school level.

Identity Statuses

Erikson (1963, 1968) introduced much of the terminology frequently found in the literature of identity psychology. Marcia (Kroger & Marcia, 2011; 1966, 1980), made a particularly useful contribution to the field of identity development by defining and initiating a body of research on identity statuses using Erikson’s (1963, 1968) terminology. Marcia categorized the identity formation statuses in common usage by the degree of commitment the individual maintains toward their perceived identity status. Highly committed individuals fell into the categories of identity achievement and foreclosure (Kroger & Marcia, 2011). Marcia considered individuals in the state of identity achievement to have made a commitment to the self in terms of skills, values, goals, beliefs, roles, and individual histories as a result of exploration activity. Those individuals in identity foreclosure had taken on identity commitments given to them by significant others, such as parents. Marcia identified two other identity statuses, which typically displayed a low degree of identity commitment and which he named moratoriums and identity diffusions. Those individuals in the moratorium category were actively pursuing identity facet commitments, but were still engaged in an exploratory process; whereas, identity diffusion individuals were neither committed nor actively searching.

Marcia’s (Kroger & Marcia, 2011; 1966, 1980) categorizations have been applied extensively over the past 50 years, but particularly toward individuals in late adolescence (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2007). The application of this theory to the area of vocational identity, especially later in life, has been a focus of those involved in career counselling, as described later in this review.
McAdam’s research in the area of human personality used narrative identity as the top tier of a three-tier model of personality development. An examination of the other two tiers adds further insight into those who may become passionate about a particular domain of interest by providing a link between personality and vocational choice.

**Personality and Narrative Identity**

McAdams (2009, 2015; McAdams & Cox, 2010; McAdams & Olson, 2010; McAdams & Pals, 2006) produced his work on narrative identity as part of a three-tier personality development model that includes a dispositional signature tier, a characteristic adaptation tier, and finally a life narrative identity tier. Each tier of personality development tends to influence the life of the individual, but each tier tends to activate at different stages of life.

McAdams and Olson (2010) named the dispositional signature tier, the *actor* self. In this tier, the person shows dispositional traits very early in her life, perhaps from birth. Bruner (1990) gave a vivid description of this tier, that resonates with the word *actor*:

> When we enter human life, it is as if we walk on stage into a play whose enactment is already in progress—a play whose somewhat open plot determines what parts we may play and toward what denouements we may be heading. Others on stage already have a sense of what the play is about, enough of a sense to make negotiation with a newcomer possible. (p. 34)

As the individual grows and develops through childhood, they make characteristic adaptations to their particular life circumstances. McAdams and Olson (2010) named this the *agent* self, the self that is motivated to take action, to deal with whatever life circumstances they may face.
The final tier, arising in late adolescence (Habermas & Bluck, 2000), McAdams and Olson (2010) named the author self. In this tier, the author is able to create a narrative identity for the individual’s life, by working with the stories, integrating, interpreting and revising her personal narratives backward and forward through time.

**Dispositional signature tier.** In describing the dispositional signature tier, McAdams (2009; McAdams & Cox, 2010; McAdams & Olson, 2010; McAdams & Pals, 2006) drew heavily upon the long-standing and well-respected work of McCrae and Costa (2008), who developed a five-factor theory of personality traits. These traits tend to become evident in people at a very early stage in life. The research showed a hereditary linkage in the development of the traits and has shown the traits to be quite stable over time. The authors described the five traits as:

- **Neuroticism**—Depression (a tendency to experience dysphoric affect—sadness, hopelessness, guilt)
- **Extraversion**—Gregariousness (a preference for companionship and social stimulation)
- **Openness to experience**—Actions (a need for variety, novelty and change)
- **Agreeableness**—Compliance, a willingness to defer to others during interpersonal conflict
- **Conscientiousness**—Achievement Striving (strong sense of purpose and high aspiration levels) (McCrae & Costa, 2008, p. 164)

Of significance to my research, there have been many attempts in the past to correlate the five factor personality traits as standalone traits (without taking into account the other two personality tiers) with academic performance. Recent research in this area provided some insight, but also showed inconsistency in the findings (Vedel, Thomsen, & Larsen, 2015). Among
university students, as might be expected, conscientiousness tended to correlate to academic GPA (grade point average). Openness tended to correlate to GPA in some academic majors but not in others. Another recent study (Komarraju, Karau, Schmeck, & Avdic, 2011) working with the five factor traits confirmed that conscientiousness is critical for learning and performance and, to a lesser degree, so are agreeableness and openness. There was a strong negative correlation between neuroticism and learning, but a minor relationship between extraversion and learning. These studies at least demonstrate that dispositional traits can influence the individual’s life and learning long after they have developed through all three tiers of personality.

**Characteristic adaptation tier.** McCrae and Costa (2008) hypothesized that individuals adapt their dispositional traits to the circumstances of their lives through what they termed *characteristic adaptations*. McAdams (2009; McAdams & Cox, 2010; McAdams & Olson, 2010; McAdams & Pals, 2006) added characteristic adaptations as the second tier of his meta-theory of personality development. This second tier included “motives, goals, plans, strivings, strategies, values, virtues, schemas, and a range of other personality constructs that speak mainly to the motivational aspects of human life” (McAdams & Olson, 2010, p. 524). It is at this layer in the personality development theory that motivational factors, especially those identified by Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000, 2011, 2012), come into play in the person’s life as the person adapts to external circumstances, events and in particular, interaction with other people. It is also in this tier that life circumstances combined with individual traits may influence an individual to embrace one particular vocation and another individual to embrace another vocation.

**Narrative identity tier.** McAdams (2009; McAdams & Cox, 2010; McAdams & Pals, 2006) posited the narrative identity layer as being the last personality development tier to form, as people integrate, internalize and make sense of life events and experience. It includes those
that have taken place in the past and those projected forward in time. Finally, for completeness, McAdams enveloped the three-tier model of personality development in the context of human evolutionary design, human cultural practices, and meaning processes.

Career counsellors assist people in finding suitable vocations and, consequently, in planning how individuals might embark upon vocational learning. Skorikov and Vondracek (2007) expressed the opinion that only two theoretical perspectives have proven viable in support of career counselling. The first is based on the personality theory of Holland (1959, 1997) and the second, on the identity theory of Erikson (1963, 1968). I chose to describe two prominent approaches to career counselling, one representing each of these theoretical bases, as examples of how career counsellors may assist individuals to find suitable vocations and possibly callings.

**Career Counselling**

A great deal of literature supports the counsellors who assist others to make vocational choices or from the perspective of my research, to determine which body of vocational knowledge to pursue (Brown & Lent, 2013). I briefly describe two approaches prominent in the literature.

**Holland’s RIASEC theory.** The work of Holland (1997) was the basis for one of the more enduring counselling techniques still in popular use today (Nauta, 2013). The theory was based on six *personality types*, shortened to give the theory its name: “Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional” (Nauta, 2013, p. 56). The personality types originated, according to Holland (1997), as “the product of a characteristic interaction among a variety of cultural and personal forces including peers, biological hereditary, parents, social class, culture and the physical environment” (p. 2). This description is similar to the dispositional trait tier, combined with the characteristic adaptation tier, as described by McAdams and Cox
The theory followed the personality–environment personal fit (P-E) approach, in which the counselling client is first assessed on which personality types best fits the client (Nauta, 2013). The counsellor then presents an array of possible work environments, each associated with the client’s personality type, to the individual for consideration as part of the counselling process. Holland used the term congruence to refer to the degree of fit between the client’s personality type and the client’s current or proposed work environment.

In general, the research has shown the six personality types to be well founded for an American audience (Nauta, 2013) and the personality types seemed to fit well with people in late adolescence or beyond. The most significant finding by those assessing the theory was that the degree of congruence between the personality types and the associated work environments was positively correlated, but only minimally so, to favourable work-related outcomes. These outcomes included job satisfaction, job performance and academic achievement in the vocational field of studies. The theory was probably most valuable as a source of self-knowledge for counselling clients and as one tool among several others to stimulate thought about career directions.

Career construction theory. Career construction theory was the name given by Savickas (Maree, 2013; 2011, 2013) to his counselling theory, which began by exploring the facets of the client’s career identity. Savickas (2011, 2013) used the three-tier identity model developed by McAdams (McAdams & Cox, 2010; McAdams & Olson, 2010) as the basis for his counselling technique. In essence, Savickas counselled clients to build their career narratives in three layers: the actor layer, as represented by their résumé, the agent layer, as an explanation of why their career took shape as it did (why it happened), and finally, the author layer, as an exploration and interpretation of their career theme(s). Savickas proposed the counsellor should develop an
author layer narrative for each client based on a formalized interview process. Once completed, the counsellor intervened in three ways. Firstly, the career counsellor provided vocational guidance for the actor using as an example the RIASEC approach (Holland, 1997; Savickas, 2012). The second intervention was career education or coaching for the agent, and finally, career counselling for the author (Savickas, 2012). In essence, the career construction approach assisted clients in developing a consistent career narrative that they would be able to act upon under the guidance of the career counsellor (Maree, 2013; Savickas, 2013).

**Summary.** This completes my exploration of the theory behind “what” we learn as it relates to vocation, vocational interests, and vocational identity. The review opened by defining vocation and calling. I then discussed the psychology of interest development, which suggests that the triggering of personal (or vocational) interest is idiosyncratic and peculiar to each individual. I followed with a discussion of how people internalize skills, values, goals, and roles through narrative identity formation. I then discussed related research into personality development, which gives insight into some factors that may also influence whether a person becomes a passionate vocational learner in a particular domain. Finally, I discussed the practical application of narrative identity theory by counsellors who assist individuals in finding suitable vocations or callings.

I selected adult education theory to answer the question of “how” adults learn. My objective was to describe a theoretical basis for adult learning separated conceptually from the motivational factors that I find often cloud understanding of adult learning processes. I now elaborate on the research on adult education theory.
Theory of “How” We Learn: Adult Education

I found it appropriate to set the stage for adult learning theory by first discussing the interaction of thought and emotion in the learning process. The presence of emotion has often been raised as an issue in the development of adult learning theory generally, and transformative learning theory specifically (Dirkx, 1997, 2001, 2006, 2008; Dirkx, Mezirow, & Cranton, 2006; Jarvis, 2008).

Learning and Emotion

Recent perspectives emerging from the neurosciences suggest that pure rational thought is and always has been a philosophical fiction. In a seminal book by Damasio (1995), aptly named *Descartes’ Error*, Damasio hypothesized that all reason has feeling (our momentary perception of the body) and emotional content, and that this content is in fact necessary for our reasoning to deal with the copious uncertainties of living. Furthermore, when we learn, the substance of our learning has feeling, emotional and cognitive content, a perspective noted by adult educator, Taylor (2001, p. 219).

The research cited to this point has described associated emotional content on the topic of passionate vocational learning. For example, passion itself, the external regulation of an individual’s activities, and the *eudemonia* (happiness) associated with acting out intrinsic motivation, all create important emotional content (Deci & Ryan, 2006; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vallerand et al., 2003). Both the fulfilment and lack of fulfilment of the hypothesized innate psychological needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000, 2012) are associated with a variety of emotional content. As examples, the emotions connected with words such as oppression, support, friendship, loneliness, freedom, connectedness, ability, growth, and acceptance may all be easily associated with the three needs. The theory of identity
development refers to strong emotional content such as crisis (Erikson, 1963, 1968), diffusion (Marcia, 1966, 1980), eudemonia (Waterman, 2005, 2011, 2013), and finally the meaning making and fulfilment associated with narrative identity development (Bruner, 1990; McAdams, 2011).

My point in these introductory paragraphs is that emotional content is present in all cognitive activity. I find the theory of adult learning has often been inconsistent in the recognition of emotional content, and the relation between emotions and the theory of the learning process itself. For this reason, my approach is to isolate the process of learning in the theory presented below from the ever-present emotional content of learning. I believe the other bodies of theoretical research, cited previously, represent the emotional content more appropriately.

The Big Four, Plus One, Theories of Adult Learning

I framed the theories of adult learning, in this section, on two principles that seemed appropriate for the work at hand. Firstly, this work is student-centric. I centred the discussion on the student’s passion for learning, on the student’s personal vocation and, ideally, on the student’s own learning processes. Secondly, it is my belief after a study of adult learning theories, that the researchers have often mixed motivational theory elements and other emotional elements with cognitive learning theory, which serves to obscure the learning theory. My approach in this chapter has been to separate the theory into theory of why we learn (our motivation), theory of what we learn (in this case our vocational identity as a component of our overall identity), and how we learn (the process of learning).

I now review five prominent theories or practices in the tradition of adult learning, which I entitled the Big Four Plus One (Groen & Kawalilik, 2015), with the intent of extracting the
essence to create what I believe is the most fully developed theory for the process of how adults learn.

**How Adults Learn: Andragogy**

The controversial word *andragogy* was first used by Knowles in 1968 (Knowles et al., 2011) and was generally understood to mean “the art and science of helping adults learn” (p. 59). The andragogical model itself has been reviewed, criticized, and has evolved for many years as Knowles (and his successors') modified and refined the concepts (Jarvis, 2006). In its most refined state, andragogy referred to a student-centred set of six assumptions about how adults learn. In reviewing these assumptions, I found them to be a mixture of Knowles’s beliefs about motivation and learning, but contain little theory of the learning process (Merriam et al., 2006). Nevertheless, one of Knowles’s assumptions emphasized “the role of the learner’s experiences” (Knowles et al., 2011, p. 64) as an essential ingredient in the adult learning process.

The andragogical learning framework (Knowles et al., 2011) included a seemingly linear progression of eight steps for implementing the andragogical assumptions by organizing classroom instruction—a sort of recipe for delivering instruction to adults, including steps such as “diagnosing the needs for learning” (p. 114) and “designing a pattern of learning experiences” (p. 114). All eight steps are oriented to a learning management process written from a teacher’s perspective and do not describe a learner-oriented learning process.

One of the more potent criticisms of andragogy, as summarized by Grace (1996), referred to the model as being highly linear, and failing to recognize the interactive social context of adult learning espoused in the work of critical theorists such Freire (2000) and Mezirow (2012). As a

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1 Knowles died in 1997, but there are still new editions of his books being published, such as the main reference work used here, *The adult learner: The definitive classic in adult education and human resource development* (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2011).
critical-radical adult educator, Grace further argued that andragogy played to the economic agendas of business and industry, a relationship acknowledged tacitly by Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2011). For my immediate purposes, as Hartree (1984) had established, the work contained neither theory nor learning process.

Knowles’s development of the andragogical assumptions brought two important dimensions of adult learning to light. Firstly, that adult learning builds on accumulated experience [Assumption 3, (Knowles et al., 2011, p. 62)], the meanings and patterns assembled through living, which become a defining characteristic of adulthood. Secondly, andragogy emphasized the importance of adult volition and responsibility toward learning as a defining characteristic adulthood. I accommodated this second point separately in this review by citing the research on self-determination theory.

The andragogical assumptions have a sense of learner self-directedness about them. In the mid-1970s, Knowles (1975) began to use the terminology, *self-directed learning*, explicitly. The next section follows self-directed learning through from Knowles’s era to more sophisticated learning models called by the same name.

**How Adults Learn: Self-directed Learning**

Self-directed learning aligns most readily to the category of learning referred to as *informal learning* (Merriam et al., 2006). Informal learning is “learning that takes place without the externally imposed curriculum of either formal or non-formal educative programs” (p. 35). Canadian adult educator, Tough (1978) was a contemporary of Knowles and independently produced empirical data on the self-directed learning habits of Canadian adults. Tough (1978) set out to determine how frequently adults undertook learning projects which he defined as “a highly deliberate effort to gain and retain certain definite knowledge and skill, or to change in some
other way” (p. 250). The time spent on these projects was to be a minimum of seven hours. Tough found that fully 90% of his participants had undertaken at least one project in the past year, and that a typical learner conducts five projects per year at an average of 100 hours per project, for about 500 hours of learning overall, yearly. The research by Tough and others spun off an immense research industry that had “an almost cult-like quality to the extent that self-directedness is viewed as the essence of what adult learning is all about” (Caffarella, 1993, p. 25). Caffarella considered self-directed learning (SDL) to incorporate three distinct ideas:

A self-initiated process of learning that stresses the ability of individuals to plan and manage their own learning, an attribute or characteristic of learners with personal autonomy as its hallmark, and a way of organizing instruction in formal settings that allows for greater learner control. (pp. 25-30, italics added)

Caffarella’s mention of personal autonomy shows the blending of a motivational factor, the psychological need for autonomy from self-determination theory, in a discussion on learning.

Over the years of its ascendancy, researchers developed several theoretical models to describe and explicate SDL (Merriam et al., 2006). One of the last to be widely circulated was developed by Garrison (1997). Garrison’s definition of SDL and the necessity of dialogue with others, already signified the rise of critical thinking as a sometimes competing, sometimes complementary model of adult learning (Garrison, 1992). Garrison’s (1997) learning process model consisted of three dimensions: (a) self-management (task control), (b) self-monitoring (cognitive responsibility), and (c) motivation (entering motivation and task motivation). Self-management dealt with how learners manage their own learning process, how the individual sets learning goals and then manages the resources and support required to achieve the goals. In the self-monitoring dimension, the learner takes on “a commitment and obligation to construct
meaning through critical reflection and collaborative confirmation” (Garrison, 1997, p. 24). The learner reflects on new concepts that come about through collaboration, and constructs new meaning out of previous knowledge. This is where the ability to think reflectively and critically becomes an essential proficiency to be exercised in adult learning. It is what I consider to be the learner-oriented learning process contribution of Garrison’s work. Garrison (1997) was a rare theorist who recognized the need to include motivational theory as the third dimension of his model. The underlying motivational theory used by Garrison was an expectancy-based theory, with motivation resulting from a rationally evaluated selection of learning goals, although the paper did not elaborate any further on the theory of motivation.

**How Adults Learn: Jarvis’s Learning Theory**

Jarvis (2006, 2007, 2008), a prominent adult educator, developed his own model of human learning. The model was first formulated in the mid-1980s and continued to evolve for over 20 years. Jarvis’s process model seems similar in many respects to others developed over the same period, notably Mezirow’s (1991) transformative learning model. Jarvis nevertheless emphasized two aspects of the learning process undertaken by individuals that I find particularly meaningful. Firstly, the word and concept of disjuncture, which is terminology peculiar to Jarvis, appears to fit a learning situation appropriately. According to Jarvis, “Disjuncture occurs when our biographical repertoire is no longer sufficient to cope automatically with our situation, so that our unthinking harmony with our world is disturbed and we feel unease” (Jarvis, 2006, p. 16). In essence, we have encountered something in our environment that puts us in a state of dissonance, something that triggers the learning process.
The second emphasis in Jarvis’s model that I find particularly meaningful is the notion of the person in the life-world2 who embodied the whole person, “body/mind/self-life-history” (Jarvis, 2008, p. 6). This statement contains nuances of the individual’s identity, in the use of the words self-life, as discussed previously. Jarvis was notably breaking with Cartesian thinking (Merriam et al., 2006, p. 189) by emphasizing the value/importance of life history experience, which includes the sensual experiences of the physical body as well as the cognitive experiences of the mind. He extended this thinking to postulate that much learning in childhood tends to be more sensual and that “adults and older children are more likely than young children to experience disjuncture in the cognitive domain” (Jarvis, 2008, p. 8). Jarvis’s model recognizes the effect of emotion on learning, but in a way I find to be unspecific and ambiguous.

**How Adults Learn: Experiential Learning**

In its simplest form, experiential learning refers to a process by which “people learn through complex elements of experience that cannot be duplicated in the classroom” (Fenwick, 2003, p. 6). Experience also plays an important role in many theories of adult learning from the early work of Lindeman (1926), Dewey (2008b), Knowles et al. (2011), and Freire (2000), to the more recent theories of Jarvis (2008) and of transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000).

The work of Kolb (1984) and his often-referenced experiential learning cycle is commonly associated with learning through experience. Kolb made such a strong association between learning and experience that he defined *learning* as “the process by which knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (p. 38) and thereafter, dropped the word *experiential* (in his book) when referring to experiential learning. The experiential learning cycle is in essence a lifetime cycling through four learning process stages: (a) concrete experience, (b)

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2 This is terminology is usually associated with Jürgen Habermas, who strongly influenced Mezirow (2000).
reflective observation, (c) abstract conceptualization, and (d) active experimentation. Kolb also described his views on human motivation for continuing to perform the learning cycle. In essence, people inherently seek integrity or what Kolb described as “a profound gift of humanity—a desire to reach out, understand, become, and grow, a pervasive motivation for mastery that White has called motivation for competence” (p. 224). This is the same White (1959) that I referred to when discussing the posited innate human need for competence (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000, 2012). Kolb apparently recognized one of the same innate needs identified by the self-determination theorists—but one only—as a significant motivating factor.

In a more recent summary of experiential learning, Merriam and Bierema (2014) described three models of learning through experience that they “feel resonate particularly well with adult learning—reflective practice, situated cognition, and communities of practice” (p. 115). The name reflective practice refers to learning that derives from an individual reflecting on his or her practical job or work activities. The authors considered the reflection to be focussed on improving professional practice. In this context it might apply to almost anyone working, although we often refer to the work of, for example, doctors, lawyers and teachers this way. Situated cognition is the term reserved for experiential learning, which takes place in a particular context and for which the context is of particular importance such that “the context itself shapes the learning” (Merriam & Bierema, 2014, p. 118, italics in the original). A business manager who learns to be effective in a particular corporate role, who interacts with a particular group of colleagues, and who operates in a particular industrial context, has likely learned a great deal of situational knowledge. Finally, the authors use the term communities of practice to describe groups of people who come together in order to learn about some common interest.
Experiential learning theory adds further to the elements of a process model for learning by individuals. From the theory examined to this point, the process model should include the contribution of experience, reflection, critical elucidation of assumptions, dialogue with others, and process initiation because of disjuncture. In my view, transformative learning theory captures and expands upon all of these points well.

**How Adults Learn: Transformative Learning**

Transformative learning theory “seems to have replaced andragogy as the dominant educational philosophy of adult education, offering teaching practices grounded in empirical research and supported by sound theoretical assumptions” (Taylor, 2008, p. 12). Transformative learning theory has been the object of an enormous amount of research, extending back to the original paper published by Mezirow (1978), and is difficult to summarize succinctly. Taylor (2008) documented no less than ten versions (conceptions) of transformative learning theory that have grown out of this body of research. My objective here is to elaborate on only the “dominant” (Taylor, 2008, p. 7) conception built around the work of Mezirow himself. I have chosen the work of Mezirow because of his prominence in the development of the theory. His work emphasizes “personal transformation and growth, where the unit of analysis is primarily the individual” (Taylor, 2009, p. 5), which is consistent with my own purposes for this study.

**Psychocritical perspective of transformative learning.** Mezirow (1991, 2012) improved the original transformative learning concepts over time as more researchers added their views to his original work. A detailed account of this evolution describing the timeline of changes is given by Kitchenham (2008). My review is taken from the Mezirow (2000) version, which was reproduced more recently by Taylor and Cranton (2012), and which is the most recent and fully elaborated version of the theory I have been able to find published under Mezirow’s
name (Mezirow, 2012). Paraphrasing elements in this discussion, I understand transformative learning to be a theory of adult learning in which a volitional person (p. 24) builds on to a basis of experience (p. 5) through the use of critical reflection (p. 19) and reflective discourse (pp. 10-11), to develop new meaning structures (pp. 7-8), which can be used to guide future action (p. 5). Mezirow did not summarize the theory in quite this way, although we see a more elaborate series of ten elements in Mezirow (2012), and with similar lists going as far back as his original theory developed from research with women participating in college re-entry programs (Mezirow, 1981). Rather than repeat Mezirow’s ten elements list, I have chosen to use instead the more recent work of Cranton (2002), which was built on Mezirow’s work. Cranton (2002) identified seven “facets” (p. 65) of the process that seemed to be held in common by various authors who describe transformative learning. She emphasized that transformative learning is “not a linear process, yet there is some progression to it, perhaps spiral-like” (Cranton, 2002, p. 65). Nevertheless, this seems the most complete individual learning process description available from the adult learning literature. The seven facets include:

- An activating event that typically exposes a discrepancy between what a person has always assumed to be true and what has just been experienced, heard, or read [this seems to correspond to Jarvis’s (2008) notion of disjuncture]
- Articulating assumptions, that is, recognizing underlying assumptions that have been uncritically assimilated and are largely unconscious;
- Critical self-reflection, that is, questioning and examining assumptions in terms of where they came from, the consequences of holding them, and why they are important;
- Being open to alternative viewpoints;
• Engaging in discourse, where evidence is weighed, arguments assessed, alternative perspectives explored, and knowledge constructed by consensus;
• Revising assumptions and perspectives to make them more open and better justified; and
• Acting on revisions, behaving, talking, and thinking in a way that is congruent with transformed assumptions or perspectives. (Cranton, 2002, p. 66)

I included in Figure 3 a conceptualization of a single transformative learning event, based on Cranton’s facets, and one that helped me to visualize the meaning of an energized learning process. Rather than a “spiral” (Cranton, 2002, p. 65), which I find overly regular as a model of human learning, I have shown the facets described by Cranton as an organic sequence of thought, moving forward to conclusion, but broken in progression, and highly irregular. The initial activating event and final acting on revisions facets are the start and finish of the sequence, but everything in-between is repetitive and somewhat random, perhaps even serendipitous, although progressing toward a conclusion as described by Cranton.
Figure 3. An Illustration of a Transformative Learning Event

This diagram enabled me to visualize the role of motivational theory vividly. Why do learners move forward from facet to facet as indicated by the black arrow with the question mark? The answer is that they are energized to move forward in the process because they perceive that their need for competence, autonomy, and relatedness will be fulfilled if they move forward (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000, 2011, 2012).

Those following a social action educational philosophy were quick to criticize Mezirow “for focusing too much on individual transformation at the expense of social change” (Merriam et al., 2006, p. 153). Mezirow’s response was that:
Action is an indispensable phase of the process of adult learning. But action can mean making a decision, being critically reflective or transforming a meaning structure as well as a change in behaviour. Critical reflection often results in the learner deciding to take collective social action to effect changes in the system, in institutions, or in social practices. (Mezirow, 1995, pp. 58-59)

Another somewhat related criticism of Mezirow’s theory, as reported by Mezirow himself (Mezirow, 2006), was that it depended too heavily on the concept of rationality leading to a “decontextualized view of learning” (p. 29). Mezirow addressed this issue by responding: “Influences like power, ideology, race, class, and gender differences and other interests often pertain and are important factors. However, these influences may be rationally assessed and social action taken appropriately when warranted” (Mezirow, 2006, p. 29).

The adult learning community also expressed a need for “more clarification and emphasis on the role played by emotions, intuition, and imagination in the process of transformation” (Mezirow, 2006, p. 28). Mezirow’s (2006) response was simply that the criticism was warranted. Dirkx (2001) was one of the prominent adult educators who levelled this criticism and who, in his early work, laboured to describe “how emotional, affective, and spiritual dimensions . . . are often associated with profoundly meaningful experiences in adult learning” (p. 70).

As a final comment on the interaction of emotion with learning, the model presented in Figure 3 includes a motivational arrow that indicates that individuals will be energized to move through the process if the individual perceives her need for competence, autonomy, and relatedness will be fulfilled by moving forward (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000, 2011, 2012). The person in this situation will no doubt encounter numerous emotions in the learning process, some
hindering movement, some assisting movement, but ultimately, if the process moves forward, the emotions favouring movement will have overcome those creating resistance.

**Indications of transformative learning.** Researchers have identified several ways to know whether transformative learning has taken place in the individual. One way is to find direct evidence from the individual that “problematic ideas, beliefs, values, and feelings” (Taylor, 2009, p. 3) have been changed as a result of the core transformative elements of “individual experience, critical reflection, and dialogue” (Taylor, 2009, p. 4). It may be difficult to detect direct evidence of change if the transformative learning took place in the distant past, to another individual or to a person with a lesser degree of self-knowledge. Cranton and Hoggan (2012) identified several possible means of establishing whether transformative learning had taken place in a learning environment. Three examples pertinent to my research are (a) self-evaluation, (b) interviews, and (c) narratives. Self-evaluation requires the individual to have knowledge of transformative theory and then assess whether essential elements, for example, as described by Taylor (2009) were present, as the ideas, beliefs, values, and feelings were changed. In this case, Merriam (2004) cautioned that a “mature cognitive development” (p. 65) is a precondition for transformative learning in the individual. In the case of interviews, Cranton and Hoggan (2012) proposed that the work of Kegan (2000) might be used in distinguishing between “informational kinds of learning” (p. 47), and transformational learning, which has epistemological implications as “a new way of knowing” (p. 48). Evidence of epistemological change in the individual, perhaps at the worldview level, might then indicate that transformative learning has taken place. Personal narratives were also cited by Cranton and Hoggan (2012) as a source of evidence, which might demonstrate the conditions for transformative learning or possibly the result of a transformative process in the individual’s past. Finally, there was a suggestion in the work of
Taylor (2007) that authentic transformation may have taken place when the result is sustained action consistent with the changed meaning perspectives.

Two recent books have offered the suggestion that transformative learning may be understood as learning that produces change in the identity structures of the individual (Illeris, 2014a, 2014b), or in closely related “self” views of the individual (Tennant, 2012). These theories imply that researchers may detect transformative learning because of sustained changes to identity or the self as indicted by sustained changes to skills, values, goals, beliefs, and roles. Neither of the authors offered research-based evidence of their theories.

**Summary.** This completes my exploration of the theory behind the question of “how” we learn as individuals. I examined five central theories or approaches to adult learning looking for common elements that I could form into a process model of adult learning. The transformative learning theory of Mezirow (1978, 2012), as augmented by Cranton (2002) and (Illeris, 2014a), was chosen to represent a theoretical adult learning process model describing how individuals learn, for the purposes of this review.

The literature of why, what, and how we learn as adults is extensive and a great deal of theory was discussed. The theoretical framework of my research is comprised only of those specific theories, terminology, and concepts that inform my research directly.

**Introduction to the Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for my research draws primarily upon three domains of research and learning. Firstly, my research is informed by self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000, 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vallerand et al., 2003), which provides extensive concept, terminology, and theory related to why people become motivated to the point of passion. The self-determination theory researchers hypothesized that energized individuals will
perform an activity if they perceive that activity will fulfil the individual’s innate psychological need for competence, autonomy, and relatedness. They used this theory to provide empirical evidence for the effect of both extrinsic and intrinsic regulation on human activity. Furthermore, they have shown that intrinsic or fully internalized regulation may often lead to passionate involvement in any activity such as learning. Passion in this case refers to the person’s commitment to invest extensively in time or resources to continue performing the activity.

The second large theoretical base for my research covers the interrelated topics of vocation and calling (Dik et al., 2013; Dik & Duffy, 2009; Duffy et al., 2014; Duffy & Dik, 2013), the psychology of identity development (Erikson, 1963, 1968; Kroger & Marcia, 2011; Marcia, 1966, 1980), narrative identity (McAdams, 1985, 2011; McAdams & Olson, 2010, 2010) and vocational identity (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2007, 2011). This theory provides the concept and terminology that helped me to ask the question what people learn about the vocation and vocational identity of the individual. The recent work by Dik and Duffy provided clear definitions for vocation, calling, purpose, and meaning that I used in my research. Erikson provided the initial theory of identity development that Marcia made researchable. Marcia also defined the identity statuses, which clarified and determined the state of identity development of the individual. McAdams drew upon earlier work in identity theory as the basis for developing his own theory of identity internalization through personal narratives, a theory that became widely accepted. McAdams’s work pointed to a natural alignment between the development of personal narratives and research into these narratives through narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), my chosen research methodology. Finally, the work of Skorikov and Vondracek made clear that I could view vocational identity as a role in overall identity
development, which in turn pointed my research toward the vocational elements of narrative identity development.

The theory that influenced the *how* of passionate vocational learning originated in the work of a number of researchers in adult education. The work of Mezirow (1991, 2012) was used to centre the theory, concepts, and terminology of adult learning, but as supplemented since its inception by several other researchers. The many contributors to the development of this theory include Cranton (2002, 2006; Cranton & Hogan, 2012), Taylor (2007, 2009; Taylor & Snyder, 2012), Dirkx (1997, 2001, 2006, 2008; Dirkx et al., 2006), Kegan (2000) and more recently Illeris (2014a, 2014b) and Tennant (2012). Transformative learning theory has become a theory of “change” learning as distinct from additive learning, in which the individual simply learns more information. In the process of transformative learning, individuals encounter a disjunctive event, which triggers reassessment of personal meaning structures through reflection and dialogue with others. Over time, the person undergoing transformative change develops new meaning structures that trigger sustained and concordant action as a result. Illeris and Tennant have both associated transformative learning with changing meaning structures, which are associated with the identity of the individual.

My research into passionate vocational learning employs an extensive theoretical framework encompassing theory, concepts, and terminology from three large domains of research. I employed self-determination theory to represent *why* adults might learn to the point of passion. I used the work of several researchers to form the theoretical basis for vocational narrative identity, in this case representing a specific example of *what* adults learn. Finally, transformative learning theory provides a theoretical base for *how* adults learn.
Summary

My interest in the topic of passionate vocational learning in adulthood requires a review of literature from three bodies of research: (a) self-determination theory, (b) vocational narrative identity theory, and (c) adult learning theory. Together these bodies of research outline theory that provides general, high-level insight into passionate vocational learning in adulthood. The theory base is extremely broad and brings together several bodies of research that are seldom associated. I could find no precedent in the literature for the assembly of these theories in the way described. Nevertheless, this theory base leaves open several questions of how real humans, in their idiosyncratic lives, experience passionate vocational learning.

The literature of passionate vocational learning revealed a fortunate alignment between the narrative identity theory and a well-known research methodology, narrative inquiry. Narrative identity theory suggests that individuals develop narratives of their identity formation process, which should be readily available to assist researchers in understanding their experiences. These narratives, in theory, describe how the individual internalizes motivation toward a vocation through the vocational facet of the person’s greater identity. Narrative inquiry is a methodology for understanding the experience of individuals toward a research topic. I have chosen to use narrative inquiry as the methodology for exploring the experiences of adults toward passionate learning in their vocations.
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN

Overview

In this chapter, I describe the research design to discuss the research questions posed in Chapter One. I begin this chapter by restating the research questions and introducing the ontology and epistemology underpinning my research design. I then describe the theoretical framework, which includes the theory and concepts I use to inform and support the research topic of passionate vocational learning. I next describe narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) as an appropriate methodology for the research, followed by a brief description of the participants and the process used to recruit the participants. In the remainder of the chapter, I describe my research methods, including the processes for data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation followed by the data integrity framework, the limitations, and delimitations of the research as presented.

Research Questions

The primary research question that guided this study is: In the experience of adult learners, what is the relationship among passionate engagement in the adult learning process, developed interest, vocational choice, and action towards learning?

Secondary proposed research questions included:

a. How do experienced adult learners interpret, describe, and define passion in their learning?

b. Is there a relationship between choice of vocation and passionate interest? If so, what is the nature of that relationship?

c. How is vocational interest experienced (triggered, developed, and sustained) by adult learners?
d. What are some tensions and contradictions experienced by adult learners when passionate interest and vocational choice are not aligned?

Educators in a post-secondary, vocational choice context are the primary audience for the findings of my research. Insights drawn from the data may provide individuals working, mentoring, or coaching adults—counsellors, coaches, community development workers, or parents of young adults—with a deeper understanding of the interplay between passionate learning, vocational choice, and sustained passionate engagement.

The ontology and epistemology form the philosophical underpinning of the research as performed by making clear what we know to be real and how we know the research produces knowledge.

**Ontology and Epistemology**

**Ontological Underpinnings**

The ontological question of research is: “What do we believe about the nature of reality?” (Patton, 2002, p. 134). In the case of narrative inquiry, the reality we are exploring is the reality of human experience (Clandinin, 2013). The ontological question becomes, accordingly: “What do we believe about the nature of the reality of human experience?” For the purposes of my narrative research, I will follow the lead of Clandinin (2013) and Clandinin and Connelly (2000) who based their work on the ontological perspective of Dewey (2008a, 2008b) toward experience. Dewey’s (2008a) view of the ontology of experience was summarized in the statement: “In an experience, things and events belonging to the world, physical and social, are transformed through the human context they enter, while the live creature is changed and developed through its intercourse with the things previously external to it” (p. 251). In essence, I believe our memories of the events and people we have encountered, the emotions and feelings
we have held, the related associations and narrative creations we have made, and the way we have brought these together as the stories of our lives, create the reality of our experience.

**Epistemological Position and Assumptions**

The epistemological question may be stated: “How do we know what we know?” (Patton, 2002, p. 134). I restate this question in the context of lived experience as: “How do we know the experience we have narrated is a valid representation of the participant’s experience?” To answer this question, Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) drew upon the epistemological assumptions of Dewey’s ontology (as quoted in the previous section):

[Dewey’s ontology] implies that the regulative idea for inquiry is not to generate an exclusively faithful representation of a reality independent of the knower. The regulative idea for inquiry is to generate a new relation between a human being and her environment —her life, community, world—one that “makes possible a new way of dealing with them, and thus eventually creates a new kind of experienced objects, not more real than those which preceded but more significant, and less overwhelming and oppressive.” (Dewey, 1981b, p.175) [(Dewey, 2008d, p. 175) in the current reference list]. In this representation of knowledge, our representations arise from experience and must return to that experience for their validation. (p. 39)

My epistemological position is that by interviewing and collecting research data from willing research participants and by following the validity procedures discussed below, I co-constructed with my participants a valid representation of their life experiences regarding passionate vocational learning in adulthood. This position requires five epistemological assumptions. Specifically, I am assuming:
• The participants will recount to the best of their ability their recollections of their experiences, and that they will reflect upon these experiences to enable elaboration of their accounts.
• The participants will not wilfully attempt to deceive me as they describe their experiences.
• The validity process described below will ensure the narratives are valid accounts.
• The observations derived from this research will not be generalizable for inductive application to other humans.
• That the experience described will be a subjective co-construction with the participants.

The research process relies upon a theoretical framework that allows a researcher to build upon the work of others who have gone before. I will now outline the theoretical framework used in my research.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study draws primarily upon “the concepts, terms, definitions models and theories” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 86) of three bodies of research literature, found in the broad disciplines of psychology and education. These three bodies of literature are each quite extensive in their respective disciplines, and will be touched upon only briefly here. The main bodies of research literature include firstly, human motivational psychology, as represented by self-determination theory. The study is further informed by the literature on identity formation (Marcia, 1966, 1980), vocational identity (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2007), and narrative identity (McAdams, 2011) all of which were based primarily on the original work of Erikson (1963, 1968). Finally, the theory of adult learning originally posited
by Mezirow (1991, 2012) is used extensively in the interpretation of the adult learning situations described.

**Self-determination Theory**

Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000, 2012) developed a meta-theory of human motivation which became widely accepted. The authors based this theory on the hypothesis that all humans have three innate psychological needs—the need for competence, autonomy, and relatedness. An individual will be motivated or energized toward an activity when the individual perceives the activity will lead to the fulfilment of these needs. The theory led to the development of a continuum of self-determined behaviour (Ryan & Deci, 2000) which is included in the previous chapter as Figure 1. This continuum indicates the conditions under which individuals may move from a-motivated behaviour to a range of extrinsically regulated behaviour (external, introjected, identified, and integrated) and finally to intrinsically regulated behaviour, which includes a construct for passionate engagement in an activity (Vallerand et al., 2003).

Self-determination theory provides a set of concepts, terms, and theories which help to explain why individuals may become energized to perform a set of activities such as those involved with learning, as well as the work of personal identity formation (Deci & Ryan, 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2013).

**Identity, Vocational Identity and Narrative Identity**

The field of human identity development and research is extremely broad and includes several lines of research that have grown out of separate traditions (Vignoles et al., 2011). For the purposes of my research, I have described *identity* as a person’s own representation of the *self*, in terms of skills, values, goals, beliefs, roles, and individual history (Erikson, 1968; Kroger & Marcia, 2011; Marcia, 1966, 1980; McAdams, 2009; Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2011). In this
context, *vocational identity* (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2007, 2011) is a subset of identity, formed around the person’s vocational roles, which carries with it the person’s self-view of their vocationally related skills, values, goals, and beliefs. Accordingly, over time, a person may have several vocational identities that are in a state of constant change and in variable states of formation.

Another element of the theoretical framework chosen to inform my research is largely based on the recent work of McAdams (2011; McAdams & McLean, 2013), known as **narrative identity theory**. Narrative identity theory is based on the original work of Erikson (1963, 1968), who drew upon his therapeutic work to describe several stages of human identity development. Marcia (1966, 1980) provided definition for Erikson’s terminology, which helped researchers to develop the theory further. For example, Marcia introduced identity-related concepts, including the identity statuses—diffusions, achievements, foreclosures, and moratoriums. In the mid-1980s, several researchers in the field of psychology (Bruner, 1986, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1988; Sarbin, 1986) were advancing the idea that humans are story tellers by nature, and that we inherently make sense of our lives by telling stories. McAdams (1985) applied the emerging theory of narrative formation to the way people form their views of the self, or their narrative identity. Eventually, McAdams (2011; McAdams & Cox, 2010) developed the concept of narrative identity as the top tier of a three-tier model of personality development. In essence, the creation of our narrative identity is the way we use personal narratives to internalize, to make sense of, and to create unity and meaning from our life experiences. The research suggested that our own narratives reveal the narrative threads (or themes) that we have woven through our lives and through our life experiences. These threads give insight into the circumstances and events of
our lives, our relationships with others, the decisions we have made, and our plans and expectations for the future.

**Transformative Learning Theory**

Transformative learning theory was first introduced by Mezirow (1991, 2012) in the late 1970s. The theory itself underwent extensive criticism and modification as other researchers added their insight and research findings to the theory base (Illeris, 2014a; Kitchenham, 2008; Taylor & Cranton, 2012). The theory itself hypothesized that individuals may undergo a profound learning experience in which their “meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mindsets” (Mezirow, 2012, p. 76) are transformed. This change-oriented learning experience (Illeris, 2014a) is distinct from learning which is “informational” (Kegan, 2000, p. 45) in nature. Transformative learning creates deep change in the person’s meaning structures and perspectives, whereas informational learning is simply the addition of more knowledge of a like nature to that already held by the individual.

Cranton (2002) described a generalized process for transformative learning, which is illustrated in Chapter Two, as Figure 3. In summary of this model, the essential events associated with this process are: (a) an activating event, (b) critical reflection, (c) discourse with others, and (d) action resulting from the revision of meaning structures. These facets are indicators that transformative learning is, or may be, taking place. Furthermore, the process of transformative learning was considered by Mezirow (1991) to be irreversible in that once meaning structures have been changed, we cannot reverse our new understanding.

In a recent development of the theory of transformative learning, Illeris (2014a) hypothesized that “transformative learning comprises all learning that implies change in the identity of the learner” (p. 40). Illeris based his assertion on a review of transformative learning
theory as well as identity literature, although notably, included none of the identity literature used here with the exception of Erikson’s (1963, 1968) original work. One element discussed by Illeris (2014a) is “work identity” (p. 76), although there is little description of this particular element of his hypothesis.

I chose narrative inquiry as an appropriate methodology for this research into the experience of individuals who are passionate learners in their respective vocations. I based the research on producing narratives of the individual adult’s life experience, covering the development and growth of vocational interest, the development of passion toward learning, and the experience of engaged learning in a particular domain of vocational interest. As Clandinin (2013) wrote, “Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding and inquiring into experience. It is nothing more and nothing less” (p. 13).

**Methodology: Narrative Inquiry**

A narrative is “a spoken or written account of connected events; a story” (*Oxford Dictionary of English*, 2010). Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding the lived experience of humans and of drawing upon that experience as a source of knowledge and meaning about the nature of the experience (Clandinin, 2013). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) developed a rigorous definition for narrative inquiry:

Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration between the researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in the same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up people’s lives, both individual and social. (p. 20)
Chase (2011) took the perspective of a narrative theorist in elaborating on the nature of narrative inquiry:

Narrative theorists define narrative as a distinct form of discourse: as meaning making through the shaping or ordering of experience, a way of understanding one’s own or others’ actions, of organizing events and objects into a meaningful whole, of connecting and seeing the consequences of actions and events over time. Narrative researchers highlight what we can learn about anything—history and society as well as lived experience—by maintaining a focus on narrated lives. (p. 421)

The narrative inquiry I described in this study examined a particular aspect of lived experience, specifically, those experiences encountered by my participants on the nature of passionate vocational learning in adulthood.

The research participants are at the heart of my research effort, the vital source of knowledge for research into passionate vocational learning. I next briefly introduce the research participants, describe the participant recruitment process and describe my ethical assertions concerning the participants.

**Participants**

I identified research participants whom I thought would be passionate learners in their vocations. I selected five diverse individuals to participate in the research according to my selection criteria. I became the sixth participant because I felt my personal insight would assist in the interpretive process, but also in order to make plain to the reader how my own life experience might have influenced the research.
Description of Participants

I selected the five participants (apart from me) to diversify the sample to the degree possible, by gender, age, and vocation. Nevertheless, the group as a whole were privileged to be all actively engaged in a vocation of their own choosing, and all had mustered the resources to obtain at least one or more post-secondary credentials, by the time of the interviews. The academic credentials of the participants ranged from apprenticeship certifications, to baccalaureate degrees and master’s degrees, for the most part aligned to their vocational choices. The participants selected were two women and three men, aged 24 to 60 years old, whose vocations included firefighter training officer, nurse-educator, IT department change leader (a “fixer” of corporate IT organizations), a process safety technologist, and a tile-setter tradesperson. Chapter Four contains a much more extensive description of each person recruited.

Recruitment of Participants

I received approval from the University of Calgary’s Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB), on April 29th, 2014 (Study Id: REB14-0370, renewed on April 17th, 2015) and began an immediate search for research participants. The five persons eventually chosen were identified using a purposive sampling (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002; Polkinghorne, 2005) selection process. The first selection criterion was that all individuals were self-described passionate learners in their respective vocations. The second criterion was that they were all willing to participate in approximately three separate interviews, totalling three to four hours, over a seven- to nine-month period. Thirdly, I asked for people who were willing to discuss openly their life stories around their passionate learning, how it related to their vocational interests, and how their vocational interests may have developed. Fourthly, I took care to avoid participants who were in a real or perceived power-based relationship with me as the researcher.
Finally, I searched for participants who had a post-secondary credential, due to my personal employment in a post-secondary institution, and my concern for the ongoing development of our students. I did not select for age, but assumed that people with a post-secondary credential would at least be in their early 20s. I did exclude some candidates largely because their vocations were similar to those already chosen. The reader should also recognize that my use of these criteria, in effect, created a group that as a whole enjoyed significant privilege in both their learning and vocational opportunities.

The research process began when I purposively selected the first participant in June 2014 and continued until I identified the last participant in March 2015. I identified participants through a variety of personal and professional contacts. Three participants were found following a snowball sampling (Merriam, 2009; Polkinghorne, 2005) process. As a dean in a post-secondary institution, I used my network of personal contacts to identify intermediaries from whom I requested help in identifying passionate learners in their respective vocations.

In the three cases where participants were identified using intermediaries, the intermediaries were given the introductory letter contained in Appendix A, and were requested to send it to individuals whom they felt might participate. I did not request feedback from the intermediaries on how many people may have been sent or saw the letter. In one of the three cases, the letter was posted on a bulletin board at a training academy where interested parties who worked at the academy could read the posting and respond to me if interested. In all cases, it was left up to the potential participants to contact me directly if interested in participating. When interested potential participants contacted me, I responded to the potential participant initially through email and then through personal interviews by telephone, focusing on the selection criteria. I added candidates to a list of possible participants as they were identified.
I identified two participants whom I had met previously on a casual basis and whom I suspected might be potential research participants. In both cases, I sent the participants the introductory letter in Appendix A, and waited for a response. In neither case did I pursue the individual after I sent the initial letter. In both cases, the individuals voluntarily expressed interest in participating.

**Ethical Concern for Participants**

The welfare and confidentiality of the participants were my primary concerns during the performance of the research. I requested each participant provide a pseudonym and sign the CRREB approved consent form, included as Appendix B, prior to beginning the interview process. All participants completed consent forms, which I kept in a locked location. I strictly protected the confidentiality of each participant in all cases.

I did not expect the research to include subjects that would create embarrassment or concern; nevertheless, there were some emotionally charged experiences described to me. In these cases, the wishes of the participant governed the decision on whether material was included in the narrative or not.

I now describe the methods used for my research in detail under the headings of data collection, data analysis and interpretation, data validity, and finally the limitations and delimitations of the research.

**Methods**

My intent was to co-produce a personal life story for each participant, describing how he or she had become a passionate learner in his or her respective vocation. I was also interested in hearing about their learning experiences in their vocations in order to respond to the research questions. The available literature and my own experience led me to suggest to the participants
that they should start their personal stories as early in their lives as possible, describe their biographic experiences growing up, including their educational experience, and eventually how they selected their various vocations.

In overview, the narrative creation process followed for each of the five participants was identical. I collected initial interview data and wrote a draft narrative myself. In each case, the process of assembling the narrative revealed gaps and additional questions, which I took back to the participant in a second interview. I then produced a second draft narrative, which I returned to each participant in written form. I asked the participant to read and comment on the narrative, noting errors or additional thoughts. I collected the final comments from each participant either in written form or through a third interview and modified the narrative accordingly. I wrote my own personal narrative after completing the narratives for the five participants.

**Data Collection**

My application of narrative inquiry relied upon in-depth interviews as the primary source of research data (Chase, 2011). I asked the participants to share their stories concerning the subject matter as outlined in the research questions. I loosely guided the participants, rather than created structured responses to formal interview questions. During this process, I used the thematic prompts included as *Appendix C*, in the event that the participant did not mention some of the areas of research interest. These prompts were seldom necessary; all participants spoke in a natural narrative flow about the areas of interest. The intent in this approach was to allow the participants to freely elaborate on their experiences and the related meaning developed by them toward their vocational learning experiences over time.

The sequence of the interviews and narrative creation process proceeded in all cases in the same general format, starting with a single interview, usually over an hour in length. I
recorded and transcribed all interviews myself in order to deepen my connection with the research participants. The transcriptions were coded informally by highlighting and flagging comments made by the participants that seemed relevant to the narrative, taking into account the three-dimensional space view of narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This three-dimensional view included the “personal and social (interaction); past, present, and future (continuity); combined with the notion of place (situation)” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50, italics in the original). I then used the informally coded transcription to create a written narrative account (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 142; Van Manen, 1990, p. 170) of the participant’s biographical experiences, covering the data that appeared relevant to the research questions. The accounts used extensive quotations from the participants and I deliberately left them lengthy to broaden the subject matter material retained. In the terminology of Clandinin and Connelly (2000), both the interview transcriptions and the draft narratives became “field texts” (p. 93). In the creation of the draft narratives, there were often gaps left in the participant’s stories or indications of an additional topic of interest that I highlighted in the first draft of the narrative.

The second interview was almost always an hour in length as well, and its intent was to fill gaps in the first narrative account, explore emerging topics of interest, and ensure coverage of the thematic prompts. I then followed the same process as the first interview by transcribing and informally coding the transcription and then modifying the draft narrative appropriately. In some cases this process was undertaken a third time, as I felt necessary. I polished the completed draft narrative grammatically to make it as readable as possible. I then returned the polished draft narrative to the participants for their review and correction. In all cases a corrected version of the narrative was returned to me and I produced a completed “research text” (Clandinin & Connelly,
narrative, which could be used for data analysis. In two cases, I recorded and transcribed the feedback process as an interview and used the transcription to modify and complete the research text narrative. As originally anticipated, the final research text narrative contained a large amount of direct quotation from the individual participants (Chase, 2011).

Data Analysis and Interpretation

I performed data analysis using the constant comparative method (Charmaz, 2006; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I analyzed the interview data for each participant using an informal coding technique in which I highlighted, tabbed, and annotated the printed interview transcripts and then organized them into the initial draft narrative. The content of the first draft narrative was derived from the three-dimensional space of narrative inquiry: the dimensions of time continuity, social interaction, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The draft became a biographical story for each participant, including elements of their educational and vocational backgrounds, leading up to the time at which the narrative was completed. I refer to these narratives as the participant’s vocational narrative or simply narrative. There was constant comparison between the interview comments and the emerging narrative during the writing process. Often gaps in the data emerged, which I recorded and addressed in the second interview.

The creation of the first draft narrative was both analytical (based on the coding process) and interpretive in nature. I considered the narrative to be a co-creation with the participants of their story of becoming a passionate learner in their respective vocations. As Chase (2011) described: “When narrative researchers interpret narratives heard during interviews, they begin with narrators’ voices and stories, thereby extending the narrator–listener relationship and the active work of listening into the interpretive process” (p. 424). I diligently tried to maintain unity with the individuals whose story I was interpreting, when participating in the interpretative
process (Riessman, 2008, p. 12). The interpretive process “can be characterized as moving between two metaphors—that of a field text, constructed through the activities of data collection, and that of a narrative text, which is meant to convey the researcher’s present understanding and interpretation of the data” (Cohen, Kahn, & Steeves, 2000).

I formed the second interview around gaps identified in the first draft narrative, the thematic prompts located in Appendix C, and new intuitively derived questions that had emerged from the creation of the first draft text. The analytical (informal coding of the transcript) and interpretive process was again followed in the creation of the second draft narrative text. I returned the second draft text to the participants with a request that they review the text, comment on areas where there were factual errors or where there was misunderstanding of their experiences, or perhaps the associated meaning they derived from the experiences. I then wrote the third narrative text, which I returned to each participant as a personal record of his or her experiences. This third draft text, as recorded for each participant in Chapter Four, became the research text from which I performed further data analysis and interpretation, as described below. I created my own vocational narrative as the sixth participant, as a final step after the completion of the five participant vocational narratives.

The completed vocational narrative for each participant, including my own, was analysed using the informal coding technique to identify vocational narrative threads that appeared in the lives of each participant. These narrative threads were smaller, focused narratives, oriented around vocational themes that reoccurred through the life stories of the participants. The narrative threads were isolated from the larger vocational narratives, not additive to the vocational narrative. The identification of the narrative threads was both an analytical and interpretive process, again following a constant comparative approach (Charmaz, 2006; Merriam
& Tisdell, 2015). I recorded the results of this process in a section following each participant’s narrative in Chapter Four, entitled: [the participant’s name] *Narrative Threads*. I documented the narrative threads as findings, following the vocational narratives, for the convenience of the readers.

Further details of the data analysis performed and the findings are presented in Chapter Five. I coded the data according to categories, some of which emerged during the data analysis process and others of which were directly aligned to categories used in the research questions. These categories included vocational interest, disruptive events, choosing and entering vocation, vocational identity development, vocational learning and possible stagnation.

The response to the research questions in Chapter Six—Discussion, includes largely interpretive content in response to the research questions.

In summary, I performed data analysis and interpretation for each participant, firstly in the creation of each participant’s vocational narrative and, secondly, in the identification of vocational narrative threads for each participant. I recorded this data analysis and interpretation in Chapter Four—Vocational Narrative Findings. Further data analysis and interpretation was performed in order to respond directly to the research questions and is recorded in Chapter Five—Additional Findings Organized by Research Question. Final data interpretation was performed in responding to the research question in Chapter Six—Discussion.

**Data Validity**

Polkinghorne (2007) studied the validity issues associated with narrative inquiry and identified two areas where validity is of particular concern. He posited that the role of the narrative writer and interpreter was to argue the validity of the evidence collected from the participants and to argue the validity of the interpretation offered by the researcher. Polkinghorne
(2007) emphasized that it is more important to capture the meaning expressed by the participant accurately and fully than to determine whether the events really happened as stated. The researcher is seeking narrative truth rather than historical truth.

In order to improve the validity of the evidence collected from the participants, Polkinghorne (2007) made several practical suggestions on the data collection process, which I followed as closely as possible. Firstly, participants were encouraged to use figurative expressions to help overcome the limits of language in conveying the depth of their experience. Secondly, I attempted to enable deeper reflection by encouraging the participants to take more time to explore the meaning of the life situation under discussion. I planned at least three interviewing sessions in order to allow time for trust and relationship to build between the participants and myself as the researcher, so that the participants might reveal more of their inner thoughts and meaning. Finally, as interviewer, I was sensitive to my own tone and demeanour during the interview sessions in order to encourage the participants to reveal their inner thoughts.

I believe that the validity of the vocational narratives themselves was reaffirmed in each case by the opportunity the participants had to read, modify, and approve the final narratives. In each case, the narratives contained a large percentage of material quoted directly from the participants but, in addition, the participants read and agreed that I accurately portrayed their personal vocational narratives.

Polkinghorne (2007) described his view of how an interpretive commentary (such as I present in Chapter Six—Discussion) should be written for interpretive validity:

The general purpose of an interpretative analysis of storied texts is to deepen the reader’s understanding of the meaning conveyed in a story. An interpretation is not simply a summary or précis of a storied text. It is a commentary that uncovers and clarifies the
meaning of the text. It draws out implications in the text for understanding other texts and for revealing the impact of the social and cultural setting on people’s lives. In some cases, narrative interpretation focuses on the relationships internal to a storied text by drawing out its themes and identifying the type of plot the story exemplifies; in other cases it focuses on social and cultural environment that shaped the story’s life events and the meaning attached to them. (p. 483)

I believe that a reader who retraced the steps I followed in developing findings and discussion chapters would consider my comments to be a plausible interpretation of the data collected from the participants and therefore a valid analysis and interpretation.

Limitations

A limitation of the study was that all participants could be regarded as privileged in that they were able to access post-secondary education at various times in their lives, and were working in paid vocational contexts at the time of the interviews. Furthermore, due to the recruitment process, there was an unequal gender representation among the participants with two women and four men participating.

I asked all participants during the recruitment process if they were passionate vocational learners and, accordingly, all participants affirmed this requirement. There was no definition of the expression *passionate vocational learner* given to the participants, nor was there extensive discussion of what this expression meant to me, as researcher. I left the meaning of passionate vocational learner open to the interpretation of each participant.

Finally, my personal traits as an interviewer, such as age and gender, may or may not have affected the degree of openness attained during the interview process.
Delimitations

Firstly, the number of participants was restricted to six, due to the time needed to interview the participants and to create and document the narratives.

Secondly, there was a deliberate effort made to ensure that each participant was in a vocation different from those of the other participants. For example, I chose only one person with a nursing vocation, although I could easily have recruited other nurses as participants. This helped to improve the diversity of the group but eliminated a comparison of the experiences of two individuals in the same vocation.

Lastly, during the creation of the narratives, I used only those elements I believed directly or indirectly related to the research topic and questions.

Summary

In Chapter Three I outlined my design for addressing the research questions posed originally in Chapter One. I began the chapter by restating the research questions and by describing my research ontology and epistemology. I then outlined the theoretical framework, which provides the broad concepts, theories, and terminology used as an underpinning for the research process. I briefly defined the chosen research methodology, narrative inquiry, before discussing the people who formed my participant group and the processes I followed for participant recruitment. Finally, I discussed the methods followed in my research, including data collection, data analysis and interpretation, the approach to data validity and the limitations and delimitations of the research.

Chapters Four and Five contain my research findings. Chapter Four—Vocational Narrative Findings, contains the narratives of six individuals who are self-described passionate learners in their vocations. I wrote and assembled these narratives as the researcher, although I
made every effort to create the narratives in an open, non-judgmental, and friendly way with the participants. Indeed, I truly enjoyed the relationships developed with each of these people during the process of creating the narratives. Chapter Four includes my summary of the narrative threads revealed by each participant, which were eventually used by each participant to influence vocational development decision. Chapter Five presents additional findings, organized in a way that enabled me to answer the research questions.
CHAPTER FOUR: VOCATIONAL NARRATIVE FINDINGS

Overview

I now describe the vocational narratives of the six participants, including myself, who are all self-professed passionate vocational learners. I created these narratives in order to provide understanding, insight, and most especially context for the findings in response to my research questions. I assembled the narratives, apart from my own, from 14 interviews carried out over a 14-month period. The participants proofread and corrected each vocational narrative in order to verify the content. The material I present for each participant includes two parts: (a) the individual vocational narrative itself, and (b) my own reflections as a researcher on the narrative content, which form what I call the narrative threads. I interpreted the narrative threads as vocationally related stories that the individual internalized and retained. I isolated these stories (narrative threads) from each vocational narrative as stories that seem to have influenced the vocational decision-making of the participant, and that helped the participant make sense of her experiences. In each case, I drew the narrative threads from the vocational narratives; they were not additive to the vocational narratives. I illustrate the vocational narrative and the narrative threads in Figure 4.
Figure 4. Vocational Narrative with Data Categorized by Narrative Thread

The six study participants were, using their pseudonyms:

A Euro-Canadian female named Alison in her early 50s who was a nurse-educator;

A Euro-Canadian female named Jules in her early 30s and who was trained as a journeyman tile-setter and who was about to re-enter the workforce after having two children;

A Euro-Canadian male named Aaron in his late 50s who created his own vocation as a “fixer” of corporate IT organizations;

A Euro-Canadian male named Fly who was a firefighter training officer until he turned 60 and entered mandatory retirement just as we completed our interviews; and

A Euro-Canadian male named George in his mid-20s who worked as a process safety officer a few years after becoming an instrumentation engineering technologist.

I (Rand) am the final participant, and I am a Euro-Canadian male in my early 60s, an engineering-educator employed as a dean at a technical post-secondary institution.

Although I wrote the vocational narratives, they contain numerous quotations and are the consolidated result of at least three interviews or interactive communications with each
participant. They include a final review of the narrative by each participant. I briefly introduce each participant, provide the written vocational narrative, and give a summary of the related narrative threads.

I gave names to the narrative threads for each person as I deemed appropriate. I used three criteria to identify narrative threads. Firstly, the threads were often parts of the narrative that arose at different points in the life of the individual but nevertheless, showed consistency over time. Secondly, the threads played a major role in the vocational story of the individual. Thirdly, some narrative threads appeared to result from a single vocationally important event in the life of the participant.

I took all the quotations in the individual narratives and the reflections sections from the interviews with the person under discussion. The narratives for the six participants follow, beginning with Alison.

**Alison’s Vocational Narrative**

At the time of the interviews, Alison was a nurse-educator in her early 50s, a doctoral student in education and a mother of two children in their late teens. Alison had been a keen athlete, a winter sports enthusiast and soccer player virtually her whole life; in fact, shortly after an interview in 2014, she flew to Brazil to watch the World Cup Soccer matches.

**Childhood Memories**

Alison was the third child to be born into a tightly grouped family of four children. Her father was a mining engineer who had grown up in Northern Ontario, but did his engineering education at a small university in Northern Michigan, where he met her mother. Alison was born in a city in Northern Ontario, but her family settled into life in a major city in Alberta when she was five years old, a city that became her long-term home.
Alison’s lasting memories of her early childhood are of snow and playing in the snow. She speaks of a relatively happy childhood with little trauma to recall. The closeness of her siblings in age is notable: “Four kids in four years. . . . have you ever heard of the saying Catholic twins? Like my sister and brother were born 11 months apart.” After speaking at length over two interviews, and as we were chatting and walking to the door, she said abruptly, “I’m a supporter, ever since I was small, third child, looking after the youngest, and helping the older.”

She went on to explain that from early childhood and into her adult years, she constantly provided care, in particular for her younger brother:

My younger brother was, and still is . . . he has a hard time taking care of himself, . . . I would follow him home from school and pick up his mitts and his toque and whatever he dropped as we walked home. I’d walk just maybe five minutes behind him picking up his stuff, and that was a theme from then until now.

She spoke of another episode when she and her younger brother were both university students:

When he was in university he’d stay up all night typing a paper . . . he would leave the paper on the kitchen table, like he’d forget it . . . I’d grab his paper . . . and somehow I find him on the campus, [his name] you stayed up all night, like hand the stupid thing in, here it is . . . it has just carried on into adulthood.

Alison’s caring nature became apparent later in our conversations as she described how she had visited and cared for her elderly grandparents:

I’ve always been supportive, right? Like I took care my grandparents, for example when I was in university, so I maybe was 20, and my grandparents were probably . . . [in] their middle 70s, and on reading week, they lived in Northern Michigan, I would go to be with
them instead of going . . . bust loose [spoken in a loud elated voice], or whatever, so I just did that stuff.

Her practice of caring for her elderly grandparents continued until the time of their death, well after she had a family of her own.

My grandma lived to be 99 and my grandpa lived to be 95. So, as my parents got older . . . even though I had babies, and young family, I would go to Northern Michigan . . . like two or three times a year, and organize care for them, because they ended up in a nursing home.

**High School**

Alison’s memories of high school appeared unhappy overall. Her marks were good with the exception of math, but her interests fell out of synch with her peers, and she lost connection with many of those who had previously been her friends in junior high. She was an athletic young woman and played soccer almost constantly from an early age. In her words, “I’ve always just moved.” She expressed a love of activity involved in physical education and running on the track team, but she mentioned that she especially loved soccer. She ran competitively and played soccer through junior high and high school. After that, the competitive running disappeared. Her love of soccer stayed with her, however, and remains strong today.

Alison spoke of her high school years after Grade 9:

I just didn’t like high school . . . I just couldn’t find my place or my way for any of those grades, my people were gone, you know, the people that you hang around with in Grade 9, like over the summer, and then you find them in September and they were all just either boy crazy, or didn’t want to do the things that you wanted to do, you know, that’s
when all the girls dropped out of sports; you are on this great soccer team and then boys come along, Grade 10, poof, no one wants to play sports.

She “lost her people,” a meaningful comment that laments how she and her friends belonged to something bigger than any individual—a great team—and then it was destroyed by the loss of her friends. Alison’s mother started to worry about how abruptly her engagement with her friends and school had changed. When her mother learned the cause, she started putting pressure on Alison to take up new activities. The school band was her mother’s solution and she encouraged Alison to become a band member. The clarinet became the instrument of choice to the degree Alison had no choice in the process. When she spoke of her experience in the band, her voice became slow and dull:

I played the clarinet for three years . . . first year, second year, third year . . . I mean I was in third, with two chicks who were stoned permanently, that’s why it was so horrible, right? I never advanced, I didn’t like it, I wasn’t trying either . . . my mom got me in the band, right? . . . [to] help me find my space, my place . . . but that was not it.

When I asked whether others in the family played an instrument, her response was emphatic. “Nobody else played an instrument . . . we were all horrible . . . awful squeaky recorders in elementary school, but no, there was no music playing in our house, it was brutal.” Alison associated with the band members to a degree. She was part of the group, but a reluctant part. She went on trips with the band but she never assimilated into musical band culture, she never set her heart on the hours of practice required to be a competent instrumentalist. Her experience of the band was far from a replacement for her “great” Grade 9 soccer team; in fact, it was a total letdown.
During high school, Alison developed an academic passion for one particular subject, the field of biology. She was fascinated by movement and by the human body, and one teacher in particular drew out her fascination:

The teacher was great; he was so great . . . it was fun, he let you pick whatever topic . . . I’m in Grade 11 . . . and I picked this topic . . . anorexia nervosa, because, like eating disorders, this was like a new thing in 1980, no one knew what it was. . . . He was just as excited as everyone else was. . . . He was a good teacher. And I mean he let me take Grade 12 biology in Grade 11, right? He believed in [me] he saw how excited I was about the topic, right? There’s some of that too, he favoured me for sure, he did, a bit.

Alison had a particular fascination for the biology of the human body, something she has long associated with her physical activities such as running, soccer, and physical education in general:

Biology in general . . . I’ve always been interested in the body, which sort of lines up with always needing to move, and liking gym and liking phys ed., so that part was fascinating. Just even learning body parts, and how the body moves, and the digestive system and circulatory system, is fascinating, because . . . it’s in the book, and it’s fake, but it’s also you, your heartbeat. . . . You can run and feel lactic acid and soreness, well there was direct application maybe too, it didn’t seem theoretical, it seemed practical, maybe that was . . . part of it.

Notably, when Alison studied biology of the human body, she saw the theory as practical, relating a runner’s soreness to the build-up of lactic acid in the muscles, a tangible relationship for someone who has been a runner her whole life.
Choosing a Career

Alison’s tale of picking her future career again showed strong parental influence. Her older sister had a lifelong desire to be a teacher but Alison was uncertain about her own direction:

I sort of went into nursing by default, in a lot of ways, which is kind of funny. I never always wanted to be a nurse. I mean in our family, there was sort of an expectation that you would go on to University. So, four kids in four years, . . . my sister went teacher, my brother went, . . . he’s in business, then I was going, and then my younger brother. I wanted to be a phys ed. teacher, because I just like to move, and I thought, oh, I could just jump and run all day if you are doing that. And they [her parents] said, [Alison made a vocal sound like “nutt”] nutt, nutt, nutt . . . then I said, okay, well I want to be a social worker then, and they said, nutt, nutt, nutt . . . you’ll get too attached. So, then I took the calendar for the [local university], and I looked at the social work courses, and I looked at the phys ed. courses, and I kind of combined the two, and came up with nursing. There was your biology, and your physiology, and your zoology . . . everything that you are taking for kinesiology, but there was your psychology, and your sociology, and everything you are taking for social work . . . nurse by default, completely, but I don’t regret it either.

Alison compromised with her parents and entered a university nursing program. She had no family history or personal experience in nursing. Her mother did administrative work on occasion, which was unrelated to nursing. Alison’s neighbour, whom Alison considered in some respects a second mother, was a registered nurse at a local children’s hospital but Alison recalled no connection between her neighbour’s occupation and her own choices.
Alison applied for the four-year nursing degree program at the local university. She spoke very little of her time in the nursing program, apart from mentioning that the nurses who graduated from baccalaureate programs were a small minority of the nurses working in the field when she graduated. Most nursing students, at that time, came from two- or three-year programs, where the nursing students focused on clinical nursing practice in hospitals. Some people in the nursing community considered the baccalaureate degree nurses “book smart,” but relatively inexperienced as clinicians, a perspective that influenced Alison’s later choices of employment.

**Early Career**

There was whimsy in Alison’s description of how she found her first work as a nurse:

Yeah, I got my bachelor of nursing, and then my friend and I went on a road trip. We applied for jobs in California, and the way we did it was to look at a map and we picked any town with the name beach in it, so like Huntington Beach, Newport Beach, so I mean at that time you’re writing letters and sending them off. So, we just sent them all down and in about a month later we went on a road trip, so we . . . went all these places that we had applied and we camped and we had a lot of fun. . . . When we got there . . . I’m going to say somewhere in like a suburb of LA, with the name beach in it, . . . we went and toured the hospital . . . we just realized that the health system [in the US] is not like the health system in Canada, so . . . we didn’t go anywhere. But right before I left, because I wasn’t sure that it was going to work out, I looked at a map again and I applied anywhere in Alberta and BC, near a ski hill . . . so when I got back I actually had an interview in [a town in South Eastern] B.C.

Alison found a position where her four-year nursing degree was supplemented by extensive clinical experience.
I went out there for two years and I worked at my first job in a 50-bed rural hospital where you did everything. I called it my extended clinical because at that time, there were quite a few hospital programs, and those kind of nurses I think maybe had a little bit more legitimacy, so it was about 1985, and about 10% of nurses had degrees, most had hospital programs. I decided I needed more clinical because everybody said everyone who went to university didn’t get enough clinical and the best way to do that was to go to a rural hospital.

After only two years in her first job, Alison and her nursing friend decided to travel together and the pair spent the next year travelling abroad. Alison and her travelling companion returned home briefly before adventurously deciding to explore work in a teaching hospital in another Canadian province. The teaching hospital environment afforded Alison the opportunity to work at the core of medical-surgical nursing. She moved to the new city where she worked on an acute care cardio-vascular and thoracic surgical unit in a teaching hospital.

In my mind, I thought, I wanted to work in ICU, so I worked in a cardiovascular and thoracic surgical floor. So quite sick people, with heart and lung surgeries. So, they’d be in ICU for about two days, 48 hours, then they come to our unit, it was quite acute.

Alison found this experience unexpectedly hard on an emotional level and she lasted only a year. As she described to me her emotional state prior to leaving employment at the teaching hospital she said, “I thought, I don’t want to do this, I don’t want to go to ICU, I don’t like it. I don’t like these people who are so sick. I can do it, but I don’t like it.”

Alison left the job and went travelling for a six-month period before returning to her home in Alberta, where she found the employment situation had changed dramatically. This was a time of healthcare fiscal restraint in Alberta and, as a result, she decided to return to B.C. where
she became a public health nurse in the rural area close to where she had first worked. It seemed the public health nurse role with the opportunity it affords to interact with people in the community suited Alison. Alison loved public health nursing in this rural community where she was able to practise nursing independently, free from the scrutiny of physicians:

I was a public health nurse and we were still at a time when you could do anything, it was generalist practice, which meant you could do home visiting, and schools, and clinics and vaccinations, but then it started to change, and kind of got specialized. You became either a school nurse or . . .

Alison was in a long-distance off-and-on relationship with a man she had met during her early work life in the B.C. ski town, but who now lived far away in her home city. In order to see where the relationship might go, she decided to return to her home city where she found work, again, as a public health nurse. The variety offered by public health nursing but, more importantly, the opportunity to interact with primarily healthy people in the community and especially to help everyday people in need of nursing support, appealed to Alison. The nature of the work is evident from a particular team she became a part of:

At one point in time, in one of the schools, I was in a sort of a preventive thing, we got together with resource teacher, the principal, somebody from the [city] recreation, police officer, someone from mental health and myself, as the school nurse, and we kind of made a summer camp for “at risk” children at the school. Was that nursing? I don’t know, right? Is it collaborative practice in the helping professions?

When we spoke about her early career and why she moved around frequently, she said: There was no thinking, like there really was no thinking in the 20s, . . . there was no plan . . . I think when I went back to [her home city] I was thinking about my husband, and
thinking about the possibility, you know, not a long-distance relationship, and maybe being married. . . Yeah, so that was a huge draw, for sure. Where is this going to go? . . . in my 20s there was no clear thought about the vocational path.

**Work in the Community**

Alison returned home in her late 20s and married the man she met and dated briefly during her first stint in B.C. From a career perspective, Alison continued working as a public health nurse throughout the city. Not long after she returned home and before her marriage, an event took place that had a profound impact on Alison’s professional life. Alison appeared deeply moved during the interview as she told the story:

I was a very young public health nurse, I had a family, . . . I was visiting them, . . . I still get a little emotional about it; I don’t like to talk about it. I had visited them over the course of a couple of months, and the wife, she would call me then all of a sudden she would hang up . . . go to see them . . . they’d be moved again, and with two little kids, and she was pregnant, and they were new to [the city], and they had all these struggles, and it was about 1992 or something like that, around there, . . . and we didn’t screen for violence, I knew they were poor and I knew they needed support, but I just couldn’t put my finger on it.

One day she returned to her home clinic and the charge nurse, with a copy of the local newspaper in hand, called to her, “Hey, [Alison], I think this is your family.” Alison looked at the paper:

And there it was splattered all of the front page . . . he’d hit her over the head with a hammer four times, and killed her. She was four months pregnant . . . it just sort of switched my whole worldview . . . I feel very guilty . . . I felt very, what did I miss . . . I
really suck at this, like how could I . . . It was right in front of my face . . . and I didn’t see it, but no one saw it, right? No one else saw it too, and I found out later that she’d been in and out of shelters and stuff like that, but it was the aftermath too, because I was interviewed by homicide detectives. I had to go to court for the child welfare hearing, and he was like sitting right there . . . it had a huge impact on me.

Alison shared this story reluctantly; as though she felt deeply connected to the tragedy. The encounter with this family and the wife’s tragic demise placed a great deal of personal meaning on the issue of domestic partner violence. It gave the issue a human face and it became a major factor in propelling Alison through many of her passionate learning episodes in the years that followed.

**Graduate Studies in Nursing**

Alison was in her early 30s and had been a public health nurse for approximately five years when she felt the need for change in her professional life. She was becoming bored with the work she was doing. We talked further about this boredom, and she explained:

I just get bored, and that was one of the times . . . in public health the first year is a huge learning curve, and then the second year you’re really hitting your stride, and then by the third it’s smooth and it’s slick, . . . and by year five, I was bored.

Alison told me of two other occasions, later in her life, when she had overcome major challenges in her work but in time, as the challenge dwindled, she became restless. On those occasions, she sought change in the work she was doing by changing jobs or by undertaking additional educational goals. In her early 30s, she chose to do a master’s degree in nursing at the local university to relieve the boredom. Alison recalls the master’s program as a life-changing experience; it became the first large-scale example of passionate learning in her vocation.
Alison’s peers had difficulty understanding her motivation for doing another degree at this stage in her life. She recalled their speculation that she was doing the degree in order to rise in the nursing hierarchy. Her real reasons were intrinsic:

I’m doing it because I really want to read in the area of violence . . . . You know because everyone else, like 75, 80, 90% of them, were in it because they wanted to be a nurse manager. So, it wasn’t a means to an end for me, ever . . . it’s still not. It’s about curiosity . . . and restlessness.

Alison began the program at the local university although shortly after she started, she became pregnant with her first child. The first year of the program was an intensive learning experience but after the child was born she reduced her course load to the bare minimum. Another year passed before she was able to return to fulltime studies, but this time her husband, who had taken a year off work, was at home caring for the child.

Alison’s master’s program was based on her interest in “the role of the public health nurse in women’s shelters.” She made her course choices around the counselling of women and children. She found the coursework included a thorough feminist grounding, something she had not encountered previously. When she spoke of this period, Alison was animated, especially in terms of the influence of one professor in particular, a professor who gave Alison a profoundly significant quote: “You need to think about how you think about your nursing practice.” She felt she was reflective about her nursing practice but the professor’s approach went one step further. The fact that Alison could actually organize her thinking around how she was going to think about something “blew [her] out of the water.” This simple statement became a hallmark of Alison’s own professional practice, as she elaborated:
It’s the ultimate in reflective practice and it’s the ultimate in [a] kind of the back story . . . it’s just more open and contextual . . . it cracked it open for me . . . If you’re not thinking about what you’re doing, then your feet have stopped moving . . . in soccer you keep your feet moving, and so that reflection is about, sort of, academically and vocationally keeping your feet moving. You’re not stuck, and still, you’re moving . . . it’s about growth and then it’s about what else, and what else, and what’s possible, . . . it’s about growth and possibilities, potentials, reflection; reflection can lead you there.

Alison described the professor as “quiet and nice, and supportive . . . but she just facilitated passion.” In general, Alison, who studied adult learning theory, described this period as highly transformative in the sense used by adult educator, Jack Mezirow. Alison started looking at the world differently from the way she read the newspaper to the way she saw her nursing practice. She started to perceive social power differentials more clearly and the misuse of power behind the news.

Alison appeared thoughtful as she described that particular professor. The professor was an experienced community nurse and that similarity in their backgrounds facilitated a connection with Alison’s own practice and to Alison personally. Furthermore, the professor created a safe environment where Alison was able to verbalize her difficult understanding and expressing thoughts, such as her reflections on the way she thought about her practice. To articulate and share her reflective thoughts left her feeling vulnerable. Alison said:

There’s risk, and so you need a sort of kindness, that support, a bit of a soft place to fall or knowing you’re not going to get “That’s wrong, no, you’re not on the right track.” I think there’s a piece of that in a really good teacher or to help you become passionate about what you’re learning . . . safety, right . . . safety, yeah, to take the risk.
Counselling

After Alison had completed her master’s degree, she entered a period of her life she calls the “crazy many jobs” period, spanning about five years. The crazy many jobs included whatever she could find and fit into the schedule of her growing family. Her husband returned to work as an engineer while she picked up a wide variety of casual jobs in and around the nursing profession. In the past, she had worked with many people in the local area and these relationships resulted in opportunities for nursing-related work in various locations. One of the crazy many jobs hit a particular chord with Alison that resonated deeply within her, although it came in a surprising form:

I finished my master’s and I got a phone call from someone who I used to work with in public health, and she was working at . . . a shelter. At the shelter they do counselling for men, women, and families. It’s an emergency shelter, in one half, but . . . the other half of the shelter was like counselling for men who had been mandated to counselling for abusing their wives. So she phoned me up and said [Alison], we are looking for a strong woman. And I’m thinking, so are you calling me then? She said, we need you to come here and counsel. And I said, but I’ve just been three years studying violence against women and now you’re telling me you want me to come and counsel men? Are you on glue?

Alison considered herself a “softie,” in the sense of emotional tenderness, a perception reminiscent of her parents’ advice against a social work profession. She had just completed three years of her life studying violence against woman while doing her master’s program and did not miss the irony of the situation. Regardless, she took the job. There was something in her that recognized a meaningful opportunity to help others and to make a tangible contribution toward
reducing further cases of partner violence. When we spoke of why she had taken the job, Alison was able to only hint at the appeal: “On the one hand I was completely, like scared shitless, but on the other hand I was completely fascinated, and so maybe it appealed to the curiosity, restlessness, risk-taking piece, and that learning growth potential, . . . possibilities.”

Alison began working in the shelter counselling men, a job that stretched her well beyond the normal bounds of a nursing professional. She would go to the shelter only a couple of nights per week, so the hours of work were low. She had not trained for that job specifically; even the counselling courses taken as a master’s student were for woman and children. Finally, she became pregnant shortly after beginning the work, which left her feeling, at times, “exceedingly uncomfortable, being a pregnant woman in this group of violent men.” Nevertheless, Alison found she truly loved the work she was doing:

My [master’s] topic was around partner violence . . . so it’s 1990 something, we were calling it abuse of women. We weren’t calling it partner violence or anything like that. So that’s what I studied but then I ended up counselling men . . . and I loved that job . . . my kids were little . . . I would go in the evening, a couple evenings a week and go counsel, with men. It was good . . . I loved that job, I would still do today . . . well, it’s evening work, and the pay was terrible, but honestly . . . one of my favourite jobs was that job; I loved it.

Alison recalled an anecdote from that period of part-time counselling that gives some insight into how her peers perceived her. A male colleague who co-facilitated the groups remarked to her, “Well, you’re a chartered psychologist, eh?” She started to laugh and replied, “Actually, no. I have a Master of Nursing [degree], and I studied in the area of violence, and my
option courses were in counselling.” The counselling field drew Alison, a fact that caused her to stretch the bounds of professional training in order to fulfil her attraction to this area.

**Nurse Educator**

For the past 10 years, leading up to our interviews, Alison worked primarily for a university as a nurse-educator teaching students online nursing theory courses and facilitating clinical nursing courses in the community and in hospitals. She also worked at a local hospital in a minor OR (operating room) on a limited basis, but felt this role was a poor fit and that she was a “fish out of water.” The role required her to provide pre- and post-operative care to women who were undergoing tests for breast cancer. There was constant pressure to perform her duties as a quick transaction and then move on to the next patient. Nevertheless, she could see the women were vulnerable and in need of more care and support:

I would be working with a woman, she’d be crying her eyes out, and you’d be teaching [her] about her surgery, and then, I’d come out of the clinic room and the surgeon would say: “What are you doing in there, what took you so long?” And, I thought, I cannot reconcile this.

As a result, Alison ended this role in order to concentrate on her studies and educational practice.

Alison’s current practice as a nurse educator enabled her to retain her professional nursing participation while emphasizing those aspects she considered most important and limiting those aspects less aligned to her experience and state of mind. She chose, for the short term at least, to avoid the practice of what she somewhat facetiously refers to as “ooey gooey” nursing, although as a minor side effect, it is no longer easy to explain to people what she does by simply “naming her hospital.” More importantly, her work with the university afforded her
the opportunity to work directly with nursing students online, and to guide the students at their clinical sites in the surrounding area:

I am . . . helping mentor the students who are, hopefully . . . taking up some of what I’m sharing with them. . . . It’s casting [a] wider net for relational practice, we talk a lot about relational practice, ethical practice. We talk about their specific practice like dressing changes, and starting IVs, and all of that stuff, giving a vaccination to a squirming toddler . . . we talk a lot about context, and relationship, and what else, what else is going on [in the lives of the patient].

Alison’s emphasis on “relational practice,” was about understanding the context facing the patient, where they will be, how they will live, about the other things going on in the patient’s life that may affect treatment and the feasibility of care and recovery. These are aspects of nursing care that a nurse may uncover only through a relationship with the patient and Alison saw this approach as an essential part of her teaching. She recounted a particular success in her practice:

I teach my students about their patient teaching [how the patients should look after themselves when they leave the hospital]. The biggest sort of coup I ever had was this one student; she was a real emergency nurse . . . and her practice, as one of my students, was in the community. She said the next time someone comes into emergency, . . . “I’m going to picture where they live, whether it’s a farm, a rural farm . . . or in the city” . . . she was going to picture and see, was that realistic, what was their home like?

At the time of our interviews, Alison had worked as a professional nursing practitioner for over 25 years. At the start of her professional life, defining her role as a nurse was relatively
simple and straightforward. She took pride in the work she did, not to mention that it was easy to explain her profession to anyone who asked:

In the first 10 years of my career, I was a hospital nurse, I was a public health nurse, and I think I really identified and was really proud of being a nurse, and I would probably say, oh, I’m a nurse, and I work in the hospital in [the small BC town], and I’m a nurse, and I work in the [university] hospital, and I was really proud because of this university hospital, and I was on a cardiovascular and thoracic ward. . . . So, I was proud of it, and in the community too, I liked it because it was an independent practice and again . . . I was proud of what I did, and thought it cool and exciting, and I would probably explain it to people who were willing to listen. . . . I don’t know who’d be asking me after the first 10 years, it’s not that I’m not proud of being a nurse but I mean I continued to be an RN, and I kept my credentials, my hours and everything else, but I just did all these other things, and I think, I less identified with “I am an RN.” I don’t know, it’s like a label almost . . . it turned into a label, but it wasn’t the description, or wasn’t, the richness, wasn’t reflected, or the possibilities weren’t reflected.

As Alison’s experience grew and her roles strayed from the easily defined mainstream of nursing practice, her work became more complex and less easily explainable to the uninitiated. Over the years, she experienced many different nursing roles and from her descriptions of her likes and dislikes, she described being consistently more attracted to the relational, counselling or teaching side of the profession than to the less “relational,” more “transactional” practice of medical-surgical nursing. She has continued to hold more than one job as she grew and developed professionally, a practice most recently shown in the pursuit of her doctorate while she continued to work at the university as a nurse educator.
Although Alison was proudly both a nurse and a nurse-educator, she saw and reflected on how her practice became much more than the relatively simple clinical work she first experienced. At one point she mused:

Honestly, I’m more of a psychologist. It’s probably what I should have done, and didn’t, right? . . . like, my favourite job was counselling at the shelter, and I am abundantly fascinated about the human mind, and what makes people tick.

**Doctoral Studies**

Alison investigated a number of optional doctoral programs, both in the US and Canada, but in the end those options did not meet her needs. Eventually, she chose the “educator” portion of her “nurse-educator” role as the focus of her efforts and entered a doctoral program in education.

Alison expressed deep passion for her doctoral topic. It deals with an area she has read about, considered and been generally fascinated with for close to 20 years: “How do young adults understand intimate partner violence?” with a focus on understanding healthy, unhealthy, and violent intimate partner relationships. She returned to her passion for understanding, educating, and possibly reducing the incidence of intimate partner violence. When she embraced this topic, she was in a public health nurse frame of mind: “all about nurses screening for violence.” However, her focus on young adults came about because of another tragic event, the 2011 shootings of four young people near Claresholm, Alberta, and the related suicide of the shooter. All of the people involved were barely into their 20s. The man who did the shooting reacted to an ex-girlfriend’s apparent involvement with other men. Alison quickly realized that public health nurses would never have screened these young people and, furthermore, there was a gap in the literature concerning such events. She changed her topic accordingly and began
researching to fill the gap. When I asked Alison about her passion for learning, she spoke of her research topic:

Well, my topic, I mean I just light up when I start to talk about it and I have to calm myself down because not everyone is as interested in it as I am. I don’t know, I mean, I’ve studied and read and worked in the area, not worked-worked-worked, except for the shelter, in the area of violence for 20 years now. I mean it just fascinates me, right?

**Alison’s Narrative Threads**

Alison produced her story as a passionate learner in her vocation from several identifiable and intertwined narrative threads. I found the following narrative threads most significant in the way Alison formed, focused, and evolved her vocation.

**Caring Narrative**

Alison’s caring narrative thread was firstly evident in the support she gave her younger brother and later her grandparents. She mentioned that she thought of herself as a “supporter, ever since I was small,” which she described as an interest in assisting other people, or at least family members, as an outwardly focused characteristic of her life. Her ultimate choice of the nursing profession and the way she has leaned toward social issues are further evidence.

**Human Biology Narrative**

Alison showed a consistent interest in the functioning of the human body. The way she responded to, and remembers, her high school biology class experiences remained a vital experience of those years. Her athleticism promoted an interest in bodily performance and she considered both the fields of kinesiology and nursing, which she related to the operation of the human body, in her process of selecting a university discipline.
Practicality Narrative

Alison told stories of practicality throughout her vocational narrative. Samples included delivering her brother’s paper to him, seeing the connection between her biology and athletic pursuits, her choice of nursing as a practical profession, the extended clinical experience she gained at her first job, and her thoughts of reducing domestic violence through screening. Her practicality may well have influenced a number of her vocational and learning choices.

Nurse–counsellor Narrative

Alison’s story about choosing her nursing vocation showed both her parents’ perception of Alison’s emotional tenderness, but also the possibility that her parents influenced her away from a vocation as counsellor or psychologist. Alison was a registered nursing professional and built her life around the profession but she constantly revealed how she shaped her profession toward interpersonal counselling. The main examples were her jobs counselling healthy people as a public health nurse, her role as an educator, her favourite job counselling abusive men, and finally her relational practice orientation as a nurse-educator.

Carefree Narrative

Alison’s first few years after leaving university were notably carefree, according to her stories. Her efforts to find beachside and ski resort positions were almost whimsical, although they produced her “extended clinical” position in South Eastern B.C. Her periods of work were interspersed with extended periods of travel; she seemed to enjoy the lack of job commitment. She was serious about her profession and, as her professional affiliation proved, she was thoroughly competent in the role but in her own words there was “no thinking . . . no clear thought about a vocational path.”
**The Domestic Murder Narrative**

Alison’s inability to detect and even prevent the tragic incident with the young mother and her violent husband was a major turning point in her life. This event connected Alison with a tragedy. In a harsh and unexpected way, it put personal meaning into the words *domestic partner violence*. The event propelled Alison into what became a lifetime quest to understand and find ways to prevent such horrendous acts of violence.

**Public Health Narrative**

Alison gravitated quickly toward public health or community nursing in her early work life. Public health practice offered her the opportunity to work with people in need of her assistance, which seemed to align with her inner self. The variety offered by public health nursing but, more importantly, the opportunity to interact with real, healthy people in the community, and especially to help everyday people in need of nursing support, appealed deeply to Alison. Alison made it clear that as a public health nurse, she performed her duties outside of direct medical doctor supervision, an aspect of her profession she found to be oppressive at times.

**Relational Practice Narrative**

In recent years, Alison adopted the theme of “relational practice,” the importance of the nurse relating to the patients as thinking, feeling human beings, in need of comforting, as a hallmark of her educational practice. She tried very hard to instil this value into her nursing students. Alison’s recent reaction to the surgeon who questioned the time she was spending with recovering patients gave evidence of the depth of her belief in this area by causing her to leave that employment.
**Educator Narrative**

For over a decade Alison practised as an educator through the online university, although until just recently, she often did other nursing work in concert. Her work as a public health nurse, which was often instructional in nature, shows an affinity to an educational role. Finally, her doctoral work under the umbrella of a university educational faculty further enhances her educator narrative.

**Partner Violence Narrative**

Alison has developed a consistent interest in partner violence, largely triggered by her experiences as young public health nurse, but further developed through her formal education at both the master’s and doctoral level. She originally used the generative nature of this thread to examine how public health professionals might screen for partners at risk. Recently, she studied societal attitudes toward violence, an understanding that may eventually lead to prevention that screening practices cannot assure.

**Principled Self-assurance Narrative**

Alison consistently made decisions that required her to stand alone, but for reasons she considered important. As examples, Alison demonstrated her self-assurance by continuing with her much loved athletic pursuits, when many of her friends had given them up; she accepted her first job in order to build her clinical experience; she brought reflective practice into her teaching repertoire, because she felt it was a vital part of the nursing role. Finally, just prior to our interviews she left the hospital-based, breast cancer care facility, because she felt she was unable to fulfil the role as needed by the patients.
Alison’s narrative threads are used to show how they influenced her decision-making in Chapter Six, where her vocational development process is discussed further. I now describe Jules’s vocational narrative and corresponding narrative threads.

**Jules’s Vocational Narrative**

At the time of our interviews, Jules was in her early 30s, a wife and mother of two boys aged five and three. Jules attained a baccalaureate university degree in the humanities shortly after leaving high school, but she eventually trained as an apprentice tile-setter. Jules left her position in the trades when she became pregnant with her first son; she was on the verge of re-entering the paid workforce at the time of our last interview.

**Childhood Memories**

Jules’s family were originally part of a Mennonite community in Southwestern Ontario. Her grandparents sold their farm to a land developer and both her parents migrated from the religious farming community to more secular vocational pursuits. The culture of the community left a lasting impression on Jules:

I was raised in the Mennonite Church. Family reunions included people coming in horse and buggy and then people driving cars . . . I remember I was born in a big old stone house, a stone farmhouse, . . . I had a paternal grandma teach me how to make bread from scratch, teach me how to quilt . . . I treasure them [quilts], I have cedar boxes with quilts that were my great grandmother’s, that have been passed down. My grandmother quilted, hand quilted, no machine quilting, hand quilted my son’s little quilts, myself for my marriage, all the grandkids.

The two worlds she experienced, the traditional Mennonite community and the secular society she lived in, stimulated her interest in the broader world. “I think growing up with my
great grandparents, speaking in the German dialect . . . I always had a general interest in the world outside of the environment I was in.”

Jules was 12 years old when her parents decided to move to urban Alberta. A chemical company employed her mother and eventually asked her to move West. Around the same time, Jules’s father was developing his own career as a commercial airline pilot. When the family moved west he was doing contract work as a pilot, which meant that he alternated between extensive periods at home and extensive periods away from home, while he built his flight-time portfolio. The family’s move contained an unexpected and consequential element for Jules:

They had decided before they left, that they were going to get divorced, but they would move out together, and tell us [Jules and her younger brother] when we got here. So I was 12 and already feeling the impact of displacement. I’ve always been a loner so I think that I didn’t have a lot of friends, I only had a couple of friends, it [lack of friends] was hard, and then the family, and then the divorce.

Jules and her younger brother lived with her mother, and Jules was placed in a nearby French immersion school in the new city. Her placement in the French immersion school began a pattern language skill development that later became an important factor in her life. At first, Jules’s dad lived in a nearby community but he led a life increasingly apart from his children. As time passed, his employment changed into regular work as a charter and commercial airline pilot and consequently, he spent a great deal of time away from his children.

High School and the Dark

Jules spoke little of her days in high school, or at least little about her academic interests. The loss of her family and of her father as an active presence in her life overshadowed her memories of that time:
When I needed . . . guidance from my dad, like somebody to do your homework with, coach you through science . . . he wasn’t there. So, I felt like I always had to do everything on my own. My mom was dating; my dad was gone.

Since Jules’ father worked for a charter airline during the summers, Jules, while in high school, was able to spend time in Europe visiting with her father and travelling through England and other European countries, where she was further exposed to European languages.

In Jules’s early to mid-teens what she later came to know as the dark drew her in. Jules talked about the dark in various ways but when she was in high school, it had a lot to do with making bad decisions, on her own, without a lot of guidance from parents or other close people, and frequently under the influence of what became consistent drug use:

Yeah so then, I remember becoming not a very nice teenager, so like, [at ages] 14, 15, 16, 17, I was resentful, I missed my dad, so I wanted him to replace time with the things he bought me. It doesn’t mean anything, . . . that was the thought at the time, but it didn’t mean anything. And I didn’t know how to process emotion. I didn’t have a mom who did things with her daughter that other people were doing with theirs. . . . I started . . . using drugs, so at 14, I started using drugs.

The Rave Culture that developed in the late 1990s drew Jules into using drugs. This environment resulted first in her use of the drug ecstasy and then developed to an addiction to cocaine:

This was the time of rave culture . . . they used to shut the [theatre name] down, and thousands of us would go there, you’re all underage and it’s an all-night electronic music festival. I remember going from there to [transit], and I remember people being dressed up, and going to work. I’d be coming off drugs, and underage, and I always remember it
felt . . . I always knew it was like, the inner voice was already talking to me then . . .

[Jules] watch what’s going on, we’ll³ keep you safe, but this isn’t the only way, . . . I
don’t know how I survived some things.

From an academic perspective, while still in high school, Jules found it possible to pass
from grade to grade but without any exertion, a skill she developed in high school and one that
she continued to use later in her life.

I started to identify that I didn’t have to work very hard to get school completed. I learned
the skill of manipulation by being able to lie, to get exempt from a class, and still have
something passed.

Jules finished her last year of high school, but was surprised to find that she was still
three credits short of the requirements her diploma. She received little guidance from the school
system and recalls only her high school psychology teacher with any fondness. Around the time
of her graduation, Jules’s father became a full-time pilot with a large airline that enabled free
travel for dependants, a privilege Jules managed to hold on to until she was 26 years old. The
two years following high school were a mixture of travel and upgrading through correspondence,
to complete her high school diploma. She also obtained a certificate in teaching English as a
second language, which she felt, upon advice from her cousins, would “just open the door to be
able to make more money travelling, instead of just the service industry work I was doing.”
Eventually, “I did what I was thought I was supposed to do . . . I registered for post-secondary.”

**College, University and the Dark**

Jules entered a local college to complete the upgrading necessary for university entrance.
She used a semester of field study in Ghana to enable a transition period between institutions.

³ “we” is the Divine team, Angels, Messengers of God, The Holy Spirit.
While studying in Africa, under the continuing influence of drugs and alcohol, and largely on her own, she made some very bad decisions that left her scarred emotionally but wiser. She also started refining her notion of the dark that continued influencing her life:

It was . . . when I started to identify the dark, and I didn’t quite know the light, as an analogy for where to live, but the dark is like the secrets, keeping them within, and not having people around you, not being guided, not having a connection to anything higher, not believing in God.

When Jules returned to Canada from the field study, she became a full-time student at an Alberta university. She had no real career direction or particular academic focus in her post-secondary education but simply wanted a university credential. As she explained:

I just wanted a degree . . . I have this really false preconceived notion, in Alberta all you need is a degree . . . I’m already here, so all I need is a degree and I can get entry-level energy work, because that’s what you’re supposed to do; after university you are supposed to go to entry-level work somewhere because you have a degree.

At the local university, Jules took a variety of courses inspired by her love of travel. Her curriculum included language courses such as English, French, and Spanish, but also Women’s and African studies. After high school, Jules lived with her mother off and on, as she travelled, but after entering university full time she began living close to campus. She earned money bartending, an environment that made the procurement of cocaine relatively easy, provided she remained quiet about the activities she witnessed.

I was really addicted to cocaine after this. I was probably up for five days a week. I was passing my classes, I was bartending, . . . they were giving free drugs to just not say anything, [about prostitution operating out of the bar] and then there was that voice,
you’re educated, you’re almost done your fourth year, . . . but I was so addicted to the drugs that I couldn’t stop.

The drug addiction continued even though she had several opportunities to quit. Her mother’s employer had a family assistance plan that still covered Jules but she had become adept at manipulating the people in her life in order to protect the addiction. She entered rehabilitation programs three times and yet her addiction remained. Eventually, she finished the degree program: “I just did what I had to do to get it done, got my degree, never had any friends, never had a community.”

**English Teacher and the Dark**

After graduating, Jules started travelling again. She went back to India and to Costa Rica (where her high school friend had settled). In India, she managed to get a job teaching English, but when her malaria medication failed and she contracted malaria, her time there ended. She returned to Canada to recuperate at her father’s cottage in the Eastern Ontario lake country. It was during this recuperative period that she put together another plan to remove the addiction from her life. She reasoned, on her own, that the only way she could beat the addiction that held her was to spend time in a place where drugs were difficult to obtain. In her research she found Seoul, South Korea, and employment teaching English in a university preparation program.

Jules used a recruiter in Vancouver, who placed her in school where management considered English teachers to be better employees when their appearance attracted more students to the school: “because I have, and I quote, desirable eyes, a really western face.” She recalled:

I just remember this contrast again . . . the dark, doing what . . . I was told to do, that my contract said I had to do. You’re like a foreign worker, so my visa bound me to working
for this individual. I couldn’t switch schools or anything. I wanted to be there, and you know, in terms of life experience . . . I was running away. I was running away from myself, and I was never able to find myself because I wasn’t going [looking] within, which you can do anywhere in the world, . . . I was going “out,” and looking for all the answers out—it must be in another country, it must be in another school, it must be in another program, it must be in another . . . job, it must be with another boss, you know, all outer . . . I’ve never felt more alone than I did in a city of nine million people.

Jules’s early experience in Seoul did not solve her addiction problem. In fact it changed from addiction to cocaine to an addiction to alcohol, a drug that was readily available. She was 24 years old, living and working in Seoul, but now using alcohol extensively while experiencing the nightlife of the 24/7 Asian city. The blur of the teaching and the nightlife lasted six months before she finally endured a traumatic experience she does not willingly talk about but one that shocked her into seeking help for her addiction. Jules joined Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), an organization with whose help, and after close to eight years of addiction, she removed drugs and alcohol use from her life.

Jules finished her English teaching contract while attending English language AA meetings, close to the American military base, in the heart of Seoul. She maintained her sobriety, but again travelled for another three months, mostly back to stay with her friend in Costa Rica, where she attended the AA meetings in Spanish. After three months, she chose to return to Alberta, to the city that had been her home. Up to this point, Jules had rarely had a sustained interest in any location or occupation, although she had, out of need for employment, her desire

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4 “To start listening to the inner voice, the voice of love, and God and pure loving guidance. I was still leading with ego, as I call it, more the dark side.”
to travel, and her facility with language twice been drawn to international roles teaching English. As she observed about her life to this point:

I remember the feeling, after completing my contract and Seoul, of that being the only thing that I’d ever done for one year at a time. I’d never dated anybody for a year, I never worked anywhere for a year, I never stayed in the same school for a year, because . . . I was so uncomfortable in my own skin, I constantly needed to change, and so I remember the feeling of accomplishment, and like being so proud of myself, and being the only one to celebrate myself, that I actually did something for a year.

Jules returned to Alberta to work at a local college where she taught English language skills to new Canadians. She was still in her mid-twenties, but widely travelled, and was worldly especially in the ways of the dark world of her addiction. For the first time, with a clear mind, she started to look at how the people around her were spending their lives, and to consider what she wanted for the future. She looked at her fellow teachers at the college:

We would go to lunch at the same lunch hour every day, sitting with the women in the lunchroom, who are like counting the days until their retirement, and counting the days until their pension kicks in, and talking about how frustrated they were with their husbands, and I remember thinking, this is hell, this is not going to be my life.

She looked out those same lunchroom windows and could see workers performing restorative work on a large open plaza structure next door. After watching the scene for several days it occurred to her “there were all these guys doing restoration of stonework, and they’re on scaffolds, and I was like, that looks so fun!” She went out on her lunch break and started talking to the workers. They told her about the work they were doing, about the provincial apprenticeship system, and where they had obtained their training.
Tile-setter Apprentice and Teacher

Jules immediately started to research how the apprenticeship system worked and how she might enter. She found that under normal circumstances, an employer first hired apprentices, who then did labourer’s work for about a year before they started the technical education needed to obtain a “journeyman’s ticket.” Jules contacted the local apprenticeship office and managed to enter into the technical education component of the program directly, without first working as a labourer:

The apprenticeship just gave me a free pass, because I was a woman, and the seats weren’t filling up, they said: We never do this, but you can go take a course without having any work experience, and it starts next week . . .

When I asked Jules why she chose tile-setting, she gave a considered response:

I went to apprenticeship, and I [said], I want to be a tile-setter. And the reason that I did was because I’ve been to the Pyramids, I’ve been to the Taj Mahal, I’ve been to Chichén Itzá, . . . the Mayan temples in Mexico . . . and I’ve seen stonework, and I’ve seen stonework withstand the test of time. I’ve seen stonework tell us stories about building a foundation in your life, the pyramids, beautifying your presence, the Taj Mahal, the importance of time management and the calendar system, Chichén Itzá, because the calendars we know it today was based on the sun dial there so, so I was like, I want to learn stone . . . I want to know this process. I like the intricacy; you know, I was ready to do something a little bit more linear for the first time in my life. I like geometry . . . I think metaphorically, it’s strong, and it’s a strong base, I think if you even go back biblically to the house built on sand will crumble, and a house built on stone will stand strong. I think I had that in the back of my mind. It was like, I knew that my foundation
was more on sand, and I wanted to shift it, and stone became what empowered and embodied strength.

Jules entered a tile-setting apprenticeship program at a local technical college. The college delivered Jules’s program at a building distant from the main campus, where administrative supervision was minimal, and where the environment was much less refined than one might expect in a publically funded post-secondary. She was almost immediately taken under the wing of an elderly instructor, an experienced bricklayer who himself had daughters working in the trades. He was an instructor she began to think of as “grandpa,” and an instructor she chided light-heartedly for his poor luncheon nutrition and his heavy smoking habit. As an experienced teacher, she was immediately surprised by the poor quality of the curricular material offered to her class; for example, material that included aged overhead projector slides. She challenged her instructor: “I’m just curious why this document was printed before I was born?”

Jules persisted for her first and successive periods of training but also in the way apprenticeships are structured went out to work in the construction industry, plying her new trade under the supervision of experienced journeymen doing at first installation work, project estimating, and inspection. For a while, she maintained her work in the evenings as an English teacher for new Canadians, simply to keep her income at an acceptable level. Even before she had completed her apprenticeship requirements, the administration of the technical school noticed her obvious talent, experience, and education, and offered her some part-time contract work to improve the very poor curricular material she had experienced as a new apprenticeship student.

Jules’s time as a working apprentice included some rough experiences. For a while, in her second year of the program, she found herself working in another city:
I had gone out in the meantime and worked my hours . . . I was single, I was clean, I was working for a company that would send me to [another city], we’d work 16 to 18 hour days. I lived in [a motel] for a long time, which was very interesting, because now I’m seeing the world with a new light, because the guys I was sent to work with would go to . . . the strip club across the road. The girls would be laying [sic] in the hallway of the hotel, because it was all riggers and construction workers, and I swear I was the only female outside of the dancers and some desk people. And so to be the one with clean eyes now, I was just like, whoa, this world is very dark, but I’m just going to go and do my job, my strategy is to hammer these hours off as fast as possible.

She completed her needed apprenticeship hours of work in quick succession, although she was held back from getting her full journeyman ticket until the full four required years had elapsed from the start of the program, following a provincial rule. She experienced many challenges on the work site that her ongoing AA training and experience was unexpectedly useful in facing. “So, you know I did the work, and it was tough being in the field . . . the stuff guys would say to me, I would just shake it off, because . . . I’m not going to feed into this.”

Jules continued her part-time work as a curriculum developer for the tile-setting program, while she worked in the construction industry. The technical college improved its curriculum development methods and enlisted Jules as a subject-matter expert, part of a larger team that included a project manager, instructional designers and multimedia designers. When speaking of this work, Jules elaborated on her engagement in the curriculum: “I really liked the curriculum development because it’s back in the research mode, and problem solving, and trying to put a sequence on learning, and I liked that. I really enjoyed that time, and being with the team.”

Eventually Jules completed the time requirement and earned her journeyman’s ticket. Jules’s personal life took a new turn around the time she became a fully qualified tile-setter. She
met a man she had known superficially in high school during the early years of her drug addiction. When they met for the second time, “[they] knew they were going to spend their lives together.”

**Learner, Mother, Teacher, Coach**

Jules became pregnant while she was working, an event that threw her work life in an entirely different direction. She was still largely isolated as a woman working in her trade and as morning sickness began to take its toll:

I was so sick, . . . and I was going by the book [What to Expect When You’re Expecting (Murkoff, 2008)], . . . and it says, at 12 weeks you tell your boss you’re pregnant . . . I told my boss I needed to meet him, so we were like two trucks parked in this field . . . and I was like [his name], I’m pregnant, like I don’t know . . . what else to say. This is what the book said I’m supposed to say. And he was like, okay, pack your tools, you’re done. I was, like, that’s not in the book!

As Jules discovered, the legal protection for the working rights of pregnant women had two exceptions, the industries of manufacturing and construction. Jules was pregnant and unexpectedly removed from her tile-setting job. She learned, with incredulity, that in the eyes of the construction world and of government regulation, she was now “disabled:”

So, I tried to wrap my head around that label. I’m at home. I have been working my ass off and I really liked to work, alcoholic to workaholic was totally my transition, it kept me busy, it kept me clean. I went to my meetings, I was living a good life, I was really happy. I was in the best shape of my life . . . because I was just working, you know, we did heavy work, granite work, . . . strong! Yeah, I was floored. And that’s where the true vocation stuff starts; [it] was based on that challenge becoming the greatest opportunity.
At this point Jules was staying at home, with little to keep her occupied. The time away from work wore on her spirits:

So I was paid to sit at home, my husband said I cried the whole time because to me this was . . . death of a dream, loss of self. What am I supposed to do? Who am I? I had my house, he had his house, now I moved to his house, and now I’m sitting alone in his house, he’s going to work every day, I’m just here alone. It was not good.

Shortly after her son was born she was contacted by an administrator at the technical school who asked if she would be willing to teach, so she returned to teach first and second year apprenticeship students and to develop more curriculum. She felt at home in this role. “I love the teaching and I love the education side.” She mentioned to me some of the influences on her teaching practices for tile-setters that reflected her Mennonite heritage:

I had a paternal grandma teach me how . . . to quilt, which I reflect on all the time and I think I became a journeyman tile-setter because putting the pieces together in patterning was something I was really comfortable with . . . when I was teaching the apprenticeship programs, I used quilting books to show my students how their mind could be creative.

Jules had a second child, 18 months later, and her growing family, indirectly, created an obstacle for her teaching. The tile-setting program was taught between two cities in the province, and although she could manage the teaching in her home city, it became impossible to take her two young sons to the other city and in the end she “had to give it up.”

Around the same time, a local women’s service organization had a women-in-construction program that they were trying to initiate and Jules went to work for the organization as a consultant. Her unique skill set, as an experienced journeyman but one who was also able to develop curriculum and her knowledge of the construction industry were invaluable to the
woman’s organization, whose social workers had very little idea of the rough, male-oriented world of construction.

Jules considered spending her time doing a master’s degree in the area of retention of women in the skilled trades. She made some calls, had some interviews, but in the end declined this direction. “This is going to be dark research, dark stories, and I’m going to get angry. I don’t know if this is a good idea.” It was at this point that Jules chose a different direction toward learning, teaching, and personal coaching. She created an online social networking organization as:

[A] project of love, about why women love their work, and to use an attraction not promotion strategy, because what I identified was that the media was promoting the skilled trades shortage, but they weren’t doing it with any kind of heart; they were doing it based on companies feeding a mindset . . . I started to tell the story about what women love about their work, then maybe I’d figure out . . . how we can change this, and that’s when I declared a project for myself . . . I’ll do my own master’s, and I did “100 women who work,” which is on the website, and I interviewed 100 women about what they love about their work, and what I found from that data was that they love working for themselves [italics added]; they loved building businesses but they are missing business education [italics added]. And so you could be good at your trade, but you’re not good at your business, and then it came to me . . . this is the solution. We will have more women in the skilled trades when we have more women business owners.

Jules provided further insight into her ideas about establishing the networking site, a form of social media for woman interested in issues in the trades:
There’s a story that . . . an analogy . . . that my life is built on—the barn building analogy from a Mennonite community, because I watched barns burn down, and I watched communities come together and rebuild them in five days or ten days, and so later on in my life when things got really tough . . . it was up to me to ask for help and put a community together.

It was also at this point that Jules started to detect resistance from some of the predominantly male trades unions. Her website venue started to receive “hate mail” anonymously. Through this period, Jules drew upon the inner strength she had built as she rose out of her addiction to keep herself on a firm course.

I just rebuilt my foundation, you’re not knocking me down, like this pyramid is on its way back up, and my boulders [blocks at the base of the pyramids] are as big as the pyramid’s, like you can’t knock me down!

**Learner, Teacher, Coach, Speaker, Entrepreneur, Leader**

Jules’s finding: “We will have more women in the skilled trades when we have more women business owners,” or what she referred to as her “core belief,” drew her attention to the business world, at first related to the trades, to women participating in entrepreneurial activities, and to business in general. The website and networking research made Jules an important figure in the women in trades milieu. She drew heavily upon her experience recovering from addiction, her love of research, the people she met through her website and advocacy activities, her experience as a teacher and her experience in the trades to develop a personal coaching practice. This practice enabled her to maintain her home life while forming and transforming her vocational life. The personal coaching practice was at first aimed at assisting women who were entering, or experiencing difficulty with the construction industry. It evolved toward
entrepreneurial activities in support of women in business. Her website and other publications brought her to the attention of several authors who promoted women in the trades or entrepreneurship to women generally. She developed a variety of “talks” that she gives across several provinces in Canada to women’s organizations, school audiences, and other related venues.

Jules is very much a person in career transition. As her children (now five and three) grew, she began exploring ways to return to more lucrative work. In our second interview, she made her calling clear: “I’ve identified that what I think I’m truly called to do is teach.” The conundrum she faced is that, apart from the interaction on her networking site, and the talks she gives, she has found little opportunity to practise her calling in a formal environment. In her words, “I always wanted it to be something that served more in a government office or in schools. That’s more what I was aligned with.” Yet, the administration of the local technical school that was the most likely forum to combine the skills associated with entrepreneurial business education around the trades, did not embrace the teaching of those disciplines together. She expanded the definition of teaching to include coaching, inspirational speaking and more recently, leadership. She learned much from her activities in the women in business milieu, which Jules transformed into a passion for the business world:

I’m passionate about business, I’m passionate about learning about operational organizational structure, I’m passionate about learning about leadership, and how great leaders inspire thousands of others under them . . . I think this new way of social entrepreneurship and social ventures, is really the right direction to go, and I’m fascinated in where that will go and how people will adapt.
Jules wrestled with the need to further her own business education in whatever form necessary. She thought about doing an M.B.A. degree versus the practical learning she could achieve on her own, and how to respond to her calling “to teach, and to lead, to inspire, and to motivate” in a domain, that has become “business, clearly business.” She expressed insecurity about her ability to operate and teach in this field. “I was always leaning toward the business, but I was just in the imposter fear mode where I was like, who am I to teach business, you know, who am I to create this?”

In the meantime, her interest in maintaining her original “women in trades” website, the networking website that drew her into personal coaching and generated her interest in business, waned:

I lost the ability to have passion for [the website and activities] based on the span of time I’ve been out of the industry. And I’m very conscious that if I’m not passionate about it, then what’s the point in continuing it, because that maintains this fullness in my life, that prohibits something else from coming in.

Along with the website, she no longer sees personal coaching as the right path. As she explored returning to workforce, she recently turned down a lucrative job offer:

I had an interview this morning with [a company], to go on as the mastery coach, for their sales team, . . . and I don’t want to do it, it’s what I’m doing now, and that’s what I want to move away from, is the one-to-one coaching, so . . .

She recently went to a friend whose company was in the business of importing architectural stone, the industry sector that employed her as a tile-setter, and asked for advice on how she should move ahead with her work life:
He said, are you serious? And I said yeah. And he said, well let me design something for you, because I’ve always wanted to work with you. And then it, like my heart just sang, because what I want to do, is work for somebody who inspires me. . . . It might come full circle, because on Tuesday, I go to negotiate a contract to go back to work for my friend, on the business side, he’s an importer, . . . he imports stone and is looking for somebody to help market and brand, so he’s asked me to come on board, and do what I did with [her women in trades website], for his company and so, . . . and he wants me to tell a story about stone.

**Jules’s Narrative Threads**

Jules told her story as a passionate learner in her vocation from several identifiable and intertwined narrative threads. I found the following narrative threads important in the way Jules formed and evolved her vocation.

**Cast Adrift Narrative**

Jules’s narrative of her move to Alberta and the divorce of her parents and the way it affected her, took her down a dramatic path that influenced much of her life course and certainly, her vocational life course. The words that stand out repeatedly are “alone,” and “lonely.” In all her story telling, Jules said little about her relationship with her mother, stepfather, and brother. She mentioned her father most frequently, but her comments were about how she felt about his absence, rather than the quality of their relationship. Jules relates much of her travel experience to seeing her father, or due to her father, and facilitated by his occupation. Jules described herself as a young woman, adrift, without reliable counsellors, advisors, and mentors, with few friends and little love in her life, until recent years. In many respects, she related her attraction to stonework “metaphorically” to rebuilding the family foundation she lost.
Dark and the Light Narratives

The “dark and the light” narrative is intertwined with Jules’s addiction to drugs, her faith, her loneliness, the way she made decisions, and it extended from her early teen years to the present day. The dark narrative included secrecy, the removal of free will, oppression, loneliness, pain, disconnection from friends, family, community, and especially, from God.

For Jules, the light included, “circumstances that . . . leave you feeling joyous and happy,” and especially love. The light narrative drew from Jules’s Christian roots and included the Holy Spirit, angelic beings, and God. Jules was born into a Mennonite community; although she departed from her faith in her teen years, she attended a Christian church at the time of our interviews.

Foundation Builder Narrative

Jules believed her teen years lacked “foundation” and, as a result, she drifted into addiction. When she finally met the stone worker journeymen (tile-setters), she saw in this trade a way to rebuild a vocational foundation she lacked. Jules related the vocation to the stone houses of her original Mennonite community and to the numerous stone buildings and monuments she saw in her world travels. She saw strength, stability, and endurance in the material, and in the work done by the trade. Even though circumstances prevented Jules from working in the trade, her love of stone and the enduring foundation it represents, remained. She was attracted “back to stone, what I’m good at, and what I can do naturally, and connect[ed] everything I’ve been doing.”

Quilting Related to Tile-setting Narrative

Jules described the quilting narrative as another tie to her Mennonite and family origins, her grandmother, the quilts she was given and the tile-setter trade. She connected the creativity
of quilting to her teaching in the tile-setter trade, using quilting books to inspire her students. Jules mentioned how the intricacy of tile-setting intrigued her, and how it stimulated an interest in the mathematics of geometry.

**Called to Teach, Lead, Inspire and Motivate Narrative**

Jules felt “called to teach and create . . . and to lead, and to inspire, and to motivate.” She gave three examples of her employment teaching English (in Canada, India, and Korea). She also developed curriculum and taught in her tile-setter apprenticeship program. Arguably, her coaching practice and motivational speaking experiences were a continuation of this calling. The latest and emerging element of this calling was her expression of leadership, possibly in an institutional or corporate environment. Furthermore, numerous people recognized her leadership in the field of “women in the trades.”

**Building Community Narrative**

Jules described how she felt unsupported in her decision-making at many times in her early years up to and including her apprenticeship years. After her pregnancy, she built an extensive and well-recognized social networking community, both because she lost her work as a tile-setter, but also in response to the way government and industry treated female tradespeople. Many other women facing similar issues, on a national scale, noticed her website and together they formed an effective online community. Jules performed her own, self-directed research to determine answers to the problems that many community members were facing. She arrived at what she believed to be the answer, that “we will have more women in the skilled trades when we have more women business owners,” and formed a narrative for the future in which she would acquire the business knowledge and experience necessary to form and lead her own entrepreneurial company.
Business Leader Narrative

Jules was in the process of authoring a business leader narrative during the interviews. Through her online community, she met many experienced people who encouraged the business leader path. She explored opportunities and searched for an appropriate path into the business community. This was a relatively new narrative for Jules, and it appeared to evolve during the course of our interviews.

Jules’s narrative threads are used to show how they influenced her decision-making in Chapter Six, where her vocational development process is discussed further. I now describe Aaron’s vocational narrative and corresponding narrative threads.

Aaron’s Vocational Narrative

Aaron was in his late 50s and for several years worked in his own vocation moving from company to company, “fixing” corporate IT departments. Aaron and I were in similar roles as corporate IT managers when we first met, and he was a casual acquaintance for several years leading up our interviews, although I knew nothing of his background.

Childhood Memories

Aaron was born and raised in a rural farming town in Southern Alberta, a town with only a few hundred residents. His family were part of the Dutch community that settled in the area after the Second World War, a community centred largely on the nearby Reformed Church. Aaron described how his family moved into the community because the church was already established and “my grandfather and whole family were very, very strict, very formal, Dutch Calvinists.” He considered his maternal grandfather the most influential person in his life:

Just reflecting back . . . having talked to him as a kid as I was growing up, and just seeing the depth and the wisdom the guy had, like he would not overreact to issues, he had very
strong beliefs on certain things, but he would always give a reasoned answer. You gave
him a reasoned question, he’d give you a reasoned answer back, and he’d couch it in
terms you could relate to. . . . When I went to university, and then certainly a little bit
later in life, I began to understand as all young adults do, that just the life he faced, you
know a labourer, and the early part of the century . . . going through a couple of wars,
moving a family from a war overrun country to a place where he didn’t speak the
language, leaving a daughter behind, presuming he’d never see her again, and just the
bravery the guy had, was just amazing.

Aaron’s father met his mother while her family still lived in Holland. In fact his father
had what he considered a very good job in Holland after the war as a member of the Rijks Politie,
the Dutch highway police. His father nevertheless left his position to follow Aaron’s mother’s
family as they immigrated. Aaron told an anecdote concerning his parent’s marriage, one that
illustrated the direct and somewhat blunt culture of the Dutch immigrants, as well as their
commitment to their Christian belief system. When Aaron’s parents were in the midst of their
wedding ceremony, the minister asked the traditional question about whether anyone objected to
the marriage. Someone did, and “the whole outfit left, everyone took their presents and left,
because they said there was a disagreement about religion.” The couple completed the ceremony
with only a few remaining guests, and then settled down to raise a family of three children, of
which Aaron was the youngest and only male child. Aaron’s father, who was always proficient
with his hands, became:

The town blacksmith . . . had a shop right next door, I grew up with tools and iron, forges
and welding from . . . at age 11, I was welding for my dad to earn money for the family.
They were very poor. I had no money at all.
His father was a modeller in his spare time, “My dad . . . was a real modeller, he loved building models, and 80% of what he built were model airplanes . . . he always liked that kind of stuff.”

Neither of Aaron’s parents received education beyond elementary school in Holland but as a student in Canada, Aaron was precocious.

I was a geek, I was the guy that liked science and maths and all kind of junk so I tended to spend a lot of time on my own and I’ve always been a reader, which is actually one of the ways I’ve learned, like I mean, I’d have to see it, or read it.

Nevertheless, school life in Aaron’s hometown was basic, with a single Grade 1 to Grade 9 elementary school, one that served the local farming community, with “nothing going on,” a description that mirrored Aaron’s feelings of boredom in terms of his early education. The schoolyard abutted Aaron’s home, a fact that served him well over his elementary school years as sanctuary, rather than convenience. According to Aaron:

But the guts of it was, when I was a kid I was the geek in small-town Alberta, I was the weird kid, and I got the living shit beaten out of me hundreds of times because I was short and fat and had a big mouth, and I used my mouth a lot.

An example of the type of memories Aaron retained illustrated his dilemma at that school. Aaron was good at math and he recalled a time when in Grade 6 he was called upon to help some Grade 9 math students learn quadratic equations, something he had learned and found easy. His description of the events paints a vivid picture:

So I just knew for a fact this was not going to be a pretty sight after school . . . I remember peeling out of school that day, I . . . was hoping to make it home before the big guys caught up with me and beat the snot out of me again. . . . “Don’t you ever do that
again,” well what was I going to do, they pulled me in, it’s not my fault, you know, ass
hole, kind of thing. Of course I didn’t know not to shut up then, so away you go.

During our interviews, Aaron was adamant that the beatings went on for years until he
started growing larger and the whole group matured at about the time he entered Grade 10 at the
local high school. Today he sees a small, unseen benefit in the way he was treated:

The positive thing, if there is a positive, is that it made me very withdrawn. I read, I built
my model airplanes, I did my own thing, had very few friends, the teachers loved me,
because of course I did well at school. I’m quite happy being on my own.

Aaron developed a passion for designing aircraft. He did not recall where this interest
came from, for sure, but two things stood out to him. The first was his dad’s aircraft modelling
hobby. Perhaps inspired by his father, Aaron led a solitary life as a child, “building things
whether it be models or whatever, I just did mountains of that, that’s where I spent all of my
time, never did sports, never was active, or that kind of stuff.” The other factor that “got me
going was the space program . . . I watched it like it was the best soap opera ever, and my parents
really encouraged it.”

Although schoolwork did not challenge Aaron, in his early adolescent years he
discovered science fairs, an activity that brought his passion for aircraft design and building
models to new heights. Twice, once in Grade 9 and once in Grade 11, he was a national science
fair winner for his aerodynamics research:

So what I did, I could barely drive, I actually set up a set of scales on my sister’s car, with
piano wire supports, a wing section in the middle, a bunch of pulleys and strings, cut little
holes through the rubber of the window to measure lift and drag of various wing sections
while zooming down country roads at fixed speeds. The first one I won was on wingtip
vortices, you see those tips on the side of [modern passenger aircraft] . . . so I did a lot of work around that and came up with some original ideas. The second one was on . . . slotted flaps, essentially when the flaps go down in the airplane, testing various configurations and slotting. So that’s what I always wanted to do was to design airplanes, I lived, dreamt . . . [designing airplanes].

As Aaron moved through high school, his interpersonal relationships improved, but his interest and engagement in classroom-based schoolwork was not stimulated. He was simply too far ahead of his classmates, particularly in the sciences and math. He completed high school with his classmates, but found the classroom work tedious. In high school, “I didn’t fit . . . the teachers just said, . . . I remember in physics and chemistry, they said okay you’re going to have to do the exams, just do the final, . . . I didn’t actually do the coursework.”

University

There was never any doubt that Aaron would be going to university.

It was assumed . . . you will go as far as you can. And my maternal grandfather . . . he certainly was a passionate believer in education, although he had none himself. It was always university degrees, you know in Europe and Holland. . . . Herr Doktor is a really special deal, so they were always . . . if you can do it, you’ve got to do it, so of course I was inclined and interested, but I had lots of support. Aaron continued to think about his passion for designing aircraft, now reinforced by his success with the national science fairs:

I wanted to design airplanes and I looked into that, so I needed a degree in physics, it was a preferred thing so I went to the local university, . . . enrolled in the physics program, two physics majors [two students], five professors which was a good teacher-to-student
ratio, and I did some more digging and they said there’s no way, you’re not a US citizen, all the work is US military work, and even if you got your US citizenship, it would be years, and of course the religious angle breaks into it because well then you have to move away from the home church, and that’s a bad thing, so things conspired to say, well, that’s not going to be the career I follow, so I’ll just do physics.

Aaron described his relationship with the church at this point:

Well, it was made important, I mean I’m a Christian . . . but it was so rigid in orthodoxy, and so, so inflexible with regards to styles, habits, and practices . . . what it did [was] . . . two things: 1) it really constrained my thinking until I went to university and began to see other things, and . . . it made me an outsider, because . . . I was going to that evil, secular university from the church community . . . when I was young, it was very much being afraid of God, and saying this is a Guy that’s out to get me . . . and don’t touch alcohol, don’t touch women, blah, blah, blah.

Aaron felt forced to give up his long-standing desire to design airplanes and to find another focus in the field of physics. His choice became the physics of optics:

It was Scientific American, they had an article on . . . laser holography, lasers were new, holography using lasers, of course, was very new, and it was just, wow, this is cool, a 3-D picture and how does that work? The physics of it, and then, it’s sort of like pulling on a string, right, well okay, what’s a hologram, what do you mean coherent light, what’s going on, and then, you just end up saying . . . this is really neat. You know it’s interesting.
Aaron’s experience at the small university was rich: “You are probably getting way more than undergrad, because you got five profs, two students. We did experimentation, we had keys to the place, we were there all hours.”

**Working Life**

Aaron was nearing the end of his university studies when a chance meeting occurred. He had won an academic prize, which he would receive from the university at a dinner in March. A heavy snowstorm occurred the evening of the formal ceremony and the dinner intended for a couple of hundred people, including several award winners, turned-into an informal dinner and chat for 15 or 20 people. Aaron, who lived on campus, was one of the attendees. The general manager (GM) of a local gas plant operated by IOC Canada, the Canadian arm of a large international oil company, also managed to get through the storm:

So . . . no problem for me, and [personal name] made it as well, and the trouble is, his other presenters, other students who lived off the campus couldn’t make it, and you have a raging snowstorm outside, . . . well you know depending on your belief set, it’s up to me, hand of God, because there’s no way I would have met this guy other than on a handshake on the platform had the award ceremony gone forward, and to end up sitting at a table with a dozen, 15, 20 other people whatever it was, and starting up to chat this senior guy from [IOC], . . . weird and kooky.

The general manager talked to Aaron about whether he might be interested in working for IOC when he graduated. A few days later, the IOC Canadian offices contacted Aaron and arranged an interview. IOC hired him to do geophysical programming, because in Aaron’s words, “they believed it easier to teach programming to a physicist than to teach a computer scientist physics.” The job offer was contingent upon Aaron completing his degree (he was still
two courses short), which he did, largely based on independent study. “I just worked basically 24 hours a day, and you know eight weeks later, they said, yup passed, and . . . I had my degree.”

Aaron became a programmer writing geophysical programs in FORTRAN, a programming language that was largely self-taught, with the support of the IOC staff, although he had some previous exposure in university. This job lasted for two years and while he performed the job successfully, in his own words:

I’m a lousy programmer . . . the trouble is, there are guys that are just good at this, and I was never one of those guys. I could do the design but I would get bored with the endless declaration of variables and all that kind of crap.

An opportunity arose to join the Information Technology (IT) planning group in IOC Canada to work on the purchasing of IT equipment and systems. Aaron took the job and became immersed more deeply in the IT function of a major corporation. The position gave Aaron his first insight into new systems that were proposed for acquisition and after about a year, his first opportunity to work on implementing an IT project. It was during this three-year project that Aaron started displaying, in a business context, an edge to his interpersonal skills that plagued him for years to follow. Aaron described the behaviour:

I had some really, really bad habits. I would’ve called it mad dog management; I actually named it. If someone got my way, or something didn’t happen the way it should of [have], I went to war, I would go out of my way to ruin their lives . . . And they noticed this, they kept on pointing out, well you should be a little gentler with your colleagues, and you know, it’s sometimes better to let things go than to fight them. I had no part of that shit. It was like, you are in my way, how do I turn you into something an eighth of an inch thick and black, so I can drive over top of you . . .
The people at IOC tolerated the extreme defensiveness that Aaron displayed but it doubtlessly created problems in the implementation of the project. Nevertheless, the team implemented the project successfully and moved the system into production mode. This type of project at IOC often resulted in the key team member taking up an operating role to perform ongoing maintenance of the new system and Aaron transitioned into the role of manager, Geophysical Systems. It was at this point that Aaron discovered something about himself that had no doubt been present previously, but that became explicit in the transition from managing a project to managing day-to-day operations. As Aaron describes it, “if there isn’t a crisis to resolve, then I’ll make one.”

One anecdote that Aaron relayed, while he was operating the recently installed Geophysical Systems, illustrates his level of tolerance for the operating mindset.

I wouldn’t do all my routine work, so performance reviews, budgets, whatever . . . I think this is a funny story, but my boss at the time didn’t [think so] . . . so, they had a guy doing accounting, . . . you give [the guy] all your expenses and he’d do it, and then they decided that was too expensive, they moved [the guy] elsewhere and everyone had to do their own expenses. Well I thought that was a pretty stupid idea, so about a year and a half later, my boss comes into my office and says why is your last trip to [Europe] being charged to legal? I said, I don’t know. He says well how did that happen? Well, I don’t think I should really be doing expense accounts and I don’t really know the coding, so I just put random numbers in . . . and I guess it must have just hit legal one of these times. [laughter] He was a very calm guy, and he turned purple and pink, and kicked the door shut again and said, “You will learn how to do expense accounts properly!”

When I asked about operations, and why he did not like to perform in this role, Aaron responded:
I get bored. Straight boredom. It’s just not interesting any more. I don’t bore well. I mean part of it is I’m not really good at repetitive things, and because I’m one of these people, the first time is really cool, the second time you want to master it, the third time you want a perfect it, and the fourth time you start to lose interest, the fifth time you’re starting to screw up because you forgot to pay attention, by the time you hit numbers six or seven it’s actually a huge mess now because you really don’t care, you’re just trying to get it done, and that’s not good for operations.

To Aaron’s mind this was a turning point in his career, one that launched him toward what eventually became his vocation. Again, from Aaron:

So they realized that I’m really bad at steady-state, so they said okay, we’ll move you out of here . . . move you to [Europe], and they got a guy in who was much better at the operations, I went to [Europe] and guess what, there was a department that was broken, and you can fix it. It’s you know, it’s not meeting requirements, and you know, it’s the same software at the worldwide seismic centre, and so it was more . . . the technology was similar, and you know a lot of the people already, and so off I went. That was the second time I did that.

With this move, Aaron set the pattern for his eventual vocation as a “fixer” of organizations and, more specifically, of IT departments in the corporate world. A Dutch colleague at the time recognized that Aaron had a particular managerial bent, which reinforced his decision to move:

He noticed that I’m good at fixing things. He says well not only have you got the technology going, but he says you’ve also built the organization, you’ve made it work . . .
there’s huge infighting between the Dutch guys and the English . . . and so I was always the one helping out.

Aaron did indeed move to Europe, specifically to Holland, to the city where IOC International did the seismic analysis for their oil and gas exploration for all of those countries (unlike Canada) who did not have the capability of doing the work themselves. One of the reasons Aaron worked well in this environment was his Dutch heritage. He was “conversational” in Dutch, because as family members told him, Dutch was in fact his first language. Furthermore, the Dutch culture and religion had surrounded Aaron from his earliest years, so he had a strong affinity for the European working environment.

When Aaron arrived in Holland, and examined the IT organization that he was to fix, he immediately diagnosed problems similar to those he saw in Canada. He began a similar IT change process. His work in Europe took three and a half years before it was time to return to Canada.

Around the time that Aaron returned to Canada, IOC became aware that they had a major problem with the overall Canadian IT organization. It had grown out of control, the budget had grown exceptionally large, and the function was not meeting the service expectations of the company. Aaron was assigned to lead a team of six people who were to reorganize the IT function, a job he was keen to do. “Oh yeah, that was starting to get into the, this is a screwed up mess, we’ve got the wrong people in the wrong job, I mean I can pull examples out . . . ” Aaron talked at length during our interviews about the poor service culture that had grown in the Canadian IT group, his personal experience of how the IT management failed to support the business in times of need and how “I had no end of stresses with some of those guys that were in management.”
This was the first major downsizing effort IOC had ever endured but the team went at it eagerly. There were major changes made but in the end 200 people of the roughly 550 employed by the function lost their jobs and it was Aaron’s team that identified the changes and positions to go. Aaron’s relationship with the CIO, on whose behalf he was working, was tumultuous. By his own admission, Aaron would still engage in his “mad dog” management style, and the CIO had many of the same rough characteristics. The situation between them got so bad at one point that the company employed a mediator to help them resolve their differences. Aaron described how the daylong session went: “And we sat there all day while this guy tried to figure out a way that these two individuals wouldn’t beat the shit out of each other any more.” In the end, the IT reorganization project was completed and counted successful.

By the time he entered his mid-30s, Aaron had an established behaviour pattern at IOC toward those who disagreed with him or got in his way. Ultimately, even though he was very capable and experienced given his youth, his eventual movement into the executive ranks was highly unlikely given his reputation. The IOC people eventually employed a counsellor to help him face the issues that had resulted in the “mad-dog” defensive style.

She [the counsellor] was able to figure out very rapidly what the problem was, and she said: Okay now we have to unwind it. Okay, you have this reaction because this is the way you made a decision as a kid, you haven’t made . . . that’s no longer an appropriate decision; you have to go back and remake it. It’s called Redecision Therapy, it’s a horrible process, . . . but, I mean, it does work.

The emotion Aaron retained from his childhood abuse at the hands of his schoolmates was still evident during our interviews.
Have you ever had the swirling? That’s where a bunch of farm kids take your head into a full toilet and flush it . . . no not a positive memory, no I got the shit beaten out of me, I’d come home beaten up, bloodied, torn clothing, you know, bloody noses, black eyes, you name it.

The Redecision Therapy proved to be a major growth process for Aaron. He summarized his perception of the need: “You know it’s a common trait in people who are abused to have disproportionate reactions to pressure, to what they perceive as being bullying, so . . . I was a jerk, there’s no other way to describe it.”

As Aaron was completing the work on the redesign of the IT Function, IOC Canada was facing its own greater challenges; the company had incurred its first financial loss in its history. This was the early 1990s and the oil and gas industry was in a recessionary period. The executive group of IOC Canada took action to stem the losses and set-up another restructuring group, this time covering the whole of the corporation. The executive called on Aaron again to represent the IT function in this effort, a natural choice because he had just completed the effort in his home department. Aaron, of all the team members, was assigned the job of root cause analysis:

I was the only one wired that way . . . so I was given the job of root cause, so I had processes and systems logic, that was sort of my lead, we divided up in the six chunks, like we had retail, and we had, you know, E&P [exploration and production], and whatever, we had specialists for each of those, but I was given the job of, okay take all the pieces, and look for root causes, which I’m pretty good at.

The new team worked on the issues IOC Canada faced for about a year and a half before they were ready to present their findings to the executive. Unfortunately, over the year and a half
duration of the project, Aaron became convinced that deep at the heart of the problems the company was facing, was a significant, glaring and unpalatable problem:

The group I was in, that reengineering group, there was a lot of work done . . . a lot of analysis on everything from failed products to going through all the project AFEs [Authority for Expenditure] and saying, proposed X, and we were going to make 20% return, and we only made, whatever, so a lot of basic homework was done, and the job fell on me to try connect the dots . . . you found out there was an inordinate number of cases where ideas were generated either by a brand-new leader, or the leader left before it was completed, or some combination thereof. And in some cases, between inception and actual production, there was a couple of leaders in between, so they lost the plot and/or the expertise, like if it was a seismic exploration play, the expertise about what exactly they were looking for, and how it got lost. So to me it was a relatively straightforward conclusion.

In short, management at most levels did not seem to understand the business they were running, there was little long-term commitment to the promised results. It seemed that IOC had developed a culture of moving managers and executives through the ranks so quickly (usually less than a couple of years in each position), that they never really got a chance to understand the business they were managing, make appropriate decisions, and live with the consequences, as a way to learning the true nature of business operations. Aaron’s supervisor on the project, the CFO of the corporation, quickly made it known that such a response to the executive sponsors of the project was not tenable. Aaron was allowed to present his finding, but as a personal opinion. Although the team effectively disavowed him, he nevertheless felt that with all integrity, he had to make the issue known. The executive gave him chance to present his opinions:
[Aaron] stands up in front of the executive of [IOC], and says we have found the issue and the biggest issue is we have a management problem, the management is incompetent, they don’t know their subject area, they don’t know their business area, they have insufficient time to learn it . . . and they all nodded politely, and I got a little mad.

Very shortly later the same day, the president of the company approached Aaron and said, “That was the bravest thing I’ve ever seen in my life.” Aaron went off on Christmas vacation thinking that it may not have been quite as bad as he first thought. When he returned, the CFO, his supervisor on the project, called him into his office, thanked him for the work, and informed him that they had decided to give the restructuring work to a large international consulting firm, and that, by the way, Aaron was no longer in demand . . . nobody wanted him.

Around the time of the presentation, Aaron felt that his employment at IOC had pretty much run its course, regardless. He had in fact been putting out feelers for other positions outside of IOC. IOC did not terminate his employment but he felt his work there was finished and he managed to get himself packaged out of the company permanently.

As I reflected on the statements made to the executive, I wondered why Aaron felt a need to be so blunt in his final comments, so challenging. Aaron relates it back to his childhood trauma and perhaps somewhat to his Dutch culture. He described his reaction to those who unjustifiably held power over him, the defensiveness he displayed and the way he felt a need to twist the point home, even when he knew it would ultimately cause him more harm. Aaron had reflected upon his approach:

You got to prove it in, it’s like you beat the snot out of me when I was 14, I’m going to prove to you, you were wrong. Not just a little wrong, way wrong. And I don’t think that’s a correct emotion. I think it’s a bad thing, but it is, I look at the roots in that
behaviour . . . it turns out a lot of my motivation then came from, I wanted to prove those 
assholes in little school Alberta, that they were wrong, and prove it in a way that they 
could never come close. It’s not a healthy way, but it’s there.

Aaron reflected further on his cultural heritage and the impact it might have had on his 
defensive behaviour:

I think the underpinnings are probably cultural, that’s got to be a piece of that, I would say the force of it, and you know, as a kid, you know, have you ever seen the crazy picture where the pelican is swallowing the frog and the frog reaches out and is grabbing the pelican by the neck? I always loved that picture. Never, ever, ever, give up, ever. . . . 
So I think, yeah, culturally there’s probably a foundation there, but . . . it’s a big part of it.

Aaron’s Dutch immigrant parents and highly influential grandfather were doubtlessly 
affected by life in Nazi-occupied Holland during the Second World War and, according to 
Aaron, the Dutch culture also harbours a bluntness that has influenced his thinking:

I’m Dutch, you can be straight . . . I think of myself more Dutch, and I think the 
willingness to be blunt, this whole cultural mindset of the right answers, is to tell people 
what you’re thinking, even if it’s too painful, whereas in Canada, my view of the 
Canadians is that they always want to be nice . . . and I go, you’re not being nice by lying to people, you’re not helping them if you make them feel good for now, you’re better off addressing the problem and fixing it.

Looking back at his 16-year career at IOC, it seems apparent that most of his history 
there was moving from one major project to another. In a sense, he was learning what it takes to 
execute large-scale corporate-technology-based change efforts. He learned lessons about himself
and began the process of moving past the trauma of youth and how to react as an adult. All of these lessons became an essential part of Aaron’s learning at IOC.

The Fixer

Aaron picked-up another position in short order. He found a property development organization that was attempting to recover from a bankruptcy situation and needed someone to establish an internal IT organization for them. This was very similar to what Aaron had done in a few of his roles at IOC so he accepted the job and moved in quickly. It was nevertheless a very brief stay in a tumultuous organization. When the restructured company decided to move their head office (and corporate staff) to Toronto, Aaron simply could not remain. He wanted to stay in Alberta, so he left the development company.

A large newly formed agricultural corporation recruited Aaron directly into the CIO (Chief Information Officer) position:

I go as the CIO . . . that was basically five years, . . . set up an IT department, put in [Enterprise Software Package], . . . and now I was starting to get more into organizational design, and staffing, and . . . it was a broken IT department, and the guys that were there were doing a good job, and so we had to learn. . . . a lot of it was around [the fact that] the business just had no time for IT, they’re [the IT group] not business focused.

Eventually, as things stabilized, the executive wanted Aaron to move into a position he did not really want. In the end, he arranged for suitable means of departure.

Aaron attained a new position at another oil company, ACOC, which also had a “broken IT shop.” At ACOC, Aaron learned a lesson that stayed with him and became an essential feature of his practice. The corporate executive needed to protect people who are change agents in their roles. Even “if you do 80% right, you’re still doing 20% wrong and you’re eventually going to
piss off somebody enough that they’re going to come after you”; the internal people will have the advantage needed to terminate the role. In Aaron’s words:

> Probably the most critical thing about being a fixer is knowing how to exit, because if you don’t control your exit, someone else is going to control it, and they’re going to control it in a way that you won’t like.

Someone else controlled Aaron’s exit from ACOC. Originally, the executive brought him in to deal with some problems and eventually replace the CIO, who apparently wanted to move on. As it turned out, the CIO did not want to move into a new position, and a war of sorts, broke out with Aaron.

> [The CIO] had no other employment option in [ACOC], so pretty rapidly he decided he wanted to stay there, and then we started to get at loggerheads with each other. And he did some ugly shit, . . . HR was involved in all kinds of junk, and I remember, I was going on vacation it was a Friday before, and I said okay, [to the CIO], . . . I’ll just do my job, I’ll do it well, . . . they fired me the day I got back.

Aaron’s stay at ACOC had been a brutal experience for him emotionally:

> That was the ugliest, that one probably was the stage where, then my . . . what am I . . . what do I believe? That almost killed me, it was a brutal time. . . . It certainly caused a lot of damage in my relationships, and you know, . . . but you learn, right?

By this point in his career, Aaron had become an experienced fixer of IT operations. Shortly after leaving ACOC, another company recruited Aaron to assist in the redevelopment of yet another IT organization. By this time, he had established his working model as a fixer of IT operations, a role he realized he could market successfully in the corporate arena. Aaron described his unique vocation to me:
I’ll tell you the story that I tell most people, is that I’m a fixer. Working with organizations, in particular information technology, where the organization isn’t working, where it’s broken, and the technical term I’ve heard is largely called crisis manager, or crisis leader or crisis . . . whatever you want to call it, but in effect the organization’s broken and it needs someone in to fix it, and make it better . . . and to get it functional again. . . . Most people when they hear IT, it’s about technology and actually my experience is that it couldn’t be further from the truth. Every problem in technology has at its roots in . . . personnel, or people problem, and frequently it gets to a single individual.

Ironically, the brutality Aaron faced as a child confronting school bullies helped him develop a skill set that proved very useful in his fixer role.

One of the things that it [being bullied] trains you to do, and I learned this about myself, is that it trains you to recognize people and size them up quickly, almost like identification: friend or foe? . . . you learn to read people quickly, and so one of the skills that you have got to have when you do crisis management is to make quick reads, the organization is not working, it’s a people problem.

By the time of our interviews, Aaron had worked in the fixer role, after leaving ACOC, no less than six times. His experience had encompassed five more energy companies of various descriptions and a transportation company. Aaron managed his average stay at these organizations into the two-year-period format he feels is appropriate for this work. He knows staying longer to continue operating the new organization simply does not suit his nature.

A colleague at one of the energy companies made a passing observation about Aaron’s vocation that has become part of his story:
I restore cars for a hobby, . . . we were talking about all this kind of stuff and we were figuring out if I was going to fit, . . . he said: Do you realize the same motivation that makes you want to take an old beat up piece of shit car, and restore it to perfection is exactly what you do at work? He said the difference is, at home you control everything, you can control every nut and bolt at home, but you come into the workplace, you can’t control most of it.

I wondered whether Aaron is passionate about or even likes his vocation, which seems to have caused him significant trauma. The organizational change situations he faces are bound to come with a human cost, which is often difficult to deal with:

I began to realize, no I like, I like fixing things. I like fixing cars and I like to see things done well and elegantly, you know good solutions to problems and, well okay, so then it becomes, okay, I like big problems, so you know, I sort of settled in my mind, that well I might not have put picked this career path, had I had a choice. I like solving problems. I like fixing things.

Aaron’s Narrative Threads

Aaron developed his story as a passionate learner in his vocation from several identifiable and intertwined narrative threads. I found the following narrative threads central to the way Aaron formed, focused and evolved his vocation.

Dutch Cultural Narrative

Aaron described his cultural heritage as Dutch–Canadian. Although he held both national passports, both his parents and influential grandfather, who were all Dutch immigrants to Canada and were involved in Aaron’s formative years, influenced his cultural sensibilities. He also spent three and a half years, as an adult, living immersed in the Dutch culture. Aaron describes cultural
tendencies toward, for example, bluntness. He also mentioned their “firm” hand during his childrearing, and their determination: “People like my granddad . . . he wouldn’t let Holland get them down because it was half blown out, he was going to go someplace else, dammit. . . . you see his determination, you know and maybe it rubs off.”

**Faith Narrative: Reformed Church and Afterward**

Aaron’s parents deliberately settled near a Reformed Church community that was already established when they arrived in Canada. Aaron described the particular church attended by his family as highly legalistic in their Christian beliefs, stemming from rigid interpretation of scripture. This rigidity resulted in a culture of firm discipline alluded to by Aaron, but not abuse. “Yeah not from my parents [in reference to childhood abuse]; my parents were firm, my dad was a typical European dad, no there was nothing from them.”

Aaron’s faith has changed over the years; although he still considers himself a Christian, his faith has become much less legalistic than in his youth and also more reflective:

I would actually argue my faith has matured, and certainly in the last 5 to 10 years, I left the . . . Reformed Church, . . . I’m really trying to ask myself the question, okay, why am I a Christian? Then you start going through, well what was good about the faith I grew up in, and what wasn’t good, and what do I really believe, and that’s where I’m at now.

**Abuse by Peers in his Childhood Narrative**

Aaron tells many stories of the abuse he suffered at the hands of his school peers, particularly during the first nine years of his schooling. In Aaron’s narrative, the other children resented Aaron’s precocious nature, but Aaron himself refused to acquiesce to the abuse of the others and, in the end, probably made the abusive behaviour much worse than it might have
been. This narrative has had a dramatic and continuing impact on Aaron’s life and work, as will be shown in the other narratives that have evolved over time as a direct result.

**Interest in Science Narrative**

Aaron displayed a strong interest in science and mathematics throughout his educational history. He called himself “the guy that liked science, and maths and all kind of junk” during his elementary school and high school years. His significant achievement in twice winning national science fair competitions, for his aerodynamics projects, was also part of this narrative. Aaron eventually entered a rich science program at the local university, originally to study aircraft design, but in the end studying laser holography, which he first learned about from reading *Scientific American* magazine. Lastly, Aaron’s first job was to apply physics principles to geophysical programming for IOC.

**Self-sufficiency Narrative**

Aaron was largely isolated in his youth. His precociousness became a barrier for his peers, as did his need to avoid his childhood abusers. He was comforted when isolated away from the abusers, and when learning and entertaining himself. “It made me very withdrawn, I read, I built my model airplanes, I did my own thing, have very few friends.” As Aaron matured, his personal ability, his high standards, and the difficulty he retained toward dealing with opponents reinforced his childhood self-sufficiency. His vocation, as it developed, became a unique vocation *largely practiced as an individual*. Notably, Aaron is an individual “fixer,” not the leader of a fixing team.

**Transformational Narrative**

Aaron began a personal recovery transformation while at IOC under pressure from the organization. Nevertheless, by his own admission, the transformative work took many years for
him to reach his current state of understanding and modification of his own behaviour. As he said somewhat facetiously:

I had some really bad habits and they actually gave me a coach, ran me through some psychological type programs that tended to deal with why is [Aaron] this crazy man sometimes? They were very, very helpful, a turning point in my life. I went from being a crazy guy, who is literally uncontrollable to the nice stable guy you see in front of you today.

From Aaron’s description, Redecision Therapy was a process of dialogue with the therapist and feedback and guidance and reflection to reconsider decisions that he had made about people, decisions that memories of his childhood abuse influenced.

**Toughness Narrative**

Aaron has retained a toughness narrative, which he finds useful in his corporate world vocation but in essence, another benefit he sees from the abuse he received as a child is:

It also makes you tough, I mean, I hear some of the things around bullying . . . I would never want to get to the point where every kid is so polite you can’t have your normal schoolyard fights and disputes . . . so I do get a little upset when I hear, oh, we’ve gotta stop bullying. No, you’ve got to stop the abusive part; kids will always bully each other, push people around.

**Independent Learner Narrative**

Aaron developed a highly independent learning style in his youth that he wove throughout his vocational narrative. He spent a lot of time on his own as a child and his precociousness advanced his learning beyond his peers, which left him learning largely by himself. His science fair achievements were individual efforts. His university studies were
largely independent (two physics students), although he did work with at least one other on his
optics research. Even in his early corporate successes Aaron made unique contributions as an
individual, while he was part of a team and eventually as he led teams. His criticism of the IOC
executive that contributed to his departure from that company was his very own, independently
assessed, and individually presented, finding. As Aaron has moved through his career, he
emphasized that it is he alone who moves between the organizations, assessing the situation in
each new company, and “fixing” the problems with the IT organization.

**Fixer Narrative**

Aaron had an insatiable curiosity to understand and especially to fix things that were
broken. His father was a blacksmith, “A person who makes and repairs things in iron by hand.”
*(Oxford Dictionary of English, 2010)*. Aaron helped his father in the shop adjoining their house
from his very early days. He has a strong curiosity about how things work:

I’m one of these crazy guys that say, if they have a museum display, with a 17th-century
water clock, I want to spend the whole afternoon looking at it, how the heck does that go,
how did that guy dream that up? So the subject is less important than is it complicated, is
it difficult, is it interesting?

His corporate experience was a succession of “fixing” projects, one after another, first in
IOC and then in other corporations. The boredom he described with steady state operations
provides his rationale to continue working on “fixing” projects, the alternative, to manage
ongoing IT operations, is simply untenable to Aaron.

**IT Organizational Design Theory Narrative**

Aaron built a considerable body of knowledge and personal theory on how IT
organizations should work. He built this knowledge from his own experience and Aaron
described to me many of his “fixing” principles, the ones he follows when he looks at new organizations, during our interviews. Aaron’s ability to look holistically at a business organization, especially an IT organization, and assess the people involved, leading to the root cause of poor organizational performance, has been recognized by Aaron himself but also by others: “I’ve been told by a few people that I should write about this, actually on the IT world . . . I’ve figured out the formula . . . The four elements [his four overarching discoveries of effective IT organizations described to me separately] . . . why am I seeing this pattern come back several times?”

Aaron’s narrative threads are used to show how they influenced his decision-making in Chapter Six, where Aaron’s vocational development process is discussed further. I now describe Fly’s vocational narrative and corresponding narrative threads.

**Fly’s Vocational Narrative**

Fly was working as a firefighter–training officer for a major city fire department until July 2015. At that time, Fly turned 60 years old, the mandatory retirement age for firefighters. Our third interview was the day after Fly’s last day on the job. After the interview, Fly went home to complete his packing for a move to Chilliwack B.C., where his wife had lived for the last few years. He now aspires to teach fly-fishing, perhaps at a local college in B.C.

**Growing up**

Fly [a pseudonym chosen for his favourite hobby, fly fishing] is a native Albertan, born and raised in a small rural town with a population of about 400 people. Fly was a middle child in a family of five boys. As we spoke, it seemed apparent that the dominant presence of his mother, in contrast to his largely absent father, strongly influenced Fly’s early life. Fly’s father was a heavy-duty mechanic who liked life and work in the far north of Canada. From about the time
Fly was 10 years old, his father worked close to 11 months of the year in the Arctic as a contractor, maintaining the equipment needed to operate the DEW (Defence Early Warning) Line radar stations, installed to protect North America during the Cold War era.

Dad spent 25 years on the DEW line, so he was up there for six months, and home for one . . . so . . . mom was not a single parent, from the point of view of having to earn a living and so on, but from the point of view parenting, she was a single parent. My dad was, because he was away so much, he was fairly detached from us boys.

One of Fly’s earliest memories of his lifelong love of fishing and of the outdoors is of time spent with his father: “I started fishing when I was seven, followed my dad through the bush, and I’d always liked being outdoors.”

Fly’s mother raised five sons almost single-handedly; she also “sat on town council for quite a few years, you know was very influential” in his hometown. Concerning his early education, one of the first things Fly mentioned to me was that:

I’m sure one of the first interesting things that I helped, that I think helped shaped my interest in learning, and so on, was that my mother went through high school with me. She had never finished, she’d finished Grade 9 when she was 16, and then times being what they were, she was out working supporting [her] family, then married my dad, and had never had the chance. But she always wanted to go back to school, so at Grade 10 she went back to school and we went through high school together. . . . It’s an interesting lesson because it has impacted me in the later parts of my employment career, as to, it doesn’t matter when you do it, you can always make changes and do things you wanted to do.
Fly did well academically in junior high and into high school. He described his motivation at the time:

When I was in junior high school, I was a runt physically. I’m still the runt of the litter in my family, but when I graduated from Grade 9, I was four foot eight, and I weighed 85 pounds soaking wet. I was small. I was the one everybody beat up on when they were having a bad day, and the way I kind of compensated was I did really, really well academically.

During his high school years, Fly was involved extensively with the army cadets. For Fly, the recognition program associated with the cadets was appealing. “They recognize your accomplishments, you win all kinds of awards, special summer camps and so on, and I think that was a part of it.” Ultimately, Fly became the top cadet in Canada one year, an achievement that still stood out to him, during our conversations:

When you grow up in small town, redneck Alberta, sticking out because of academic prowess, in any way shape or form, you sort of get labelled, right? But here was something, you know, that people sort of had to respect, and I did well in it . . . I’m actually relatively proud of that, because the way it was determined was the cadets that had taken . . . their master cadet program, which was pretty rigorous, . . . all the master cadet’s in Canada had the opportunity to go to National Army cadet camp, . . . and there were two of us out of the 250 roughly that were there, that were selected. You know it was a dead heat apparently, the arguments fell 50-50, so they picked both of us and we were named co-winners.
Post-secondary

Fly’s success in the cadet program motivated his initial post-secondary aspirations. He did well in high school and was proud both of his success as a student and as a cadet. Consequently, “that led me to think that the military would be a good choice for me.” Fly entered one of Canada’s two military colleges, at the time, specializing in “honours math-physics, you know, thinking, yeah this would be neat stuff.”

Fly managed to get through first year, although he had difficulty with advanced mathematics in the form of calculus. His roommate at the time worked out a deal with Fly, where Fly would keep military order in their accommodation and dress in exchange for tutoring in calculus. The exchange worked well enough the first year. Unfortunately, his roommate resigned after the first year, and Fly was on his own the second year to face calculus, his “great downfall.”

I have a complete inability to cope with calculus. So I failed-out after two years . . . yeah, I cannot cope with calculus in any way shape or form. . . . I went there [the military college] in ‘73, and finished up and ‘75, and so for the next couple of years I went to [another college close to his home town] and started off, okay, tried geology but there was still calculus involved, [he was in the geology program for a year] so that didn’t work out, so then I went into the phys-ed., and I got done my first year phys-ed., and I looked around and I said, I’ve been four years at university I’ve gotten first year done, and I thought, enough of this.”

At this point, Fly was fed-up with his “lack of success” in post-secondary, and yet didn’t have a strong pull in any particular direction.

Fly’s experience with calculus intrigued me, because it had caused him to change his academic direction twice over a brief two-year period. Fly reflected on the advanced math and
that it had first started causing him some difficulty in Grade 12. He nevertheless entered an honours physics math program, thinking: “I hadn’t done horribly well in the calculus, but to be honest I was not focusing nearly as hard for my studies, and I thought well, okay, I’ll just have to pick it up when I get to [the military college].” While at the military college, in second year in particular, “I was starting to get more involved in sports,” and:

I was sinking so much effort into the math, and that in my last year I also failed my English. Now the other factor that came into play there to a certain extent was I had just broken up with my girlfriend, my first ever girlfriend, whom I’m now married to . . . but you know I was, that was not helping my concentration . . . at that point.

Fly’s difficulties with calculus and his stories about it stood out so strongly in his life experience that even the day after his retirement he mentioned his wife recently bought him a T-shirt with the words on it, “Another day with absolutely no plans to use calculus.”

Over the summers, Fly worked in several different outdoor-related jobs. He worked on a summer maintenance crew for his hometown, he worked at a local RV dealership and then the summer after he became “fed up” with his attempts at post-secondary and decided to go to work on highway construction for his uncle Bob, who was a supervisor of a construction company, doing highway work:

But that first summer was a real “shaper” for a lot of the rest of my life, because we were working up near [town name], building highway, . . . so we’d finished the job we were going to do up there, and we were loading up a highboy truck with various components, and my Uncle Bob’s son, Cal, was on the crew, so my cousin, and him and I were the Junior guys, I mean Cal was 17 and I would have been 22 at the time. So at any rate, we were loading up the highboy and we’d just thrown some blocking up underneath one of
the pieces that was going to be loaded and we were walking back to go around the other side and get them in place and somebody yelled, “Look out!” I saw something move just out of the corner my eye and I jumped but Cal didn’t, and a three-ton cement auger rolled off, and it pinned him right between the hips and the ribs, so you know he was just able to yell out once, Get it off me,” was all he said, and then he was unconscious. [After a few minutes] Cal starts to have problems breathing and eventually stopped breathing, so I’m trying to do rescue breathing on him and obviously there was absolutely nothing really that anybody could do. But, the ambulance pulled up, the attendant came over and, you know, checked Cal’s pulse, and there was no pulse.

Fly’s cousin passed away and the death had a heavy impact on his immediate family. For Fly himself, he reflected deeply on the loss and what he was doing with his life:

It was one of those eye openers of how quickly things can happen . . . that you know, change life or end life, and I think that was definitely a major wake-up to me, and in many, many ways, because, I mean, at one point I’d thought about, you know, going into medicine . . . I actually went in and took the MCAT [when he went back to the college in the fall]. I opened the test and I read about the first three questions and I closed it up.

Fly’s brief venture into thinking about medicine as a profession had actually started when he was still in high school and doing very well academically. I wondered if Cal’s death might have triggered his interest but when I asked Fly about where the thought of medicine had come from, he responded:

I read a fair number of biographies of physicians from the past—Hippocrates, Galen, Jennings and so on—at varying times, and you know I liked the idea of helping others, I guess, and the other factor would’ve been the respect with which physicians are held
within the general community, and ensure that was a part of it, right, that physicians were generally very well regarded and still are really, you know. . . . You sort of go hmmm, you know, that was just something, you know, I think that was a smaller element in it, but it was certainly part of it.

Nevertheless, Fly needed to move forward with his life:

I wanted to do something and highway construction wasn’t it, you know I enjoyed the work, I enjoyed the physical aspect of it, being outdoors and everything, but after a while it’s the same stuff all the time and not overly challenging. So, at any rate I decided to go back to university, so I went back to [the local] college and finished out my second year of phys-ed. I’d always liked sports, you know, played whatever he could . . . so phys-ed. seemed logical.

That winter, while at the college, Fly responded to an advertisement for a summer job doing maintenance at a nearby provincial park. After investigating the opportunity, Fly realized he could not live on the money offered. The park ranger in charge of the recruitment noticed Fly’s experience with the military and instead offered him a job as a seasonal park ranger. Fly enjoyed the experience; he enjoyed the outdoors and the activity. He went back to college in the fall, spent another summer as a ranger, and then transferred into a physical education degree program at the local university with a major in Outdoor Education. The program engaged Fly in planning and undertaking various outdoor expeditions, with his classmates, in the wild lands of Northern Alberta. Although Fly graduated with B.P.E. (Bachelor of Physical Education), he found little enjoyment teaching high school students:

I did not want to be involved in teaching. . . . Motivation [of the students] was pretty low . . . I taught the Grade 12s and then the Grade 8s, and in Grade 8 it’s mandatory that you
take phys-ed., and Grade 12, it’s optional, so everybody that was taking phys-ed. in
Grade 12 wanted to be active physically . . . the difference in motivation level is
incredible, right?

Upon completion of his university program, Fly decided to return to the park ranger work
he had experienced in the summers. He became a full-time park ranger:

I’d always liked being outdoors, everything that I done outdoors, I’d enjoyed. You know
even if you got rained on, cold and miserable, and it was part of the experience . . . not
that you like it, but it was simply part of the challenge . . . I wasn’t going to be sitting in
an office all day . . . but it was the being outdoors, and active, that was what really
cought my eye.

The work was not full time, year round; consequently, he was left with his winters
relatively free. For those early years, he filled the winter months by coaching various high school
or college sports teams, which he felt had students who were more motivated. Fly’s work as a
park ranger became full time, year round, in 1989, and it was work that he continued to do for
the next 13 years.

At that time in Alberta, according to Fly, three agencies managed the outdoors, natural
and recreational resources of the province. Fly worked for “Alberta Parks” and the other two
agencies were “Alberta Forest Service” and “Fish and Wildlife.” In the recreational parks where
Fly worked, “rowdies in the campgrounds,” were the most significant element of the job that Fly
found distasteful: “[I] figured out . . . but I thought I could cope with it, that enforcement work
was not my forte. It wasn’t that I couldn’t, didn’t develop skill at it, but I’m not a big conflict
person.”
On one of Fly’s summers working as a seasonal ranger, management assigned him to the Provincial Mountain Parks region of Alberta, where he discovered another element of the job that he truly enjoyed:

My first summer in [the Provincial Mountain Parks] I found out that I really liked the public safety side of things. I’d always enjoyed being in the outdoors, I started to get into climbing fairly seriously and found I really did enjoy that, . . . ski mountaineering and all that stuff, and so I . . . help them get people out who had gotten themselves into trouble and so on, and so the public safety side appealed to me greatly, and I really enjoyed it.

Mid-way through his years as a ranger, management promoted Fly to District Ranger and he performed the duties of an operations planner, where he discovered the office work involved in the role was not to his liking:

You know I actually did quite well at the work, they wanted me to stay permanently, but I found out I hate administrative work, I don’t like meetings, I don’t like phone calls, I don’t like paperwork. . . . I can cope with that, but when your entire day is at a desk, whether it’s at a computer, writing, answering phone calls . . . not my cup of tea, not at all. . . . It’s the confinement as much as anything . . . I just like being able to be active whenever I want.

Fly’s aversion to the office work was strong enough that when an opportunity arose, he gratefully took a job opening in [the Provincial Mountain Parks], even though it meant a reduction in both grade and pay. Around the same time, there was another change taking place in the three agencies that managed the outdoors, natural, and recreational resources of the province:

We were starting to do more and more enforcement work on the poaching side, and so on, and we were starting to get more involved in that, as the numbers of Fish & Wildlife
officers dwindled, the Park Rangers were having to pick up what was going on in their parks at the very least, on the immediate boundaries, and then about 1997, I guess, ’98, they amalgamated Parks and Fish & Wildlife, and they called us Conservation Officers, all of us. . . . There was a great increase in enforcement, all of a sudden, you were issued body armour, pepper spray, baton, cuffs, and eventually side arms, and you were coming into the city to serve warrants, doing investigations, and totally, totally not my area of interest, and I was getting very negative about the whole . . . experience.

Fly gradually decided it was time to move on into another line of work. He had some peers who had found work in a large city fire department nearby and given Fly glowing reports of the firefighter role. Fly applied to the fire department several times, beginning in 1996. He realized he was quickly approaching the maximum recruitment age of 45; nevertheless, the department finally accepted him in 2001. Fly spent the next 10 years “on the floor” as a firefighter, beginning as a raw recruit and eventually rising to the position of “nozzle man” (now senior firefighter). When Fly was close to 55 years old, two factors led him to consider other positions in the fire department. Firstly, “you’re starting to think about pension, and your pension is based on your ‘best five,’ that was in the background, but it wasn’t a huge driver.” Secondly, there was his physical condition:

I’m 55 at that point and physically . . . I was starting to have self-doubts about, can I go in, and if one of my crew goes down, can I get them out, can do every single physical demand placed on me, every call, every shift, every tour.

There was a position, within the fire service that appealed to Fly, Training Officer (TO), at the equivalent pay grade to a Captain. He started to apply for TO positions as they became
available. He was successful in making the transition and reflecting back after four years as a TO, he said:

I’ve been here training now for not quite four years, and have actually found where I should’ve been a long time ago. Yeah, it really surprised . . . when I look back during my Ranger days, one of the things I really enjoyed was taking the beginners, who are just starting to learn climbing and mountain rescue, and so on, and even the more advanced people, but taking them out and show them the skills, teach them how to move safely, how to set up rope rescue systems, all that type of stuff. . . . It’s kind of cool to get to spend a day on the rocks, or roaming around the mountains but now I look back with much more wide-open eyes, I recognize that I was enjoying the teaching.

**Working and Learning Life**

The fire service’s training activities, both for new recruits to the service and for the TOs who train them, became more formalized while Fly worked as a TO:

About a year and a half ago . . . we had no supervision link, anyway to try to advance things, and since [personal name] has come in, we have really been able to move forward, start developing each other, like developing training officers. . . . There was nothing in place to help them develop beyond teaching recruits, okay, and they wanted to go places but now we’ve actually started to develop a system where guys come, we can start to develop their teaching skills, develop them, you know encourage their interests. We are getting involved in actual research now, not just finding other guys’ ideas, but actually being involved in research programs [in Fire Science] and so on . . . this will be quite a different Academy . . . maybe how we teach each other. You know how TOs develop themselves.
When I asked Fly about what interested him personally, wondering whether he was involved in research programs himself and whether that aspect of the job was perhaps an area of learning for him, he responded:

The scientific side, not so much, I’ve described my battles with calculus and so on, and the scientific method, and I find I’m not a really strong details guy, okay? But, what I have found in the talk of guys around here, is I seem to be more of a synthesizer, because I’ll talk with a guy about one thing, I’ll talk with him about another, and all of a sudden I go, does this fit with this, and can we do this? But it’s at a practical level, it’s not a theoretical level . . . what I found to be my biggest interest is: (a) teaching the recruits, I really enjoyed that, but (b) helping the other guys improve their skills in whatever direction they want. We’ve just started a new training officer on-boarding process . . . we have a designated mentor for them, we have a complete layout of everything that they need to get through in the first few days, and the role of the mentor, and I’ve been mentor for three out of our last four TOs.

Concerning both the TOs and the recruits, the new service members he calls the “rooks,” Fly elaborated on his philosophy for the service:

One of the things that I’m very firmly committed to is that this is the job of service. We exist to serve the citizens of [the city]. . . . You better want to serve the people, because most of what we go to is pretty humdrum when you come right down to it. But you always have to remember when people phone us they are having the worst day of their lives.

Fly truly enjoys the work he does and the people he works with. His engagement is apparent to his peers:
I use the word passionate when I’m talking around here frequently. . . . One of the things that myself and one of the other guys instituted was the TOOTY award, the training officer of the year. . . . I was lucky enough to be awarded it this year, but one of the guys . . whom I nominated, you know wrote back, you know, passionate unquestionable enthusiasm and all that [in reference to Fly himself]. I think it’s a little bit of an exaggeration, but to know that guys that I respect, and that’s pretty much the entire hall, regard me as being passionate, enthusiastic.

For Fly, passionate, enthusiastic means:

That you’re always looking to improve, not just yourself but the people you’re teaching, the people you’re working with, you know because it’s, there’s constant changes which the knowledge . . . also keeping us advancing in professionalism. . . . The increase in professionalism, a better knowledge by the individuals, learning better techniques for passing it on . . . I would not ever want to get to that point of not being able to continue to grow.

It is also the new recruits, the rooks, who seem to inspire Fly:

What we teach the rookies now and how we treat them will impact them their entire career . . . seeing things actually occur because of your efforts, whether it’s individually or you are part of a team, it takes some of the recruits that come in . . . to watch them develop confidence, develop skills, learn that they can do it . . . to watch them turn into confident firefighters, with good sets of skills, and good attitudes, and interested in continuing to learn throughout the rest of their careers. I mean, feeling that you had a role in that, that to me has turned out to be that most rewarding part of it, to know that you can have that kind of an impact on somebody.
Fly spoke at length about the relevance of the training he delivers to the recruits, for their ability to perform the required physical roles easily, for their physical safety and for the longevity of their individual careers:

So why do I spend so much time pounding away [at] you guys about ladders, because we don’t use ladders all that often . . . but you slip on a patch of ice because you’re doing it with poor technique, and you wrench your back, no that may be the end of your career. . . . I’m helping them develop important skills, and the knowledge base that is the basis of their whole career, and the reward is watching them learn, and grow and develop that enthusiasm themselves.

When I asked Fly why he seemed to get so excited about teaching skills with ladders and hoses, Fly returned to his feelings about students who are themselves motivated to learn:

I think that hidden away all these years has been this adult education . . . but everybody that comes here wants to learn, and I think that’s true of most adult learners. They are going into a career, they are taking a course at university . . . a lot of people would be going: Well, why the heck do you want to do that? Because you have the interest, and so, working with those people that are self-motivated.

I also wondered whether Fly was as passionate about being a firefighter as he was about teaching future firefighters. When I asked him what he considered his vocation to be, he answered without hesitation:

I would say my vocation is teaching, which is something I would never [have] thought five years ago, I would never [have] said that. I enjoyed firefighting, I’d have said that, I’m a firefighter and I enjoy it, but passion? You know, like we’re talking about now, no that wasn’t there. You know, it’s the passion has developed here.
Vocational Learning

Finally, Fly and I talked about how he himself learns as a Training Officer:

A lot of it is not formal learning per se, there is lots of courses and so on, but a big part of it is talking with other guys, how do you do this? How do you do that? How do you think we should do this? You know, and just all of a sudden that idea crystallizes . . . and you pursue it, and you talk about it with the guys, well is that practical is to mark, well no, but if we do this with it instead, all right, so it’s gotten to a point where I look at everything as, can I learn anything from this, that I can apply? And it’s the same with my fly-fishing.

I love fly-fishing because it’s a never-ending series of puzzles.

Fly’s Narrative Threads

Fly developed his story as a passionate learner in his vocation from several identifiable and intertwined narrative threads. I found the following narrative threads important in the way Fly formed, focused and evolved his vocation.

Outdoors Narrative

Fly loved the outdoors. His earliest memories with his father fishing were associated with the outdoors as were several of his early summer jobs and much of his adult life. Throughout his career, from his degree in Outdoor Education to his work as a park ranger and especially when working in the Provincial Mountain Parks, Fly described the love of the outdoors in his life and career. His beloved hobby, fly-fishing, which he hoped to expand into a retirement vocation as teacher, is the most recent example of his love and appreciation of outdoor activity.

Physical Activity Narrative

Fly’s need for physical activity is another narrative thread wound throughout his life. Fly included everything that required some form of exertion in the category of physical activity. For
example, fly-fishing, various sports, mountaineering, cadet drill, responding as a firefighter, and
teaching ladder usage to recruits, are all activities included in Fly’s physical activity narratives.
Throughout his adult life, Fly chose physical activity over office work and confinement
(including studying at a desk), which he has disliked intensely throughout his post-secondary and
working experience. Fly once made a major career shift and accepted a demotion in order to
avoid office work, which he associated with his dislike of confinement.

Public Safety and Service Narrative

Notably, Fly has also maintained a public safety and public service narrative thread
through much of his adult life. As I interviewed Fly, it occurred to me that he spent most of his
adult life, from high school to the fire department, in positions where uniforms were required and
I wondered whether there was any significance in the observation. Fly gave me a very quick
response that he had considered previously:

I’ve thought about it and I think what it is, at the end of a lot of thinking about this, is that
every one of those represents helping people, you know in the military, you are defending
your country, and the citizens thereof. As a park ranger, your overall job is helping
people enjoy their experience in the Parks and Recreation area, whether it’s breaking up
the parties that are disrupting everybody else’s fun, rescuing people that have gotten
themselves in trouble, controlling the wildlife that can have negative interactions, those
are all things that help people. You know firefighting is very directly . . . you’re helping
people . . . they’re having the worst day of their lives, and you walk in.

Fly considered his interest in public safety began with the death of his cousin, literally
while Fly tried to perform rescue breathing on the young man as he was dying. This thread also
included his brief flirtation with medical education, beginning in high school and ending with his
aborted attempt at the MCAT exam. Nevertheless, the public safety thread came into full bloom when he experienced the mountain rescue services he performed as a park ranger, and eventually in his role as a firefighter, and generatively, in his role as a trainer of future firefighters.

Education and Teaching Narrative

Fly described personal narratives about education and teaching, although these roles did not come to the fore until later in his life. His mother’s co-participation in high school, while he himself was attending the same school, doubtless left an impression of the importance of education to his mother. He took on a scholarly focus himself while in high school. His trouble with post-secondary education aside, in the end, he obtained a degree in education, although one that fit his particular inclinations, and considering his early teaching experience, one that seemed misaligned to his eventual employment. Nevertheless, late in his working life, Fly realized a passion for teaching future firefighters, and reflected, “I was really enjoying this, and you know it started to really become obvious that this was something I should have gotten myself into quite a while ago.”

Informal Leadership Narrative

Fly filled a leadership role among the TOs, amidst formal leadership changes, even though he has been there for only four years. He was an advocate for a philosophy of public service among the firefighter rookies he taught, and although that philosophy had been present in the service, Fly became a strong advocate. His leadership among the TOs was acknowledged formally by the assignment of three of the last four newly hired training officers to Fly as mentor. He also mentioned that his peers acknowledge his leadership and passion for the service through his recent TOOTY award, and in informal conversation.
Calculus Narrative

Fly’s story included narratives that may have barred his vocational path, but eventually led him to his career as a training officer. Three notable narratives of this type are the calculus, enforcement, and office work narratives, all of which resulted in major changes to his vocational life.

The calculus narrative may have stemmed from various sources as far back as his high school days but the source is irrelevant. The difficulties Fly first experienced in high school became a major obstacle in military college, especially in his chosen math-physics program. After leaving the military college, he again attributes calculus to his lack of success in a college geology program. Later, as a TO for the fire department, the calculus blockage is used to explain why he does not participate in the fire science-related research opportunities. Fly saw advanced calculus underlying all advanced science, which caused him to restrict his interest in science to the popular level.

I found it somewhat ironic that Fly, a holder of a physical education degree, but also one who avoids scientific research activities, was in fact an avid practitioner of kinesiology, “the study of the mechanics of body movements” (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2010), as indicated in statements such as “[it’s the] simple things you know, like hand position, foot position, and it’s quite literally if you do it in the most efficient way, it’s very easy.”

Dislike of Conflict Narrative

Fly authored a narrative around conflict that he associated with enforcement activities, which instigated at least one diversion in his career, away from conservation officer to his firefighter position. This narrative is still impacts Fly’s life as a teacher of fire fighters. He mentioned he sometimes compares firefighters to police officers, noting that firefighters seldom
experience conflict, whereas police officers are required to enforce laws and often encounter conflicting situations. During the interviews he observed as a point of pride in his profession that “very few people aren’t happy to see firefighters, and there’s lots of people that aren’t happy see police,” an observation he attributes to the law enforcement duties of the police. When it came to recruit assessment, Fly described decisions about recruit failure with his fellow TOs, thereby mitigating conflict with the unsuccessful candidates, from Fly’s personal perspective.

Fly’s narrative threads are used to show how they influenced his decision-making in Chapter Six, where Fly’s vocational development process is discussed further. I now describe George’s vocational narrative and corresponding narrative threads.

**George’s Vocational Narrative**

George was the youngest participant in this study, at 25 years old. George graduated from an Alberta technical institution as an instrumentation-engineering technologist. He most recently worked in for a company that specialized in industrial process safety.

**Growing up**

George’s family lived a semi-rural area in the midst of Alberta’s oil and gas industry. Both of his parents grew up on farms not far from the area where they settled down to raise George. His father was an entrepreneurial welder, who started building and installing car mufflers, but eventually moved over to producing mufflers for the large generator sets that powered remote oil rigs. George worked with his dad in the shop as a youth, where he learned how to use the metal working tools and the machinery of his father’s trade.

[Mother] works in a hospital actually, she in administration, and she’s part-time. It’s a long-standing thing . . . she was more in the legal system, always wanted to become a
nurse, but she didn’t want to leave us at home, or have someone else caring, so she
sacrificed that to raise us. And Dad was always, like I said, a hard-working man.

George’s dad wanted his children to avoid the hard, physically demanding life he had led;
he encouraged George to get an education that would lead him to less physically demanding
office work:

There is a continual push, really from Dad more, because he’s been more in the trades,
it’s more, hard labour his whole life, that he always wanted us to have a nice job, his
knees are shot, his body’s hurting from it, he always stressed that to us.

George admired his hard working father and phrases like “Dad was one of the hardest
working people I know” were repeated several times in our conversations. There was also
mention of the long hours and sacrifices his father made in support of his family and the “utmost
respect” he holds for both his parents.

George described his two siblings, an older brother and an older sister, in a way that
brought out something of their personalities:

Yeah, I have a brother and a sister, and they’re . . . we are all complete opposites. If we
pick a triangle, the brother he loves working with his hands, and he’s very much simple
[in his life style], he likes to stay at home, doesn’t like being out in public, doesn’t like
going out to the bar. He’s a bit older, he’s 29, but he’s just very into the creature
commforts, and living in his comfort zone. Myself, I say, if I’m in my comfort zone, I’m
not being the best I can be that day. I have to step out of my comfort zone. And my sister
she’s very much the caregiver, so she works at a jail, and she’s worked with youth justice
her whole life, since she was, I think, 16, she was volunteering.
George’s experiences throughout his high school years were in many respects unremarkable. His parents had chosen to raise their family on “an acreage” just outside of a small Alberta town.

So it’s a bit of a crossover between a farm and an actual house in the city, but it was great. The parents, they wanted us to grow up in the country because they didn’t want any the city influences on us.

High School

George was a good student but spoke with what I came to see as characteristic understatement about his academic record: “I don’t think I was quite honours, but it was high 70s, I might’ve been honours, yeah 75, in between 75 and 80, yeah, somewhere in there.” Nor does he speak of a particular subject that caught his imagination or of academic achievement of note. In describing his reasoning for making subject choices, he attributed much of the decision making to his parents, and their insistence that he attend a post-secondary institution:

Academic, I was always the pure math, the chemistry, physics, and those were simply the parents, and I thank [them] a lot for always pushing us, being in there at least getting your minimums, which would’ve been your pure math, and your chemistry, and your other science, at a certain level, then you can get into university or you get into college. They didn’t care which one I went into, as long as I pursued post-secondary.

George claimed no particular gifts, although he emphasized, “I always studied during high school too. I was never one of the ones who could go without studying.” He had basic shop training in high school, but in addition, “I grew up welding with my dad all the time in his shop.”

George is remarkably neutral when he speaks of his high school years, in summary:
High school was always very . . . I guess an easy way to explain it, my sister would always say I hid behind her leg for most of my life, so I was very shy, . . . very shy. . . . I was still very shy, had the kind of core group of friends, I was always friends with a wide variety—I never stuck to one . . . it’s never who I was, you always talked everyone, and make them feel invited . . . I was never the academic. I was never the top sports. I never really agreed with team play. I didn’t like the interaction and the structures of most teams, especially when it comes down to the coaching level. Simply just because it’s more recreational and when you’re in high school, we were never in any sports schools, so, the disparity between people, . . . I couldn’t handle someone who was trying really hard and maybe didn’t have that natural ability, being looked down upon by others, or even coaches getting angry. I just couldn’t handle that sort of thing. I had one rugby coach who I loved and I played rugby all throughout high school; he was very inclusive of everyone, [he would] push you to be your best, and push you over, he knew where your limits were, and just included everyone, which really resonates with me . . . just rugby, and it was simply because that coach . . . his was the only one that I could actually handle being with. And, that team definitely, [I was] one of the leaders for sure, always. The coach . . . would always rely on me to carry more of the team, so yeah, that was always good.

George’s avocations during high school were, for the most part, individual in nature as opposed to team oriented. He mentioned several times his love of motocross [motorcycle or motorized dirt bike] racing:
Motocross carried through high school, and there was also snowboarding to a level, and golf, always loved golf, so it was really motocross and rugby, motocross practising about five times a week.

Not only did he race his dirt bikes, but he also used his mechanical ability and resources (his father’s welding shop, his older brother was a machinist who also loved building and rebuilding his own car as a hobby) when he says, “I always worked on my own dirt bike.” In fact, it seemed he was intensely interested in motocross racing, which required practising five times a week, which leads to another element of George’s personality, his tolerance of risk. Early in our conversations, George mentioned his love of calculated risk, something that has stayed with him:

Something that was great, . . . I live off of the adrenaline, I love downhill mountain biking now. I got out of the motocross; I simply didn’t have the time to put into it, but anything that scares me I love. So I’d say I have a very high risk tolerance but at least calculating a bit to make sure everything’s okay and so that was kind of the childhood growing up.

He further suggests that this tolerance for risk may have come from his father. “The dad, he’s a lot like me; he was a bit of a crazy one when he was younger.”

Post-secondary

When it came time for post-secondary, George’s parents played an important role in the choices he made:

Again, help from the parents, and the dad, he was looking at the different trades, and they helped me out too, with looking at how much you make with each program.

Instrumentation is fairly highly paid, and from knowing a couple of family friends who
were in it, talking to them, that they loved it . . . start with that, and see where it takes you. And that was the extent, got in . . . school . . . school is alright, but it’s really not a gauge of what you do when you get out, and I’ve always, more or less always realized that you get through school and see where it takes you from there.

When I asked George about the nature of the instrumentation engineering technology program he chose, at a large technical school in a nearby city, he gave me a quick explanation:

Instrumentation is an interesting one, it’s really, and if I explain it to someone who doesn’t know what it is, I really just paint a picture of a pipe, or if you think of a refinery, or upgrader, you have lots of things flowing through, and you can get faster flows or higher pressures or higher temperatures, lower temperatures. Another one that I do like to use is basically we cooked the perfect pot of oatmeal. I’ve boiled over my oatmeal quite a few times; I’ve burned it to the pan. We put electronics in that cook the perfect pot of oatmeal, and more or less had that understanding going in, but no real process understanding, it’s a lot more process now.

When I asked George whether he could have described his two-year diploma program like this when he and his parents were still choosing it, he responded:

You have to do a bit of research and you have to, I can’t really remember what it’s called, but write on a bit of a paper of why you wanted to learn it . . . having to do a bit of research, and there’s family friends who were in it, so talking to them and really getting an understanding from there.

There was another factor involved in George’s choice of an instrumentation engineering technology program. His dad emphasized the physical demands of the manual trades; the trades such as welding that took a toll on the worker’s body. “He’s always steered us away from that
sort of work into one that would be a lot easier on your body, more of the 40 hours a week, building more of that positive lifestyle.” Nevertheless, George had his own experiences to contribute to the decision-making:

I had a job between college and high school that reaffirmed everything he [his father] was saying. I worked on an assembly line for rig mats . . . so I was the second row in, the welder was upfront, would square everything up, would pass it down, and while people were welding around us, we would stuff them with wood, whether it was treated or untreated, and all day, so we were picking up these heavy logs and stuffing rig mats, 30° in this place, and they’d have the doors pretty much shut because they are MIG [Metal Inert Gas] welding, so you can’t have much wind going through, and that was just reaffirming, long hours and hard work . . . get an office job and I can sit down. And that, obviously instrumentation you can . . . go [to the] office or you can go field, . . . I always knew field experience was important, but I always stayed more to the office job route, again, because of . . . seeing more opportunity there.

George’s period at the technical college was largely uneventful. Again, he worked hard and obtained decent marks. When asked of this two-year period in his life, he summarized it very briefly:

And that was the extent, got in . . . school . . . school is all right, . . . I’ve always, more or less always, realized that you get through school and see where it takes you from there. . . . I still have best friends who are really from [his technical school], and involvements with school there, first-year nothing, second year student club, I wanted to get involved a bit more there, it’s simply a bit of a resume builder, from my perspective, and being able to organize with the actual students, the interaction with the staff as well.
Unexpected Event

George finished his two-year program in early May 2010. He did not have a job lined up, but there were many prospects at that time. A few days after finishing classes, on the Victoria Day weekend, George and some friends went out to celebrate the completion of their diploma program:

At this point, I almost separate my life into pre- and post- . . . incident. When I came out of college, it would’ve been right after exams, I was looking for jobs, working hard, I went out with friends one night, we were on [street name] Avenue, in [the large city where he was educated], which is a big bar strip, . . . bunch of people I didn’t know, a couple of really good friends were there partying. The young mindset of course, you just . . . partying, you get way too much testosterone going. One of the guys, I had met before, just a few times, we kind of get going back-and-forth, and he’s always known for his fighting, so you’re kind of just in this, man, bullshit back-and-forth mood, right? I don’t even . . . this boy at that time, back-and-forth bullshit, yeah. I’d fight for you! I’d fight for you! We ended-up at one bar . . . and I had went off on my own at this point in time, and we are all in there at one stage, but I was on the dance floor with some girl and not paying attention . . . everyone leaves. So I hop in a cab to go back to the house, I get to the house and everyone’s partying there, I walk inside, asked, because I didn’t have any cash on me, if someone would come out with me . . . and it’s this one guy who likes fighting, likes to mouth off, he comes out with me. Little did I know that he got into an altercation at the bar with another group, from [nearby town], supposedly, or he’s from [same nearby town], some back-and-forth and he said that he’s going to kill them, so they followed him to the house and were waiting outside. In this story, I have no issue saying
it right now, and I don’t tell really anyone in my life unless they are really close, because people really do not understand, and they always judge. So, he comes out with me has the $20 and pays the cab, we turn around these guys hopped out of their car with baseball bats, and I ended up getting beat with a baseball bat. He ran to the backyard and hid. I came to in the hospital not knowing what’d happened. They were hitting me in the face so I separated . . . I have a big scar here, the jaw was split right here [pointing to his jaw], completely shattered, and so it was right around 10 hours of surgery to get it back into a reconstruction, and I also have a big scar here [pointing to his face], where my arm was busted from shielding my face. They went after me because I was with the guy who told them he was going to kill them. It was more gang-related, the guy I was with would never, ever, talk to the cops, which was one of the most frustrating things, and I mean the resentment you have for someone like that, after not knowing them, and running to the backyard, after you were the person caused it, and really not even caring for the person. I was in the hospital for eight days and I was unable to work or really do anything for three months. For a solid month I’d wake up at night from just sheer pain. They couldn’t fuse, they couldn’t wire the jaw because it would have fused, so it was completely shattered here, and separated here, just two floating bones, so I was in every week with the plastic surgeon resetting the jaw, getting everything in line, so that wiped out a portion of my life, and as you can imagine, and I always say now, people don’t change unless they have a really life altering event happen, and that’s why I separated into pre- and post- that incident in my life, and who I am now is definitely because of that in incident, and it’s just, it fuels me to be better every single day.
The circumstances surrounding the incident, the trauma George endured, the three months he spent convalescing, mostly bedridden, the people he met, including the surgeons who worked on him, even the children in an adjoining hospital building, whom he saw and spoke with, and who themselves were critical cancer patients, all left a lasting impact on George as a person. The incident brought George’s life to a full stop, in fact:

What changed my thinking was you feel you have friends [from his home town], and they’re really not there for you, and no one can understand what happened and the extent, I mean I really lost as far as I say three months of my life, and people . . . it’s not happening to them, so they don’t go, . . . you can’t empathize with anything on that extent, and I really bring it down to when I talked about, you know, change and . . . life altering, it was really losing a family member, almost you losing your life.

George eventually recovered over the summer months to the point where he was sufficiently presentable and able to go through job interviews:

I didn’t get a job ‘til September and it was a week after I got everything, there were wires around the teeth, and then elastics everywhere, I got that off and then I went in for a job interview . . . so, yeah it was 100% life altering event.

Working Life

A family connection arranged for George to get a job interview. The employer was an automation company and when they did their entry tests, he scored an unheard of 100%. The company offered George the job and he went to work:

I worked there for three and a half years. I had pretty good mentors the whole time. And they got to a bit of a point in the company where they were having some growing pains, and I felt I didn’t have a mentor any more, and I’d peaked out, and for me if I ever have
that feeling that, I guess, I don’t want to say fear, but that’s something I avoid at every
cost, it’s peaking out, whether it’s in . . . really it’s just my own potential, hitting some
sort of peak. I always need to push myself . . . I continuously have the thought: What
have I done this year? What great things have I accomplished? It really fuels me. So I lost
him [a key mentor] and felt there is no more room for growth, and that’s when I [moved
to a new position], I made that transition.

George went to work for a new company that specialized in safety instrument systems,
designing and selling smart instruments that prevent automated facilities from operating in an
unsafe way. As George explained: “So if we’re over-pressuring or over-temperaturing, we’re about
to have an incident, which leads to a health and safety environmental reputation, we shut the process
down.” George worked in the discipline of Process Safety, and from George’s perspective, this is
a meaningful area for his long-term future: “The process safety side of things . . . my
involvement, and where I get more fulfilment out of this, this is where you’re talking about
saving lives. I do 100% see being involved in that the future.”

George was attracted to this company because of what they do, the unsafe situations they
prevent, but particularly because of one individual. When asked about why he made the move, he
explained:

It was really because of a training course and I saw one person who worked for this
company and I just thought he was a genius and any company who had that guy working
for them must be great to work for because he could work anywhere in the world, and
that’s where I saw, and I really targeted that company, it was the only company I applied
to, and everything worked.

The transition to a safety-oriented company, one that promoted and built safety systems,
was particularly meaningful for George. After having endured a great deal of physical pain,
through no fault of his own, he was highly motivated to prevent individuals from experiencing traumatic injury or death as a result of industrial malfaisance. He spoke of the responsibility of management:

I just really want to avoid people having those situations, taking them to the hospital, so these injuries that happen . . . negligence is a very strong word, but I guess just the lack of caring, from some of the corporations, for their workers under them, is really troubling to me so outside of work I’m always looking, always looking for those incidents that are happening. I come home at the end of the day, I honestly, I don’t turn on my TV, rarely ever, I either read or I’m looking through news that’s customized to incidents and just really looking for what happened, kind of, if anything that could have prevented it, what management is saying. . . . I see that sort of thing in the news, [it] just really bothers me, that you have someone who’s supposed to be looking out for you but really doesn’t care, and I guess that’s where most of the passion comes from.

George’s Vocation

George is highly engaged his work, so much so that he sees very little separation between his personal life and his work life:

I feel very strongly that most people should be able to get that done, to be able to have your work and life is one, and no longer separate the two, and a lot of it comes from just feeling, again a lot happier and a lot more fulfilment from doing that, when I don’t have to think about two separate days, when I can just have one day full of activity. It’s much different, there’s lots of times I’ll take off for an hour, or two hours in the afternoon, and when I’ll go reading, or I’ll go incorporate something else, come back to work, and
balance everything out. For me, that’s really the best a person can be. . . . I found the most happiness is in incorporating those two.

I asked George to elaborate on the nature of his vocation:

Vocation is more of that, in the traditional sense, is more what you do for work, and so for me, vocation, and I’ll bring it back to really just that, Life is Through the Eyes of a Smile [the title of a book George has begun to write], that’s really been the last year, year and a half, where, going to work, if you see someone’s having that off day, where they’re having issues at work, being able to work with them to get through that, get them in a happier headspace, so more enjoyment. . . . [My vocation] is really just working with people and make them the happiest it [they] can be, or the most fulfilled.

George’s Narrative Threads

George developed his story as a passionate learner in his vocation from several identifiable and intertwined narrative threads. I found the following narrative threads were important in the way George formed and evolved his vocation.

Understated, Unproblematic, Competence Narrative

I used the word “unremarkable” to describe parts of George’s teen years, leading to the incident that caused him such pain. In George’s telling of the story, other words might be “pleasant” or “happy,” in the sense that he grew up with a loving family, progressed through school and adolescence in a respectable way and never seemed to want for much. As he says, “[I] always talked everyone, and make them feel invited, but it was never, I was never the academic, I was never the top sports.” Even as an avid participant in a dangerous sport such as motocross, he escaped injury for several years. “[In] motocross I only ever tore my ACL, and that was kind of what removed me from it.” He had many friendships, although he does not
stress any deep emotional connection to others, apart from his parents. He took his parents’ advice on a choice of careers, left home, and went off to a post-secondary, as expected, successfully completing a difficult career-focused program that offered good prospects for work and independence. George’s congenial nature is evident from this almost understated description of his background but this narrative also creates a stark contrast with what follows.

**Hard Trade Labour Narrative**

George repeatedly referred to his father as “hard working” in his trade. He also made it clear that his father wanted a better life for his son. George himself experienced strenuous labour under harsh conditions during summer employment at the rig mat factory, which seemed to reinforce George’s desire to get “an office job.”

**Incident Narrative**

The incident was dramatic, near deadly and massively traumatizing for George, both physically and mentally. Other people injured George deliberately, even though he was essentially an innocent bystander. The incident generated or perhaps amplified several other narratives that have had a dramatic impact on George’s vocational life.

**Adrenaline Narrative**

During George’s high school years, he was a self-confessed adrenaline addict, participating in risky sports such as motocross and snowboarding. In our first two meetings, George did not mention any injuries while snowboarding, but he eventually mentioned several broken bones from the sport, which suggests he was an aggressive snowboarder; in fact, as I later learned, he raced snowboards in league competition. Interestingly, George noticed a motto sewn into his snowboarding jacket, once, while his coach was taking him to the hospital with what turned out to be a broken arm. The motto read, “Fear is the Enemy of Progression,” a motto that
remained with him for years. George’s only current adrenaline producing sport is downhill-mountain biking.

**Safety Narrative**

George migrated, in his brief career, to the area of process safety, a discipline of industrial process design, which deals with designing processes so that daily work activities do not place process operators at the slightest risk. As George said to me in reference to his instrumentation education, “If we would’ve ever talked about functional safety, process safety, I don’t think I would’ve ever wanted to be involved with it.” Nevertheless, in George’s post-incident life, he migrated to this area, found great meaning in the nature of the work and feels: “I do 100% see being involved in that the future.” It seemed apparent the injustice and pain endured by George, at the very least, heightened his awareness and empathy for people who suffer from similarly unjust and painful industrial safety events.

**Mentor and Role Model Narrative**

George’s stories showed the importance of mentors in his professional life. He mentioned that he changed companies due to the loss of a key mentor. He also mentioned how he deliberately chose and pursued a company for employment, based on the presence of a key mentor. These stories were not new in George’s life. He felt strongly about the role model and mentorship qualities of his parents, of his high school rugby coach, and especially of the medical doctor who helped him through his injuries. The doctor represented to George a model of passionate involvement in his work:

> [The doctor is an] incredible individual, when I went in, none of the doctors on shift would take me because it was so severe; he was the only one who would actually take it, and he had to wake up in the middle of the night, and come in, and then perform the
surgery . . . a lot of people have a job just to have a job, when they’re not really that passionate about it and involved with it and that’s, he’s a key character, he gets up in the middle of the night, and loves doing this sort of thing, and the memories I do have in that time period, is going back to him.

George placed great value in what he can learn from almost anyone he encounters, in an exceptionally egalitarian way. “Every single person out there you can learn something from them, there an expert in something, they are advanced in something for sure.”

**Fear of Peaking Out Narrative**

George often mentioned that he wanted to avoid what he calls *peaking out*, staying static in his life and learning. He sees the potential to become stagnant in the work he does; he mentions his dislike of being in the “comfort-zone” and the need to assess his accomplishments for each year. He felt that eventually, at his first employer, after three and a half years, he had lost a key mentor, and had hit the peak of what he could accomplish there and moved on to work where he saw more satisfaction of the need, more fuel for his growth. George connected the fear of peaking out to his underlying personality, in the comparison he gave to his siblings.

**A New Set of Aligned Friends Narrative**

The incident appeared to have an important effect on George’s social circle. He broke off friendships with those who left him alone, suffering, and in his eyes, judged him guilty of deserving his injuries. These people appeared to be friends and acquaintances from his high school days. At the time of our interviews, George was deliberately meeting new people who were as actively engaged in their lives as George was: “I’m trying to surround myself with those very like-minded people . . . for the most part, in a real five-minute conversation, you can pick up on people who are of a similar mindset.”
Life Through the Eyes of a Smile Narrative

George was in the process of writing a book entitled, *Life Through the Eyes of a Smile*. The title expressed a viewpoint that was deeply significant to George, and that he made every effort to achieve each day. “The only life worth pursuing is through the eyes of a smile. Just trying to be as happy as one can be, really, experience most things.” George integrated that perspective into the work he did:

I want that book to really help others live their life to the fullest . . . that’s really where a lot of my passion comes from, I just want people to experience and live life, and just have this amazing experience . . . I just want to help people really get their full potential, and that’s . . . if you ask me, what I do, it’s so much more than process safety, because I . . . then again we have sit downs of work where we go over my goals, and my goals are exactly that, to help people be the best that they can. And to be able to spot that in someone, and then try and actually give them whatever it may be to spur it on, or really do that catalyst to help them out.

I asked George where this perspective might have come from and he immediately related it to his childhood and his loving and sacrificial parents. He also saw a connection to the incident but it was unclear. Possibly, this is a case where the incident served to amplify feelings already present in George, where it amplified the value and beauty of daily living, without pain and the injustice he endured.

George’s narrative threads are used to show how they influenced his decision-making in Chapter Six, where George’s vocational development process is discussed further. I now describe my own vocational narrative and corresponding narrative threads.
Rand’s Vocational Narrative

I currently work as a Dean at an Alberta post-secondary institution. I am a parent, with four adult children and two adult stepchildren, all independent and finding their own ways in life. My first degree was in civil engineering, graduating in 1975. I lived and worked in seven major Canadian cities and in four industries before finding my current role in post-secondary education.

Growing up

I was born and raised in the 1950s and 60s, in Barrie, Ontario. Barrie was a quiet town in that era where my parents considered locking the front door optional. My father, who was also born and raised in Barrie, drove trains for Canadian Railways (CX), as did his father and at least one of my great-grandfathers on his side of the family. My mother grew up on a Southern Saskatchewan grain farm, homesteaded by my grandfather. My grandfather eventually sold the farm to one of his sons-in-law, and became an auto mechanic in the local farming community. My mother, who was one of the younger children, moved east to Toronto during the Second World War, where she met and married my father.

I was the third child of four in the family, with 12 years between the oldest and youngest. We moved into a new post-war bungalow in 1955, which was my home until I was married at age 20. My memories of my childhood are almost consistently positive, although I was somewhat undistinguished. My parents were both excellent caregivers and providers, in my view, although the nature of my father’s work kept him away from home for days at a time, returning at very odd hours. My mother was the day-to-day parental constancy in our lives. Academically, my personal performance through elementary school was mediocre at best. I kept my old report cards with rows of Cs, sometimes Ds, sometimes Bs, but never an A. When it came to grouping students in the classroom for pedagogical purposes, I was invariably in the
“third” group, the lowest. I have a vivid memory of my elementary school principal interviewing me in Grade 8 and suggesting that I was likely to repeat a grade in high school but that they had decided to “push” me on to Grade 9, anyway. I will never know if his words helped my eventual academic progress or not, but there is no doubt I retained the memory vividly. I can still see him and recall the place of the conversation over 50 years later. The principal was a neighbour. I recall seeing him much later in my life and telling him I had just obtained a master’s degree in engineering. I felt vindicated although I do wonder if I actually did speak to him or whether it was simply a well-honed fantasy conversation.

The other memories of my childhood are mostly of building things. I loved building models, mostly plastic and wooden airplanes. I made countless toys out of wood, using the very few tools my parents had in their possession. I built my own workshop in the basement of our house, where I remember spending many private hours. Neither of my parents was inclined to use hand tools for much more than the bare necessities of home maintenance, nor were my siblings interested, so the basement workshop space was my very own. By the time I was in about Grade 6, I had become obsessed with boating. Barrie was “horseshoe-shaped,” built around a bay of Lake Simcoe, and we spent our summer vacations, from time to time, in a cottage borrowed from my aunt, on a lake in Haliburton County. I longed to be out on the water. I decided that if my father, who always wanted a boat himself (but never got one) would not provide a boat, I would build one. My first attempt, at age 11, was a wooden kayak that was a level of difficulty beyond my ability and it remained incomplete, although I have kept the blueprints safe as a memento of my youth. My second attempt, a year later, was a rowboat that I did finish. I recall getting a paper route to earn money so that I could pay for the oars and the marine-grade paint required. I had very little help from my parents or anyone else with these
projects and I even endured some active derision from my older brother. At one point, my mother bought me a wood plane with “green stamps,” a tool that sits in my basement workshop to this day. I sold the rowboat to a local cottager a few months after its maiden voyage because by that time I really had no practical use for it.

**High School**

When it came time for high school, I chose to enter what the local school board called the Five Year, Science, Technology and Trades Program. My parents always wanted me to attend university. My older brother chose a program in metallurgy at Ryerson Polytechnic in Toronto, something my father considered a “second class” education. My older sister had gone into a two-year nursing program, common for the era, at Wellesley Hospital in Toronto. At that time, the community college network in Ontario was relatively new and unknown. The Ontario government was building many of the colleges while I was in high school but my father did not view those colleges as an acceptable alternative. My father was also concerned about the name of my high school program and that somehow I would end up working in the trades after I graduated. I remember assuring him that I was entering a “five-year program,” which included Grade 13 and was intended for those people who were preparing for university education. What appealed to me about the high school program were the numerous shop classes that we would take over the first four years. These shops included such disciplines as electrician, electronics, mechanical and architectural drafting, auto mechanics, welding, machine shop, and woodworking. I had done an industrial arts program in Grades 7 and 8, and when combined with my modelling and boat building avocations, this shop program seemed a natural thing for me. My father relented, and I entered the program.
I recall a few aspects of high school that seem salient to my future working life. Firstly, I both loved and did very well in the shop classes. Several of my most memorable and influential teachers from that period were shop teachers. This was purely fun for me. They taught me how to do many of the things I liked to do in my spare time at home, except the school had much better resources and the teachers were knowledgeable. Secondly, my academic grades improved year-over-year, for every year that I was in high school, to the point that by the time I completed Grade 13, my grades were some of the highest in the new high school I attended (there were two Ontario Scholars in our school. I was in third place, one grade point below the cut-off line).

Although it is now many years ago that I entered Grade 9, I recall clearly deciding that I was going to be an engineer (whatever that was) because I loved building stuff and I needed to plan for university-level education. To my knowledge, I knew of no one in my family or outside, in fact, who was an engineer of any description (except for my father, who was a member of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, his trade union).

**Post-secondary**

The University of Waterloo granted me acceptance into the engineering program in 1970. None of my high school friends had decided to attend that school and, as a consequence, I really knew no one in my class or at the university at all. I was horribly afraid of failure, quite insecure about my academic capabilities, and for the first time in my life, I was living away from home and my supportive parents. The first year of the program was loosely termed, “general engineering,” which meant a great deal of theoretical science and math and very little “building stuff.” It was also the year we had the greatest attrition of my classmates, the year we made a choice about which of several engineering disciplines we might eventually enter and the additional stress of interviewing for our first (of six) co-op work terms. To my utter amazement I
survived, but my eyes still well up when I think of the stress of those first four months at Waterloo.

I eventually chose civil engineering as my discipline, although probably for all the wrong reasons. I originally thought that electrical engineering would be right, but I met a fourth-year electrical student who was somewhat jaundiced about his program and I started to waiver in my choice. Secondly, the conventional wisdom among the students was that civil was easiest, and when combined with my academic insecurity, I chose to be a civil engineer. In hindsight, I was somewhat indifferent about the choice, I suspect because I had no reference point or precedent to fall back on. I found over time that I actually enjoyed that field as well, although “building stuff” evolved into designing, building and testing civil engineering structures, most frequently, bridges. I worked in the field during my co-op work terms in bridge construction and then in engineering design offices, mostly run by the Government of Ontario. I discovered the world of “virtual” design and building, using newly available mainframe computers and the FORTRAN programming language. I spent my last two co-op work terms as a research assistant at the university, working in the “Finite Element” lab run by one of the professors who had contracted to write computer-based structural analysis programs for the bridge designers at the Ontario government transportation ministry. In my spare time on one of the last work terms and just for fun, I wrote my own version of a structural analysis program that was interactive and that bridge designers could access remotely over a telephone modem. This “hobby” programming effort generated a great deal of interest from the faculty at Waterloo, the Ontario bridge design engineers I knew, and eventually resulted in a job offer from a Montreal-based engineering company (which I declined). I consider it the most profound learning experience of my undergraduate years.
I transitioned almost immediately into engineering graduate studies with the same professor who had employed me during my last two work terms. The engineering program at Waterloo, with the six work terms, was actually a five-year baccalaureate program. In spite of my academic insecurity, my grades in engineering school continued the high school trend of improving year over year. By the time I graduated, I was one of two civil engineering graduates offered a National Research Council scholarship for graduate studies. By that point I had achieved a level of understanding where I felt the mysteries of structural engineering “had been revealed” and I started to wonder whether I wanted to spend my life building one bridge after another. My life as a bridge designer would not have been boring intellectually but that was what I saw and felt at the time. The master’s research work took me into the unusual field of human hip prosthesis design, hardly “one more bridge.” My supervisor had himself started to apply his skills in the “mechanics of solids” to the design of prosthetic devices, an area where structural engineering design skills were largely absent. I became one of a small group of students working with him in this crossover field of biomechanics.

Working Life

As I neared the end of the master’s program, I hit what I considered a vocational crossroad. My thinking at the time (and it was probably accurate), was that to continue in the field of biomechanics would require another degree for credibility—either a medical degree or a PhD in engineering. In hindsight, I would probably have done the engineering degree (although I went so far as to procure the application forms for the medical school at McMaster University). In fact, I had a hard time seeing myself doing either degree.

I was about 25 years old and had been married then for about five years. My wife and I were considering other options. She had been working since the start of our marriage and, for
some reason that remains a mystery to me, we decided to have a child. I recall “waking up” one morning and realizing that my time as a graduate student was done, that my wife was six months pregnant, and that I had better get a job, and quickly. I took the first attractive job that came along. I went to work as a Member of Scientific Staff, at Canada’s largest telecom research corporation in Ottawa. This was my first full-time job “building stuff,” in this case designing an underground computer telecom equipment shelter (an underground tank that, on the inside, looked and felt like a computer room). My first son was born a few months after I started work and I spent a full year writing my master’s thesis after starting my fulltime job. The job at the telecom research company lasted three years, during which time I managed the project from an original concept to the installation of five field trial units around Southern Ontario. The project was complete and there were always more projects to do at that company, yet I deliberately took a step back at this time to reassess where my future work might be. A natural progression in that industry would have been to move to the parent telephone company, where future prospects for civil engineers were better. Unfortunately, the telecommunications industry did not really inspire my interest. I did not feel a connection to what they did and although it was vital infrastructure for the nation, I was simply not interested. I started to formally reassess my own career interests, probably for the first time, using whatever career interest material I could find, to decide what I should do. I chose the railway industry.

There was a family connection, for certain, and I was always proud that I became a fifth generation railroader. Furthermore, civil engineers were well accepted working for that company because it was accountable under national railway legislation to build and maintain the entire railway infrastructure including bridges, tunnels, buildings, track, and rights-of-way; it seemed I would find a home. I was also “raised around the railway,” in a sense. My parents took a picture
of me at age eight or nine, asleep on Christmas Day with my arm around my new model train.

My favourite toys were electric railway trains, which needed structures and assembly to be complete, and as a result, satiated or even stimulated, my desire to build stuff as well (I still have bins full of HO scale models in my basement). When I was 12, my father took me with him on a freight train run from Gravenhurst, Ontario to North Bay, and back, leaving me with deeply etched memories of the adventure. Much later, when I was an engineering student, I sometimes rode with my father again because he worked at that time on the weekends only. The weekends were also the only time I could return to my hometown to visit and as it turned out, boarding the train and sitting with him was the only way we could chat.

The industry was enormously complex operationally, with all the mysteries of buying and maintaining rail cars and locomotives, roadbed and structures, operating technologies, not to mention the process difficulties of bringing all of the 50,000 people and infrastructure together to meet the needs of the customers. The industry had its own language and its own culture and I grew to know both well.

I applied for a job as a junior engineer in Toronto and began to work there building stuff such as stock pens, spur lines, grade separations, roadways, parking lots, and service offerings to large customers such as the provincial transit company. I spent a year working with the provincial transit company, investigating ways to electrify the Toronto heavy rail commuter network, something that was a massive technical “unknown” to all of us. I quickly developed skills in transportation engineering, one of the civil engineering sub-disciplines, and then eventually skills for developing operations technology such as dispatching systems, radio systems, hotbox detector systems, and other various related information technologies.
I worked at CX for 17 years. My work transitioned from early field civil engineering projects to transportation planning, to the development of operating technologies and eventually information technologies. I worked for extended periods, requiring family moves, in Toronto, Winnipeg, and Montréal. My various job titles included titles such as engineer, coordinator, project manager, manager, and director as I rose in the corporate ranks. I learned much about the industry, the culture, the processes, the technology and the people. My final position was in the HR department in Montréal, leading a number of “cross-functional” process improvement projects. These were projects, I believed, that would benefit both the people and customers of CX enormously.

I eventually left CX for multiple reasons. Firstly, I lost confidence in the corporate executive of the mid-1990s. I was close enough to the executive to witness behaviour that showed what they valued, and to know I disagreed with many things I heard and actions I saw taken. Secondly, I no longer believed it was in the best interests of my family to live in Québec, with the strong separatist sentiment that still permeated life and work, as much as I enjoyed the culture and vibrancy of Montréal itself. To this day, I still regret leaving the personal and work friendships that had developed. The final reason I will mention for leaving CX still troubles me because I do not understand whether it really factored into my thinking or not. My father passed away late in 1993 and it was almost as though for the first time in many years, I felt I could depart that corporation (institution and culture), where in many respects, I felt I belonged. Nevertheless, I have few regrets apart from the people I left behind.

When I realized it was time to leave CX, I chose Calgary as the city I wanted to live in and then I looked for an employer who would hire me and move my family to Alberta. My work at CX required extensive travel across Canada and the city that most attracted me was Calgary.
My plan worked exactly as I had hoped and I went to work for Alberta Wheat Pool (AWP), to manage their IT operations. I was still “building stuff,” but at a managerial level rather than as an individual contributor (I had been managing groups of people for 15 years at this point). I spent a lot of my time understanding the IT systems needs of the corporation, building a business case for the systems investments, and helping the executive and management to understand what it was, in fact, that we were proposing. Once we received approval and the necessary funding, I oversaw the execution of the installation project work. Alberta Wheat Pool itself was one of the large prairie farmer-owned cooperatives, and coincidently, CX’s fourth largest customer; in fact in many respects AWP was a grain transportation company. I knew something of the prairie grain pools, simply because of visits made to my mother’s hometown and time spent speaking with my relatives still active in the grain industry. I always felt some affinity, albeit a remote affinity, to AWP’s function and the many farmers who benefitted from the work, when well done. The largest project we undertook was the installation of a system infrastructure package named ERP. We installed the package, maintained and upgraded it over a five-year period, which cost the organization $47 million, just to give scale to the effort. I had learned a great deal about information systems development and management while at CX, but I learned much more about building and maintaining IT while at AWP. We had a large outsourcing partner, and I worked closely with the manager of the outsourced staff who in many respects was a personal coach, mentor, and teacher about all things related to IT. We attended courses together, we read the same books and he very patiently guided my learning. Eventually, he left his employer but I still consider him my greatest source of knowledge and inspiration in the practical management and operation of corporate information technology. We had periods of intense disagreement over
some issues in our business arrangement, but I often commented how similar our thoughts were about the management of the technologies that were employed.

My time at AWP included two mergers, one with Manitoba Pool Elevators (the smallest of the provincial grain cooperatives), to form Agricore Cooperative Ltd., and then with United Grain Growers (UGG), to form Agricore United Ltd. This last merger was very much a planned takeover of Agricore by UGG, although that did not become evident to most of the people at Agricore until the executives of the new company were announced (of the 12 new executives, only one came from Agricore and that was to replace a UGG executive who was retiring). When it became apparent that I would lose my job as chief information officer, I jumped over to a large oil and gas company, which at the time were looking for people who knew something about how to implement ERP.

I spent five years at the large oil and gas company installing ERP systems but eventually left largely due to disagreement with my supervisor, whom I believed was taking on unnecessary technical risks with the projects he was proposing and sponsoring. In hindsight, my supervisor and I had fundamentally different approaches to both managing and our own management and I was simply unhappy as a result. My wife and I were still supporting and raising our family and probably because I was afraid of losing my income, I was insufficiently selective in choosing my employer. Finally, I did not feel any particular affinity for the oil and gas industry, in general. I enjoyed learning about the industry; the large-scale operations they built and operated fit well with my appreciation of engineering projects in general, but I never did develop excitement about the industry itself. Furthermore, I experienced a great deal of dissonance over the lavish use of money by the industry. I moved to the large oil and gas company from an agricultural company with razor-thin financial profits. I moved to the agriculture sector from CX, which was
struggling to be profitable in a highly regulated industry. CX’s most significant strategy of that time was cost cutting. The lavish (and what I felt was often wasteful) use of funds in the oil and gas sector grated on my sensibilities, perhaps even more deeply on my values. In the end, my time at the oil and gas company ended when my supervisor reorganized the IT function and my position did not appear on the new organization chart.

As I was leaving the oil and gas industry, I took time to consider what I should be doing with my life from that time forward. I contemplated working as a project manager, installing ERP, but I had a difficult time facing the prospects of “one more” ERP project. In other words, I felt it would be boring work for me as “well-trod ground.” By this time, I had been engaged in the installation of that massive software package for over a decade and I simply could do no more. Eventually, I noticed a job posting for a Dean of Information and Communications Technologies at a local polytechnic institution. Something resonated within me when I considered the position. I had little confidence they would choose someone without any direct post-secondary management experience, but I did have the qualifications they advertised. I took a chance and applied. A few months later, I began work in the role, not really clear about what I had fallen into. All I knew was that it felt “right” to me. In time, I started to articulate my feelings, to myself, at least. I liked the idea of participating in post-secondary education. I found great meaning in being part of an institution that educated students for practical roles in industry. This was important to me as a parent when I considered where my younger children might be educated. What I discovered in time was the importance of the work, something I had not felt as keenly about since my days in the railway industry. It was relatively easy to relate to the people who were our students and the challenges they were facing. I also had to understand the fears and uncertainty, the loneliness of attending a school with a new peer group and sometimes living far
away from home, much of which echoed my own experiences. Many of the programs we offered were similar to my high school shop experiences. The institution was all about “building stuff” and I loved the technologies we taught, many of which I had had direct experience with during my career—construction, transportation, business, information technology, oil and gas, even manufacturing and automation. All aspects touched on the technologies I had experienced directly in industry. It was almost as though I had spent my working lifetime preparing myself to be part of the institution.

After a few years acclimatizing to the institution, I began doctoral studies, with a deep desire to understand how people become passionate learners in their chosen vocations. I reasoned that the ideal for our students, and for the institution, would be to create conditions under which each student might become passionately engaged in learning. I am passionately engaged in trying to understand the topic of passionate vocational learning and it is my vocation as educator that now draws me to this line of research.

Rand’s Narrative Threads

My story of passionate vocational learning includes several identifiable and intertwined narrative threads. I found the following narrative threads important in the way I formed and evolved my vocation.

Building Stuff Narrative

This narrative has been a constant throughout my life. I constantly maintained a home “workshop,” transported tools around the country in my moves, kept inventories of “parts” for when I might need them, built workbenches so that I would always have a place to build. Of course, building eventually took on a virtual dimension and the world of building computer
applications was a very natural transition. Even the world of building and rebuilding business processes became a natural extension of the building stuff narrative.

**Curiosity Narrative**

I have always been curious about how things work. The “things” have extended from small electrical circuits to fireworks, to software, to human motivation, and to whole industries (telecom, railways, agriculture, oil and gas and education). I have always wanted to understand these things. In some respects, I relate this curiosity to the “building stuff” narrative, because it is awkward to build things that you do not first understand. I often experienced a feeling of satiation as I explored a particular subject and the mysteries were “revealed.” I found in the past that I do not lose interest in a subject, but rather the intensity of my curiosity diminishes and I tend to file away what I have learned for future use.

**Parental Responsibility Narrative**

I intertwined many of my work changes over the years with the need to nurture and provide for my family of four children. I left graduate studies and went to my first job because my wife was pregnant. I took a particular career path in CX because one of my children adapted poorly to changes associated with family moves between cities. When I switched industries, the need to keep a constant income because my family was largely dependent on the income I produced, reduced my tolerance for risk and my flexibility in decision-making. When my children started to become independent, the relief from the financial responsibility of raising children was palpable. To a degree, my desire to help my youngest son find vocational direction added meaning to my doctoral studies. This narrative is subtle but it definitely influenced my vocational decisions. At times, this narrative was the single most important factor in decisions I made from a personal career perspective.
**Railroader Narrative**

The societal importance of my engineering profession did not come home to me until I worked in the railway industry, saw and participated in the infrastructure we built, the freight we handled, read histories of the railways themselves and of the Canadian nation. In the railway industry, I felt I was a part of a *great work*; there was an almost tangible sense of relatedness. What we did was vital for the nation and I was proud to be a part of it. In fact, I was proud that several generations of my family had contributed to that work. While at CX, I placed pictures of my father and grandfather, in front their locomotives, on my office walls and not my university degrees, which remained sequestered in storage at home.

My own railroader narrative troubles me because at times I wonder whether my father introjected the attraction to railroading into my thinking from a very early age. It was never my father’s intention for me to “follow in his footsteps” (although I learned how to drive trains while at CX). In fact, quite the opposite is true. My father was adamant that I should obtain a university education and not work as a railway trades person. My father did suggest I should consider CX at the time I was reconsidering my work in the telecommunications industry but it was because he believed CX would provide good employment for someone with a civil engineering education and that “the company” always treated him fairly. I may remain troubled by this narrative but there is no question it had a strong impact on my working life.

It became apparent to me while writing this document, that the railway was a *calling* for me, in the perfect fit sense of the word—perhaps the reason it was so very painful to leave.

**Engineer-educator Narrative**

I have identified with the engineering profession as a student, as an engineer-in-training, and as a registered professional engineer, for close to 45 years. When people ask me what I do, I
often simplify the answer by responding that I am an engineer who became an educator. Many of the students we train at my institution to be engineering technologists eventually become professional engineers. I remain a registered professional engineer because I see my educator role as a form of professional engineering practice.

I believe a great deal of meaning, and a *calling* as well (in the sense of perfect fit), returned to my life when I became a dean at a technical institution. The importance of our work, firstly to the students, and secondly to the various industries we support, is readily apparent to me. Furthermore, many of the staff (including me), have children who have graduated from our programs and prospered as a result. The importance of our work and the greater meaning behind what we do every day is both tangible and personal. We frequently have contact with students and graduates who are extremely grateful for the education they received at our institution. I am highly motivated to learn myself as a way to enhance the effectiveness of our learning environment. I am also quite passionate about the vocation I now enjoy and the learning associated with it. I intended that my research would benefit others, our students primarily, more than me.

**Student Narrative**

Since leaving home in 1970, I have spent 16 years as a registered student in a post-secondary institution. At three times in my life I seriously contemplated doing a doctoral degree first in engineering, then in business and then finally in education. A part of me has always felt an affinity for both the student and teacher roles, which were most likely factors in drawing me to my current vocation.
Managerial Narrative

As I wrote this document it occurred to me I was taking for granted that, for about 30 years, I accomplished much of my work through and with other people, often groups numbering well over a hundred persons. There is a significant degree of practical learning inherent in working as a manager. This is practical work and largely involves interpersonal skills although it is difficult to assess my own learning of this nature. Without going into the differences between management and leadership, I seldom lack a sense of direction for the people who are my responsibility but I am also highly autonomy oriented. This means I attempt to navigate the delicate balance of achieving organizational goals while supporting the autonomous decision-making of the individuals who are my responsibility.

Academic Insecurity Narrative

This is a painful story and it had a real impact on my vocational choices. I have long remembered, pondered, and told my story of academic mediocrity in elementary school and the way my grades improved throughout high school and engineering school. I vividly recall my strong fear of academic failure from my first days as an undergraduate student at Waterloo and the reason I chose civil engineering over other fields. I have always felt the joy of learning in the formal learning processes I undertook and equally so in the informal efforts (such as the process improvement learning undertaken while at CX in Montreal, described in Chapter Five). Nevertheless, my Grade 8 principal’s comments cloud my motivation with uncertainty. How important was fear of failure in my academic success? Did it play a role in my motivation for additional degrees beyond my initial baccalaureate? Am I still looking for vindication in some form?
Summary

This completes my review of the findings from the individual participants in terms of their vocational narratives and of the identification of their narrative threads. Chapter Five includes the discussion of further data from the participants, organized according to *six zones of vocational development* that emerged from the data. The vocational development zones and the structure of Chapter Five correspond to the research questions discussed in Chapter Six.
CHAPTER FIVE: VOCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT FINDINGS

Findings Organized According to the Research Questions

My primary research question is: In the experience of adult learners, what is the relationship among passionate engagement in the adult learning process, developed vocational interest, vocational choice, and action towards learning? The word *relationship* masks considerable complexity of thought across the period of time described by the participants, and particularly the time in which they were engaged in vocational pursuits. I include Figure 5, which I use to organize the findings in terms of the language used in the research question, but also with the assistance of additional language introduced from the theoretical framework.

**Figure 5.** Zones of *Vocational Development* Data as Experienced by Participants

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*Figure 5* illustrates seven key categories found in the vocational narrative data. I use this diagram more extensively in Chapter Six, but for the current chapter I use it as a way to categorize and organize data extracted from the vocational narratives and interview transcripts. The Narrative Threads, data category (1) as identified for each participant in Chapter Four, are shown as straight lines passing from left to right. The Narrative Threads may have originated
from the early experiences of the individual, from vocational interest, or possibly because of disruptive events in the person’s vocational life. Choosing and Entering Vocation (Zone 4) includes the reflection, learning, activities, and decisions that result in the person entering a new vocation or adapting a previous vocation to new circumstances. It may overlap the elements of reflection, learning, activity, and decision-making inherent in the adjoining zones. I show the zones representing Vocational Interest (Zone 2), Disruptive Events (Zone 3), Vocational Identity Development (Zone 5), and Vocational Learning (Zone 6), all overlapping Zone 4, as in a Venn diagram. I also show Possible Stagnation (Zone 7) overlapping with Vocational Identity Development (Zone 5) and Vocational Learning (Zone 6).

I organized the data summary around the primary research questions as well as two of the secondary research questions. The secondary questions are: Question b. Is there a relationship between choice of vocation and passionate interest? If so, what is the nature of that relationship? In addition: Question c. How was vocational interest experienced (triggered, developed, and sustained) by adult learners?

**Vocational Interest, Vocational Choice, and Passion for Learning**

I now summarize the findings, with reference to the zones in Figure 5, in order to respond to the primary research question, as well as secondary Questions b. and c.

**Vocational Interest (Zone 2)**

Each participant referred to the source of his or her vocational interests, although most often, the initial source was likely a combination of their narrative threads coming forward and of other influences, such as parents. In making her original vocational choice, Alison took the advice of her parents by seeking a university education. Her parents directed her to avoid physical education and social work degrees. She compromised and became a “nurse by default.”
Jules’s interest in becoming a tile-setter was sparked firstly by seeing people on the job. “There were all these guys doing restoration of stonework, and they’re on scaffolds, and I was like, that looks so fun!” Her lack of interest in teaching English also apparently facilitated her decision (“This is hell; this is not going to be my life.”). Another influence was that the apprenticeship officials made it easy for her to enter the tile-setter trade (“Apprenticeship just gave me a free pass, because I was a woman.”).

Aaron’s family also influenced his desire to attend university (“It was assumed . . . yeah, it was, you will go as far as you can.”). He equated his original interest in building airplanes into a degree in physics but found this degree would not help him get a job in the field of aircraft design (“No way, you’re not a US citizen.”). He switched his physics major to optics, another field of science that was emerging at the time. Upon graduating, he obtained a job through an unexpected personal meeting with an oil company executive, which was the direct result of a snowstorm that disrupted an award ceremony (“To me, hand of God, because there’s no way I would have met this guy other than a handshake on the platform.”). Eventually he translated his education in physics into a software programming position at the oil company.

Fly’s small stature as a teenager led him to academic achievement in high school (“I kind of compensated . . . I did really, really well academically.”) and on the local cadet program where he achieved top honours. After high school, the cadet program “led me to think that the military would be a good choice for me.” By his own admission, he concentrated on sports activity at the military college instead of the required advanced mathematics courses (“I have a complete inability to cope with calculus.”), which caused him leave the institution after two years. After a brief experience with geology, he settled on a degree in outdoor education, which enhanced his qualifications to become a park ranger.
George’s parents influenced him firstly to attend post-secondary education, and secondly in choosing his eventual field of study:

Help from the parents, and the dad, he was looking at the different trades, and they helped me out too, with looking at how much you make with each program. Instrumentation is fairly highly paid, and from knowing a couple of family friends who were in it, talking to them, that they loved it, that was kind of just, start with that, and see where it takes you.

George’s father influenced him to avoid the manual trades. “He’s always steered us away from that sort of work into one that would be a lot easier on your body,” although his father’s opinion reinforced his own experience, building drilling mats as summer employment.

I (Rand) chose my initial vocation, engineering, as a direct result of my parent’s belief that a university education was mandatory, combined with my early love for building things. My reasons for choosing civil engineering over electrical engineering, two quite different fields of study, were largely uninformed, although both allowed me to build stuff, and civil structures were a long-term interest to me.

**Disruptive Events (Zone 3)**

All six participants experienced disruptive events in their lives, sometimes more than once, that they linked to decisions about vocational change. Alison experienced a dramatic incident in which one of her clients was murdered. She attributes her interest in domestic violence to this incident and her interest in domestic violence has been the topic of two passionate learning periods—her master’s and doctoral degree programs. Alison completed her master’s degree in nursing and within a few years was working as a nurse-educator. She came to
identify with that role. She briefly performed counselling work, which she counts as her “favourite job.”

Jules experienced a personal incident in Seoul, Korea, which I alluded to in her vocational narrative. It caused her to seek the assistance of Alcoholics Anonymous and to remove alcohol and drugs from her life. She stopped her extensive travel and teaching English as a second language when she was able to reconsider her vocation through “clean” eyes. Jules was still teaching English back in Canada when, by chance, she encountered the tile-setters and entered the apprenticeship program.

Aaron chose to change jobs several times in his first two decades as a corporate IT manager. His forced position termination at ACOC was highly traumatic to Aaron emotionally: “That was the ugliest, that one probably was the stage where . . . what am I . . . what do I believe? That almost killed me. It was a brutal time. . . . It certainly caused a lot of damage in my relationships.” A few years later Aaron had assumed his new vocation and vocational identity: “I’m a fixer. Working with organizations, in particular information technology, where the organization isn’t working . . . the organization is broken and it needs someone in to fix it.”

Two externally imposed disruptive events affected Fly’s working life; both led him toward vocational change. The first event was the death of his cousin due to an industrial accident, while Fly was attempting to revive him. In Fly’s words, the event was “where I woke up and started to think about helping people.” Secondly, the abrupt amalgamation of outdoor services in Alberta, which unwillingly plunged Fly into extensive enforcement duties, propelled his vocational change directly:
There was a great increase in enforcement. All of a sudden you were issued body armour, pepper spray, baton, cuffs, and eventually side arms, and you were coming into the city to serve warrants, doing investigations, and totally, totally not my area of interest.

George endured the beating incident just after he graduated from his instrumentation engineering technology program, before he found employment, and before his professional work actually began. George did not change his vocational direction directly because of this incident; he looked for work in the field of his training upon recovery. Nevertheless, the event did affect his outlook on life, as George stated: “I almost separate my life into pre- and post- . . . incident.” George moved into an industrial safety position where he was able to have an impact on “the lack of caring, from some of the corporations, for their workers under them, is really troubling to me.”

My own (Rand’s) transition from an IT director role, to post-secondary dean, was the direct result of losing my unhappy position at the oil and gas company, a disruptive event that was highly traumatic to me personally. I was concerned about supporting my family. My wife was not working at the time and I still had one child at home who was just completing his first year of post-secondary education. I considered available positions managing ERP implementations, but felt little engagement in that work. When I became aware of the dean role, which was a dramatic change from my past, the opportunity intrigued me.

Choosing and Entering a Vocation (Zone 4)

The only activities that I considered unique to Zone 4, Choosing and Entering a Vocation, were decision-making activities that launched the individual toward a new vocation and possibly a new vocational or life identity. When the participant made a vocational choice, and started acting on that choice, I considered that individual was leaving or had left Zone 4. Zone 4
overlaps all the surrounding zones. Zone 4 is where, for example, change is initiated as a result of disruptive events, and where the individual learns about and makes sense of disruptive events. It is also where the individual makes crucial decisions that result in new vocational or life directions. I saw individuals who dwell for longer periods in Zone 4 as exploring their vocational options, expressing vocational interest, learning about possible vocations, and moving to a decision.

I categorized the learning and exploration activities of two participants as taking place in Zone 4. After losing her trades position, Jules re-entered a period of vocational exploration through the development of her “women in trades” website and of her coaching practice. She undertook a considerable amount of vocational learning as part of the exploration process. Her “project of love . . . about why women love their work,” an activity she referred to as “my own master’s degree,” is an example of a deliberate effort to learn, largely directed toward her trades vocation. This project led to her exposure to the world of entrepreneurial women and a great deal of personal coaching, reading, and exploration of future directions, all of which I consider to be both general and vocational learning.

I found George’s vocational learning processes the most difficult to place in Figure 5, although I came to believe his learning was largely exploratory in nature and was therefore probably taking place in Zone 4. I thought George was possibly undertaking the initial stages of non-vocational life change, perhaps at the worldview level, because of the beating incident and my perception that many of his statements were difficult to relate to his employment vocation. George referred to his personal learning constantly through the interviews. An example:

Really if I was to explain my self-fulfilment, what I have a passion for, it would be helping others be the best they can be. And I’ve really found gateways in books, a lot
When George referred to “gateways,” he was referring to the ways he learned and helped others to learn. In some cases, the gateways were people or, more specifically, the mentors and role models mentioned throughout his narrative: “I was always progressing, found some really great people who work there I could learn from, I had some really good experience.” Beyond these special people in his life, George made a deliberate effort to engage with many others that he encountered on a day-to-day basis from those he met in a professional capacity to those he encountered when simply walking home. “I always love sparking up conversation, with really whoever it is, I’m always learning something from everyone. . . . Every single person out there. . . . you can learn something from them, they’re an expert in something.” In other cases, George referred to significant books that inspired his development. He was also an avid online learner, daily using tools such as Google Alerts and YouTube to keep himself current on industrial safety occurrences, something he watched in preference to local news coverage or lighter entertainment.

George maintained a very active continuous learner philosophy. He often made statements such as “if I don’t learn something today . . . it’s more or less a wasted day.” In fact, he went so far as to name his continual learning process: “I’ve kind of coined it the seven and four, so I look for one hour, every single day of the week, which is your seven hours, that translates to 4% of the year, so I’d say the seven and four, trying to better myself.”

Vocational Identity Development (Zone 5)

I described vocational identity as the way a person would answer the question: Who are you, vocationally? This is the person’s representation of the self, in terms of skills, values, goals,
beliefs, roles and individual history. I did not ask the participants to describe their *vocational identity* per se, but I did ask them to describe their vocation and the meaning of their vocation. As I analysed the data, I looked for spontaneous statements made by the participants as an indication they had assumed a vocational identity and were fully engaged in vocational identity development. Clarity in the temporal dimension was important in data analysis for Zone 5 because it became apparent that some participants had occupied this zone, developing their vocations for a while, in their past, and then moved on for various reasons to embrace a different vocation.

Aaron made a direct vocational identity statement early in the interviews: “I’m a fixer. Working with organizations, in particular information technology, where the organization isn’t working . . . the organization’s broken and it needs someone in to fix it, and make it better.” He elaborated on this statement and reinforced the definition in several ways, but it became clear that Aaron had carried this vocational identity for close to 20 years at the time of the interviews. This is perhaps an indicator that Aaron dwelt in Zone 5, vocationally, for the entire period, enhancing his self-representation in terms of skills, values, goals, beliefs, and roles.

Alison, in contrast, made several statements, indicating the progression of her vocational identity development over time. I took the following examples from the transcripts directly, but ordered them chronologically according to her career progression and as her vocational identity evolved: “We were . . . those nurses that were just, you know, kind of book smart.” “I certainly was the only nurse-counsellor at the shelter.” “I’m a nurse educator . . . so I teach the theory online, I teach nursing research . . . I mentor them in their clinical sites.” Notably, Alison appeared to move into Zone 5 as a nurse, then as an educator and perhaps as a counsellor, although to some degree she retained and blended her earlier vocations.
As researcher, I am unable to return to transcripts to look for evidence of my own vocational identity development. In drawing from my memories, I believe my own vocational identity is multifaceted and that I too have retained and blended my vocational identities by repeatedly moving into Zone 5 as I embraced different vocations. I have considered myself an engineer for about 39 years since my days as an engineer-in-training but certainly since my professional designation was achieved in 1977. I also considered myself a railroader for most of the period I worked for CX railway but shed the identity after leaving. I realized during the process of documenting this research that I carried a vocational identity of leader/manager, beginning during my time at CX railway and continuing to the present day. The period of most intensive development of this latter vocational identity probably took place during the years I undertook my most intensive periods of managerial learning, while I was doing my M.B.A. degree, through to the period when I was learning the principles of Total Quality Management, close to the end of my tenure with CX. My more recent vocational role, as dean, has led to develop a vocational identity of “educator.” I did not begin the role thinking of myself in this way. The transition took several years and it was interrelated with my personal and professional learning. I believe I took on this identity only after I learned enough about the role to be competent in my understanding of the theory, methods, and values associated with the operation of my employing institution.

Jules made very few identity statements of the nature made by Aaron, Alison, and Rand. Jules taught English at three different times, in contract positions in India, Korea, and in Canada and yet her statements about these periods are typically detached from teaching as a vocation. Concerning the last of these positions, she stated, “You start as a contractor . . . contract works for me and I’ll probably be leaving again soon.” She does not appear to have moved decidedly
into Zone 5 as a teacher. Nevertheless, Jules’s work as a tile-setter led to a single strong identity statement: “I became a journeyman tile-setter because putting the pieces together in patterning, was something I was really comfortable [with].” This statement indicated that Jules did develop a Zone 5 vocational identity as a tile-setter, probably reinforced by the formal structure of apprenticeship, and by the tile-setter trade in particular. Jules retained this identity after starting her family, but it is unclear whether it was still part of the way she sees her own skills, values, goals, beliefs, and roles at the time of our interviews.

I found it notable that both Jules’s teaching and tile-setting vocations required membership in labour unions, which by the time of our interviews, carried strong negative connotations for Jules, possibly working against her identification with these vocations: “I have to go union [referring to teaching]? Everybody stayed here to go union? . . . That doesn’t work for me . . . only place the black feeling still exists is in the union, for women, and work . . . zooming out to the construction world . . . being a sisterhood under the brotherhood. . . . No, this doesn’t work.”

Jules’s research project and website resulted in her key finding that women “love working for themselves, they loved building businesses, but they are missing business education.” Jules then redirected her vocational aspirations to an intended future role of teaching business education, a role she considered her “calling.” In this case, it appears that Jules is engaged in Zone 4 exploration, although she was possibly occupying the “overlap” between Zones 4 and Zone 5 at the time of the interviews.

Fly’s work during his adult life was largely as a full-time park ranger for 13 years and as a firefighter for 15 years, the last four of which he was a training officer for other firefighters. Fly made few vocational identity statements from his park ranger days. He often referred to that
occupation as “rangering,” as in: “That was the part I enjoyed about rangering.” These statements raise the question of whether Fly was simply in a “job” during this period or whether he embraced the role as a vocation or even developed a vocational identity. I found little indication that Fly entered Zone 5 as a park ranger. Fly did seem to enter Zone 5 and integrate firefighting into his identity: “It was just starting as a firefighter, where we all start. So, eventually started out here as a recruit firefighter . . . got through recruit school, got my probationary year, spent almost 10 years on the floor, you know, being a firefighter.” Fly also appeared to be in the process of developing a vocational identity as teacher during our interviews. When I asked him what his vocation was, he responded: “Well now, it’s fire instructor. It’s teaching, you know that’s it, clean and simple.” Fly was in the midst of retiring during the final interviews, and the intensity of his identification with the teaching role was possibly diminished.

George was the youngest of the participants and has the shortest vocational experience. George’s professional education was as an instrumentation-engineering technologist, but he did not mention pursuing the professional designation associated with that profession. Furthermore, George said:

I don’t see myself being heavily involved with instrumentation in the future, but the process safety side of things, I’m still, and again where my involvement, and where I get more fulfilment out of this, this is where you’re talking about saving lives. I do 100% see being involved in that in the future, but having a couple of other things come in there as well, which I’m not quite sure of right now.

George referred to his work during the interviews as a “process safety consultant,” although he never made a vocational identity statement and tended to detach his identity from the
work he did, as in “I’m at now . . . working for . . . [corporate name] facility safety, what we do there is risk management.” I found no direct evidence that George had ever entered far into Zone 5 during his relatively short working life.

**Vocational Learning (Zone 6)**

Zone 6 as shown on Figure 5 represents vocational learning. Vocational learning in the context of Figure 5 is the learning activity associated with the entire vocational development process, but which I show most extensively overlapping with *vocational identity* development. As I analysed the data, I considered vocational learning to include the initial learning associated with a realized vocational interest, choosing and entering a vocation and, most importantly, the learning associated with developing a vocational identity, which is the participant’s self-representation in terms of vocational skills, values, goals, beliefs, and roles. I also considered vocational learning to overlap Zones 4, 5 and 7.

Fly provided an extensive description of the Zone 6 learning process undertaken with his fellow training officers (TOs) as a group undertaking. The TOs all worked at a single academy located on the outskirts of the city. Fly suggested there was in the past, few resources and little support given to the TOs and that a community learning style grew out of necessity. The TOs seemed to form a learning community, each contributing, each learning from the others and applying their new knowledge to the training of new recruits. Fly adopted (or created) a narrative of constant, continuous improvement, which is based on learning new information (fire science) and adapting new techniques for dealing with emergencies. He applied this new technique “not just yourself, but the people you’re teaching, and the people you are working with.” Fly described the way he learned from his fellow TOs and how they learned from him. Fly and the other TOs took courses from each other, depending on the skill set and background of the TO.
Some of Fly’s fellow TOs, although not Fly himself, participated in research projects on a national and international basis for the purpose of understanding fire science, and the development and evolution of new prevention and control techniques.

In recent months, management assigned Fly to mentor three of the four newly hired TOs. He tailored the mentorship process for each new TO depending on their needs but, in general, “the actual mentoring is setting the example for them, and trying to guide them so that they move their development and actions towards becoming the best possible training officer that they can [be].” Fly maintained a particular focus toward ensuring a high degree of professionalism in his fellow TOs.

Alison provided several references to vocational learning. She decided (Zone 4) to alter her vocational path to at least twice and possibly three times in her working life by undertaking the formal learning processes associated with university level degrees. She described how she first chose and completed a university-level nursing program and how she enhanced her practical skills by choosing the “extended clinical” position as her first job. Alison’s more recent examples of vocational learning, the examples she described as “passionate learning,” were both associated with formal graduate studies in nursing and education. Alison seemed partly motivated toward both these degrees by her Domestic Murder and Partner Violence Narratives. For example, in her current doctoral efforts Alison emphasized the energy her passion brings to learning and the way it “lights her up” and propels her forward. Both degrees were partly motivated by her concern for possible stagnation in her position, first as a public health nurse and second as a nurse-educator. Alison’s restlessness after a few years in particular jobs is worth noting, perhaps as an indication of a need for continuous growth, improvement, or competence. Her metaphor of soccer players’ need to keep their feet moving, in the context, suggests a
personal need for growth and learning. In fact, I wondered whether her initial statements about always needing to move contained meaning beyond the obvious physical movement and were according to Alison a reference to continuous reflection and learning.

My own (Rand’s) experience moving through Zone 6 on different occasions was similar to Alison’s in many respects. My initial vocational learning as an engineering undergraduate and graduate student launched me in that vocation. Later in my life, I used an M.B.A. degree as a way to alter my vocational trajectory (also as a way to add credibility and competence to my own managerial practice that was a growing work requirement at the time). Most recently, my doctoral studies in education were a way to add both credibility and competence to my practice as an educator.

My experience in the M.B.A. program added insight into the way a university degree program could facilitate vocational learning in Zone 6. At this time in my life, I considered myself an engineer-railroader. I was working for CX Railway in Toronto, managing a small number of technologists, but delving daily into business-related issues associated with CX and its customers. As an engineer, I felt largely untrained for life in the business world. I also recall seeing in my work life several facets of large-scale business operations that intrigued me; for example, I was intellectually curious about business topics such as economics and labour relations (CX had 14 labour unions at the time). I was living in the business world and this seemed to be something I should know about. I entered the part-time, night-time M.B.A program at the University of Toronto, and obtained the degree five years later. The learning itself opened up a broad vista of knowledge, which was of great help in the business world. I found very significant meaning in my business education as it applied to the railway industry. I constantly
used my employer and the railway industry in general as a data source in course assignments and thoroughly enjoyed the industry application.

At the time of our interviews, Aaron had worked in his fixer vocation for about 20 years after transitioning from roles as a corporate IT professional and manager. He was reflective about the stages of vocational learning (Zone 6) he encountered during his career:

There was a big part of my life where you learn the mechanics of your trade, I mean, early on it’s learning Fortran and then how to make computers go, and . . . mastering the discipline. Then it became learning people, which means learning about you as a person and how you behave and why you behave and all those stressors. Now it’s around learning how groups of people work.

Aaron described how, at the mid-point of his career, around the time he was leaving the agricultural corporation and through his period at ACOC that he was pondering:

It was probably a bit of a dead zone, well, what am I doing this for? . . . and so there’s a few years there and I began to realize, no I like, . . . I like fixing things. I like fixing cars, and I like to see things done well, and elegantly . . . good solutions to problems.

Aaron attributed the consolidation of his vocational knowledge, the knowledge that peers have encouraged him to document, to that same period of change at ACOC. “I’ve been told by a few people that I should write about this, actually on the IT world . . . I’ve figured out the formula.” Putting these pieces together, Aaron appeared to be creating his vocation as fixer of IT organizations and, speculatively, learning and creating his fixer vocation most intensively, around the time he thinks of himself as “learning people.”

Jules’s vocational learning became evident at two points in her life. Her initial interest in tile-setting as supported by her *Foundation Building* and *Quilting Related to Tile-Setting*
Narratives began as she briefly explored and chose the tile-setting vocation (Zone 4), but transitioned into intensive vocational learning (Zone 6) as she entered and completed the tile-setting apprenticeship. The apprenticeship program included periods of formal classroom study interspersed with experience on the job under the guidance of a journeyman over several years.

Possible Stagnation (Zone 7)

The word *stagnate* is defined as “cease developing; become inactive or dull.” *(Oxford Dictionary of English, 2010).* Several participants expressed concern for anticipated vocational stagnation or the potential for vocational boredom in their futures and described how they avoided this state.

Three participants expressed feelings of boredom or excess routine on the job, boredom that stimulated vocational change in their lives. Alison described how, after her return to her home city, “I was a public health nurse . . . and I kind of felt bored after about five years, so that’s when I went and got my master’s degree.” At the end of the program, Alison began moving toward her new vocation of nurse-educator. Aaron described a somewhat similar experience at IOC, which resulted in an internal job change: “[IOC] wanted, well okay Aaron, just run the group for the next five years, will give him lots of pats on the head or whatever and of course my problem is if there isn’t a crisis to resolve then I’ll create one.” He explained his thinking around routine operational work:

I’m one of these people, the first time is really cool, the second time you want to master it, the third time you want to perfect it, and the fourth time you start to lose interest, the fifth time you’re starting to screw up because you forgot to pay attention, by the time you hit numbers six or seven it’s actually a huge mess now because you really don’t care, you’re just trying to get it done, and that’s not good for operations.
Aaron’s aversion to routine work was one of the reasons he created his unique vocation, which deliberately requires him to change his corporate setting when the IT department is fixed.

I (Rand) undertook degree programs twice in my vocational life that were motivated by my desire to stimulate my learning in response to looming routine in my work. I was working in Toronto at CX Railway in a position that had become routine when I started the M.B.A. degree. Much later, I had been in my role as dean for five years when I started the Ph.D. program in education, again, at least partly motivated by my desire to continue growing in my vocation.

Several participants expressed a desire for continuous learning in their roles, which may reflect a fear of stagnation. Alison talked about the need for growth and for “keeping your feet moving.” George also talked about the need for growth, and the fear of “peaking out,” and how he “was fuelled” by the “need to push myself . . . I continually have the thought: What have I done this year?” George left his first job after three years, because “I had pretty good mentors . . . they [his employer] were having some growing pains . . . I didn’t have a mentor anymore . . . I’d peaked out . . . I lost him and felt there is no more room for growth.” Fly also made several statements about the need to learn, grow and increase professionalism, for example: “There’s also keeping us advancing in professionalism. . . . Better knowledge by the individuals, learning better techniques for passing it on, . . . taking more responsibility on yourself for fulfilling your role but also helping others fulfil their role.”

In the following section, I examine the research findings relative to the secondary research question: a. How do adult learners interpret, describe, and define passion?

**Findings on Passion in Adult Learning**

I now summarize the findings in response to secondary research question: a. How do adult learners interpret, describe and define passion? I selected all participants on the basis of
their being self-professed passionate vocational learners and yet their interpretations of passion were remarkably different between the individuals.

Alison has made her own passion the topic of reflection. She described how passion “gets right in yourself, almost kind of like a thirst for it . . . when it’s passion it’s no longer like work. It’s just something you enjoy, and it’s not suffering, and its energy inducing.” She drew a connection between her passion for learning and her graduate studies, again emphasizing the energizing effect of passion:

Passionate to me [is] almost the passion in the learning really, I guess in undergrad there’s a certain amount of hoop jumping, but I think for graduate studies you just have to be passionate, I mean some people go back to graduate studies because maybe their employer is telling them to, or that kind of thing but, passionate is sort of the key to the learning, it goes together it kind of goes round and round, that sort of the energy, you know, they feed each other.

Alison readily related to passionate learning at several points in her life. Her high school experience of her biology class was the first example mentioned even though it took place decades before our interviews. Notably, she spoke of her special topic, anorexia nervosa, a human “emotional disorder” (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2010), which already showed some alignment with her developing interests in human care and psychology. She referred to freedom of choice in the topic, to her relationship with her teacher, and the trust and appreciation she felt.

George readily spoke of the passion he felt for his process safety position and the connection he made between his work and the prevention of worker injury while operating industrial processes:
When I see that sort of thing in the news, just really bothers me, that you have someone who’s supposed to be looking out for you, but really doesn’t care, and I guess that’s where most of the passion comes from.

He also spoke of his passion for working with other people on process safety problems, a largely non-technical element of his work:

The human interaction side of things, which is huge for me, when I’m most passionate at work is typically when I’m dealing with other people . . . whether it’s a team together in a meeting, and getting everyone to come to the full agreement in the understanding, whatever topic that may be . . . I enjoyed kind of, trying to mediate that, a bit, which is exactly what this company does.

George spoke extensively about the passion he feels for his vocation. “[My vocation] is really just working with people and make them the happiest it can be, or the most fulfilled.” In reference to the book he is writing in support of his vocation he said, “I want that book to really help others live their life to the fullest . . . that’s really where a lot of my passion comes from. I just want people to experience and live life, and just have this amazing experience.” George defined his own self-fulfilment through his engagement in his vocation: “self-fulfilment is . . . not defined by success or pleasure, I guess it’s really myself being happy, and doing what I love, which is again that passion and that’s helping others out to be the best they can be.”

Aaron rarely used the word “passion” directly in his stories but when I asked him about passionate learning, he responded by talking about his passion for fixing things, both in his avocation for car restoration and vocationally as a fixer of IT operations:

I began to realize, no, I like, I like fixing things. I like fixing cars, and I like to see things done well, and elegantly, you know, good solutions to problems and, well okay. So then
it becomes, okay, I like big problems . . . I sort of settled in my mind, that well I might not have put picked this career path, had I had a choice, I like solving problems, I like fixing things.

Fly described his passion for his work, mentioning the positive effect he was having on the recruits and their future careers:

Just that I can literally feel myself getting excited just talking about it, and here I am, I’ve got three months to go, all right, I’m still talking about stuff with the guys, and starting things, that will take years to come to fruition. Because to me it’s what we do here and what we teach the rookies now and how we treat them, will impact them their entire career but what we can get going here in the few months I’ve got left can impact this academy, and department, for years, okay?

Jules made one comment concerning passion, but seemingly inspired by her concepts of the light and the dark, “[Passion] doesn’t feel like radical, extreme, protest, and screaming declaration of one’s belief system. So it does feel like a quiet path, with self-assurance, internal joy, and an execution of love and service, in all I do.”

There have been several cases of passion for learning in my own life. A case that stood out took place while I worked for CX in Montréal. In my last four years at CX, I took on a job leading the corporate process improvement efforts from Human Resources. The “Total Quality Management” (TQM) movement in North American industry dating from the 1980s and early 1990s was in decline at this point although perhaps “evolving” would be a better expression. My manager asked me to lead the one part of TQM that seemed to resonate with the broader management group of the company, specifically, our process improvement efforts. This brought me into what became a lonely and self-directed learning process to find out what process
improvement was all about. I read voraciously and attended conferences, workshops, and classes. I represented CX in front of customers, notably the automotive industry, which wanted assurance that CX was upholding our part of their automotive assembly processes (highly reliable part delivery was essentially a logistics/transportation task). I went from a state of poor understanding of quality systems to becoming a knowledgeable advocate in the corporation. Part of my role was to document the value that process improvement could produce for the corporation and to convince management that we needed to invest our resources in the effort. The work, which overlapped with my previous job, spanned almost five years and transformed my personal views of corporate governance dramatically. I believed passionately in the value of the work, particularly for the organization and our customers. The methods I was learning caught my imagination because they represented a far more humane way to manage an effective organization than the command and control management philosophy used traditionally in that industry.

This concludes my findings on how adult learners interpret, describe, and define passion. Each participant explained what passion meant to him in his respective vocation. Four participants experienced misalignment between their passionate interests and their chosen vocations and I now discuss these experiences.

**Tensions Arising from Misaligned Passionate Interest and Vocational Choice**

I summarize the data findings in response to secondary research question: d. What are some tensions and contradictions experienced by adult learners when they have not aligned passionate interest and vocational choice? Four participants described major life circumstances where their passionate interests and the circumstances of their vocations became misaligned.
Alison spent many years thinking about undertaking doctoral studies but she was in many respects blocked by her own dissonance over the role played by nurses, and particularly nurse researchers, in the field of medicine. After completing her master’s degree, Alison worked with her master’s supervisor to identify a doctoral topic for future study:

I probably thought about it for the better part of five years, and I even set up a committee, and I met with people once before, and my master’s supervisor kind of lit a fire under me . . . [What] she wanted me to do in the community health sciences, which is certainly the Faculty of Medicine, and then she had this whole kind of program planned out for me . . . she sent me to all these people. I was super close to applying, and then I thought, I just can’t do this, I just can’t do this her way.

Jules described circumstances in which the tile-setter work she loved and embodied her recovery from addiction was nevertheless lost because of her pregnancy:

[I had] been working my ass off, and I really liked to work, alcoholic to workaholic was totally my transition, it kept me busy, it kept me clean. I went to my meetings, I was living a good life, I was really happy.

When she became pregnant, the situation was forcibly changed and Jules was cut off from her work, suddenly losing the benefits of the life transition she had made:

Yeah, I was floored . . . I was paid to sit at home, my husband said I cried the whole time because to me this was . . . death of a dream, loss of self . . . I’m just here alone. It was not good.

Jules turned her feelings of loss in a positive direction, eventually creating her social networking website for women in the trades. “And that’s where the true vocation stuff starts; [it] was based on that challenge becoming the greatest opportunity.” The work she undertook
eventually led Jules to embark on a new vocation, as an entrepreneurial businessperson: “I found from that data was that they love working for themselves, they loved building businesses, but they are missing business education.”

Fly described a sharp contrast between the elements of the work he enjoyed as a park ranger and the way his employer changed the nature of the work, which caused him to leave his vocation:

When I look back during my ranger days, one of the things I really enjoyed was taking the beginners, who are just starting to learn climbing and mountain rescue and so on, and even the more advanced people, but taking them out and show them the skills, teach them how to move safely, how to set up rope rescue systems, all that type of stuff. . . . I recognize that I was enjoying the teaching.

Fly’s employer imposed changes to his work environment that nevertheless negated his appreciation for the work, and caused him to leave the park ranger role:

So, we had to start learning some public safety stuff, we had to start learning all the different aspects of the wildlife management, and the wildlife enforcement stuff . . . there was a great increase in enforcement, . . . I was getting very negative about the whole, whole experience.

Fly’s solution was to leave the park ranger role and follow some of his peers into the local firefighting service.

My own (Rand’s) occasion of misalignment experience between passionate interest and vocation took place as I was leading the TQM (Total Quality Management) -based process improvement work at CX Railway. The VP Human Resources asked me to do this work. In turn, the CEO (chief executive officer) of the company had recently assigned the work to the VP-HR.
At the time, I saw the involvement of the CEO as critical for success, but I wondered whether the CEO understood what the TQM portfolio was all about, and how misaligned the railway’s operating strategy was compared to the TQM philosophy. Nevertheless, I accepted the role at the request of the VP-HR. I spent close to four years first coming to a deep understanding of TQM and then working with the VP-HR to identify the aspects of TQM that might fit our organization (largely process improvement work), and then leading a number of projects. In the process, I became passionate about the possibilities of process improvement work, if applied broadly, to improve the service levels given our customers. It became apparent, through his decisions, that the CEO did not value the work we were doing, which created dissonance for me. This was a major factor, although one of several, in my decision to leave the railway industry and seek employment with another organization.

Summary

In Chapter Five, I organized data taken from the vocational narratives and transcripts of each participant, according to the research questions. I introduced Figure 5 as a means of categorizing the narrative data in order to respond to the primary research question and secondary research questions b. and c. I summarized the narrative data according to each zone of Figure 5, by returning to the participant transcripts and drawing out raw data used to address the research questions. I then added data separately in support of secondary research questions a. and d.

Chapter Six contains a discussion that responds to the research questions directly. The chapter interprets the meaning underlying the research data.
CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

Introduction

In Chapter Six I describe much of what I have learned from my inquiry into passionate vocational learning, particularly the learning that I draw from the findings as presented in Chapters Four and Five. I present the material in this chapter in response to the research questions. I created Figure 6 as a means of organizing my response to the research questions and I begin by describing Figure 6 in more detail. In the nature of qualitative research, I present this description as ideas, suggestions, interpretations, and speculations offered to the reader, not as facts.

**Figure 6.** Zones of *Vocational Development* Experienced by Participants

*Figure 6 is a vocational development zone relationship* diagram. It depicts the relationships among the seven zones of vocational development shown and numbered on the diagram. The narrative threads crossing the diagram from left to right are identified in Chapter Four for each participant. I identified and isolated these threads from the larger vocational narratives, based on the insight offered from the participants themselves on their personal
inclinations and reasons for making the vocational decisions. I described *vocational* narrative threads and ignored other possible threads (as shown in Figure 4) that did not appear relevant to the vocational decision-making. Narrative threads are shown in Figure 6, as possibly originating early in the participant’s life, or with a spark of interest in Zone 2, or because of a disruptive event as shown in Zone 3. Where I refer to narrative threads by name in this chapter, the names are in italics.

The six zones overlaying the narrative threads show the zones occupied by a participant during a period of vocational development. The participants may have undergone several full or partial periods of vocational development during their lives, which in turn may be initiated by (speculatively) either a spark of vocational interest or by a disruptive event. An individual engaged in Zone 4 is exploring, learning about, deciding on, or beginning to pursue a vocational direction. The activities in Zone 4 may be as simple as “getting a job.” I did not attempt to define the processes inside the zones with any precision but rather offer descriptions based on the experience of the participants. I show Zones 5 and 6 developing in an interactive (overlapping) way over time, which I based on the experiences of the study participants. I also show Zone 7 as a second (disruptive events were the first) ending process for a vocation, born out of concern for stagnation in the vocation. I show the narrative threads underlying the zones as an indication of consistency of decision-making by the participant throughout the vocational development. I suggest that the individual revises updates and adds new insight, or rationale, to her narrative threads as she reflects on her experiences and to the point at which they are constructing the narratives. The individual, at whatever zone he occupies in the vocational development process, has used the narrative threads to assist in his decision-making, or to explain his state of vocational understanding at that time. As a final comment, I show the time dimension as being
flexible in Figure 6, and having no explicit length of time for the development process. Figure 6 illustrates the relational sequencing of the zones as suggested by the experience of the participants. The development process may span a lifetime or be repeated partially or wholly several times over the life of the individual. An individual may move through the stages described in the diagram, occupying different zones at different times in her life, depending on life circumstances.

In the following sections, I elaborate on my discussion in response to the primary and secondary research questions. Figure 6 begins my response to the questions by showing the relationships between the vocational development zones. I demonstrate in this chapter how the experience of the participants adds meaning to the diagram in association with the theoretical framework cited previously.

**Discussion of the Primary Research Question**

My primary research question was: In the experience of adult learners, what is the relationship among passionate engagement in the adult learning process, developed vocational interest, vocational choice, and action towards learning? The secondary questions are Question b: Is there a relationship between choice of vocation and passionate interest? If so, what is the nature of that relationship? and Question c: How was vocational interest experienced (triggered, developed and sustained) by adult learners? I respond to these questions with reference to Figure 6.

**Overview of the Zones of Vocational Development**

I created Figure 6 based on the experiences of the six participants in this study. The process is complex and I request the reader to refer frequently to Figure 6 during this description.
The following description is an overview of my response to the primary and two secondary research questions.

At any point in time, the participants were able to draw upon their narrative identity threads to guide and assist in decision-making as required by emergent circumstances. The narrative threads, which represent how the participants made sense of their lives and experiences at the point in time in which the narrative is constructed (McAdams, 2011), are assembled by the individual based on his or her dispositional traits (McCrae & Costa, 2008), and characteristic adaptations (McAdams & Cox, 2010). Together, the threads form a major part of the narrative identity of the participant (McAdams & Cox, 2010; Skorikov & Vondracek, 2007, 2011). As the participant entered the vocational development process, based on individual experiences, the participant initiated the development of a vocation in one of two ways, either from a vocational interest (Zone 2) or from a disruptive event in his or her life (Zone 3). Participants then decided to enter into a vocation (Zone 4), which in some cases involved entry into a post-secondary program on a vocation, or in the self-definition of a unique vocation, or simply applying for a job, which opens new vocational vistas for the individual. Significantly, some participants spent a prolonged period of time in Zone 4, in a sense, circling through the zone, exploring vocational options (Marcia, 1966, 1980), by performing overlapping activities in the surrounding zones. These overlapping activities included initiating vocational interest development, reacting to disruptive events, initial learning about a vocation and the initiation of vocational identity, all of which sometimes resulted in the choice of a vocation. Several participants initiated the process of developing an associated vocational identity in Zone 4 (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2007, 2011), which came to full bloom in Zone 5. I speculate that in some cases, vocational interest developed to progressively higher levels of interest (Hidi & Renninger, 2006; Renninger & Su, 2012)
during the vocational development process. I also speculate that each participant, at different points in his or her life, engaged in a vocation to the point of passion for the vocation (Vallerand et al., 2003). I believe it probable, that for some participants, the process of vocational learning (Zone 6) was interrelated with vocational identity formation (Illeris, 2014a; Tennant, 2012), and that, overall, the vocational learning processes included both transformative learning (Illeris, 2014a; Mezirow, 1991, 2012), and informational learning (Kegan, 2000). I also believe it probable that the participants experienced both transformative learning and informational learning to the level of passionate engagement (Vallerand et al., 2003). Several participants also experienced a period of anticipated vocational stagnation (Zone 7), which triggered a revision of their vocation. Finally, I believe that three participants encountered non-vocational, or only partially vocationally related, transformative learning experiences (Illeris, 2014a; Mezirow, 1991, 2012). This observation helps with the interpretation of George’s vocational development state, in particular, at the time of the interviews. I discuss these three cases in a separate section entitled Non-vocational Transformative Learning, following the discussion of Zone 6.

The participants experienced the vocational development zones shown in Figure 6 as non-linear and at times repetitive experiences. Some participants spent an extended period of time in Zone 4, while they explored, chose, and entered a vocation, which roughly corresponds to people who are identity moratoriums (Marcia, 1966, 1980). I show Zone 4 overlapping with all four of the adjacent zones (Vocational Interest, Disruptive Events, Vocational Identity Development, and Vocational Learning). Several participants repeated the whole process of vocational development (possibly all six zones), either partially or totally, during the years of their work experience.
I now show how the experiences of the six participants have contributed to this exploration, description and elaboration of my response to the primary and two secondary research questions.

The Narrative Threads (Zone 1)

McAdams and Mclean (2013) described how, through their “narrative identity, people convey to themselves and to others who they are now, how they came to be, and where they think their lives may be going in the future.” (p. 233). In his application of narrative identity theory to providing vocational guidance to individuals, Savickas (2011) suggested that people create micro stories which can provide understanding of vocational events in their lives. I drew upon the work of these authors to explore how the participants in this study became passionate learners in their vocation.

The participants gave to me, as researcher, the six vocational narratives outlined in Chapter Four (including my own) with a great degree of consistency. Although the narratives were the product of 14 separate interviews, I detected absolutely no inconsistency in the stories. Furthermore, in all cases, the stories flowed naturally from the participants without hesitation or revision. I believe my experience assembling this material is in itself verification that the individuals composed narratives probably over many years but certainly well in advance of the interviews.

I identified the narrative threads upon completion of the larger vocational narratives. The identification of these threads, which are similar to the micro-narratives described by Savickas (2011), provided immediate insight into the decision-making of the participants. The ease with which the narrative threads were isolated and identified, the way they often appeared several
times during the participants’ stories, and the consistency of the insight they provide into the participant’s decision-making, gives ample reason for their inclusion in Figure 6.

The work primarily of McAdams (McAdams, 2001, 2011; McAdams & McLean, 2013) suggested that there are themes within narratives that are often common between individuals. He cited a generativity theme, for example, in the latter stages of the lives of Americans (McAdams, 2013). I found no such similarities in the narrative threads of the current study. I was not following McAdams’s methods and the number of participants was quite small by comparison. Most of the narrative threads I found important were idiosyncratic to the lives of the individuals, although I can see that other people might well have narrative threads similar to Alison’s Caring narrative or my own Building Stuff narrative.

In several cases, the participants’ narrative threads, arising from their early lives, apparently influenced their early vocational decisions. Furthermore, the narrative threads provided the participants with continuity through their vocational development sometimes over several years. Alison created a strong narrative based on her supporting and Caring thread. It first included care for her brother but later was apparent in her choice of the nursing profession, her experiences as a nurse, her choice of topics for graduate studies, and in her care for her grandparents. Fly’s Outdoors, Physical Activity and Public Safety and Service narrative threads were also influential through much of his vocational life. Aaron’s Self-sufficiency, Individual Learner, and Fixer narrative threads appeared and reappeared in his vocational development over approximately four decades of his life. Lastly, my own Building Stuff, Student and Managerial narrative threads influenced my vocational decision-making for many years.

In summary, and in response to the research questions, the narrative threads provide a connection between the individual’s vocation and how he or she arrived at that state. They also
provide insight into the person’s vocational interest development, the vocational choices made and the vocational learning that person might undertake in the future.

**Vocational Interest (Zone 2)**

The Vocational Interest zone was the point of entry into a vocation, often an initial vocation, for all the participants. The participants’ narrative threads seemed to have a strong influence on each participant’s thinking where vocational interest was realized. In four out of six cases, parental influence was highly evident in this decision-making (not Jules, nor Fly).

Alison’s parents required university attendance and combined with her own research and her *Caring* and *Human Biology* narrative threads, she was able to enter a nursing program and take up the role of a nurse, which was her sole vocation for many years. Jules had a chance encounter with tile-setters at a time when she was dissatisfied with her current vocation and possibly because of her *Foundation Builder* and her *Quilting Related to Tile-Setting* narrative threads, she entered an apprenticeship program that was very different from her previous experience. Aaron was strongly influenced by his parents and grandfather to enter a university program. He chose a local university probably through the influence of his parents and of his *Faith, Interest in Science* and *Fixer* narrative threads. George’s parents influenced him toward a post-secondary program and, in this case, family friends helped to find the instrumentation engineering technology program he actually entered. George’s *Parental Relationship* narrative thread appears to have had a strong influence on his vocational choices, as did his *Hard Trade Labour* narrative thread. Fly did not mention overt parental influence on his choice to pursue post-secondary but I find it likely that his *Outdoors, Physical Activity, Public Safety and Service*, and *Calculus* narrative threads probably influenced the evolution of his vocational interests and choices. Finally, the two dominant factors that stand out in my own (Rand’s) choice to enter
engineering school were my father’s requirement that I attend a university, coupled with my own Building Stuff narrative, which I associated with engineering as far back as Grade 9 although my knowledge of the field was quite weak at the time. A chance encounter with a disaffected electrical engineering student, when coupled with my own Academic Insecurity narrative, played a part in my choice of the civil engineering discipline.

When compared to the situational-individual interest model developed by Renninger (Hidi & Renninger, 2006; Renninger & Su, 2012), several participants showed what seemed to be a low level of vocational interest in their respective initial vocations. The four-phase model showed a progressive deepening of interest from an initial momentary triggering (“that is interesting”), to a more sustained or reoccurring interest (“there it is again, I keep seeing that”), to a more enduring state (“I am going to find-out more about that”) to a well-developed committed state of interest, but with always the possibility of loss (“I am building the interest into my practice, I am getting good results”). At least the first three phases of situational-individual interest model were evident in the experiences the participants had while still in the Vocational Interest zone (Zone 2), and in the overlap with the Choosing and Entering a Vocation zone (Zone 4). The final phase of interest development appears to overlap with the Vocational Identity Development and possibly the Vocational Learning zones. The transition that appeared to take place, for example in Alison’s case, is that an initial early interest in obtaining a nursing degree led to actually obtaining the degree and doing the work of a nurse and became her lifelong vocational identity as a nurse. I made a similar transition, from a vague interest in building things, to 38 years as a practicing, registered, professional engineer. Notably, both Alison and I were graduates of multi-year, university-level professional programs, which
suggested these programs have methods and structures that encourage quick assumption of vocational identity.

**Disruptive Events (Zone 3)**

The disruptive events described by the participants appeared to create vocational change in two ways. The first is a *forced change* that enabled vocational reassessment; the second is a *meaning laden event* that encouraged vocational evolution.

In three cases, participants reassessed their vocation and explored new choices because of a disruptive event that forced a change in employment. Aaron’s departure from ACOC caused him to reassess the nature of his work as an IT manager and operator, and launch into a new vocation as a roving fixer of IT departments. Aaron’s *Self-Sufficiency, Independent Learner* and *Fixer* narratives may have played a part in his reaction to the forced change.

Jules’s first pregnancy was the immediate cause of her departure from her tile-setting vocation. She nevertheless took the opportunity to have her second son while she explored the world of women in the trades. During the interviews, Jules appeared to be in the midst of exploring and developing a new vocation as an entrepreneur in the business world but still oriented toward her meaning-laden love of stone and tile.

In my own case, the loss of my oil and gas company position caused me to consider and pursue a new vocation as an educator. In making this decision, I was probably influenced by my own *Building Stuff, Student,* and *Managerial* narratives. In all three cases, Aaron, Jules and my own, externally forced disruptive events initiated vocational change.

*Meaning-laden* disruptive events influenced vocational change for three other participants. Alison stated the domestic murder case probably initiated her interest in domestic violence, which was associated with both her graduate degree programs, her vocational change
as an educator, and a counselling position she considered her favourite job. Both Alison’s *Domestic Murder* narrative, and her *Partner Violence* narrative threads, probably originated with this disruptive event and may influence her vocational decisions in the future.

The meaning Fly found in his distant (in time) death of his cousin event and his more recent forced application of enforcement duties as a ranger, in a sense, both pulled and pushed him to pursue a new vocation where he found meaning serving as a firefighter. He enjoyed the firefighter vocation and it ultimately led him into the role of training officer that became his passion. Fly’s *Public Safety and Service, Education and Teaching, Enforcement, Outdoors and Physical Activity* narratives probably all played a part in his decision-making about this vocational change.

The meaning George sees in industrial process safety, protecting innocent workers from injury caused by faulty industrial processes, seems somewhat connected to his beating event. His vocational aspiration to help others to become self-fulfilled also seems related to his personal trauma, although I find the vocational implications unclear. I discuss non-vocational transformative learning in a later section, primarily as a response to George’s state.

The literature of narrative inquiry offers some indication of the importance of critical events in the lives of people. These events are seen as critical because “of their impact and profound effect on whoever experiences such an event. They often bring about radical change in the person” (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 77). The effect of critical, disruptive, disjunctive, or disorienting dilemmas on the lives of people is evident in the literature of adult teaching and learning (Jarvis, 2006; Mezirow, 2012; Woods, 1993). In his early work on transformative learning, Mezirow (1978) stated:
There are certain challenges or dilemmas of adult life that cannot be resolved by the usual way we handle problems—that is, by simply learning more about them or learning how to cope with them more effectively. Life becomes untenable, and we undergo significant phases of reassessment and growth in which familiar assumptions are challenged and new directions and commitments are charted. (p. 101)

Jarvis (2006) described the learning process leading to change where “we enter a state of disjuncture and implicitly raise questions What do I do now? What does that mean?” (p. 19) The disruptive events experienced by all six participants showed dilemmas or disjunctive events, that, based on adult learning theory, should trigger “transformative learning” (Mezirow, 2012) or learning where “The person in the world (Body/Mind/Self) [is] changed” (Jarvis, 2006, p. 23, italics added). Jarvis’s quote comes very close to suggesting learning, which leads to a change in the identity of the individual, or the vocational identity of the individual, in the context of this research. The disruptive events identified by each participant in Zone 2, as described earlier, almost certainly initiated transformative or change learning in some of the participants, which developed further as the participants chose and entered a new vocation in Zone 4. The overlap between Zones 2 and 4 in Figure 6 is intended to indicate an imprecise transition between the disruptive events, the decision-making process, and the learning associated with these zones.

**Choosing and Entering Vocation (Zone 4)**

I show the Choosing and Entering Vocation zone in Figure 6 overlapping four other zones in dotted lines because the activities that take place in this zone appear to be part of the surrounding zones. I consider the activities in Zone 4 to be a mixture of the activities in the surrounding zones, with imprecise boundaries delineating the activities.
Some of the participants entered and left Zone 4 directly, because they chose to enter a post-secondary program or started and completed a job search. Alison’s choice and entry into a post-secondary nursing program was one of these. My own application and acceptance into an engineering program was also of this nature. Both Alison and I undertook the initial vocational learning for our respective professions, through formalized learning in undergraduate professional programs, within the overlap between Zones 4 and 6. Alison and I also initiated our respective vocational identity developments, as nurse and engineer, in the overlap between Zones 4 and 5. Jules’s experience as a tile-setter apprentice arguably took place in the overlaps between Zones 4, 5, and 6. Both Aaron and I performed job searches, which when complete resulted in our embarking on a new vocation. Fly’s two applications, firstly to become a firefighter, and secondly a firefighter training officer, may be viewed as a relatively quick transit through Zone 4.

Other participants, George and Jules, appeared to be dwelling in this zone during the interview process. I see George’s desire to help others with self-fulfilment as still somewhat vague vocationally. Jules appeared to be looking for vocational direction, which became apparent to her during her research into women in the trades. The research led her to seek a future in the entrepreneurial world of business. Neither George nor Jules had yet fully assumed a new vocational identity, which I see as an indication they were still operating largely within Zone 4. Notably, both George and Jules appeared highly engaged in “informal learning activities” (Merriam et al., 2006, p. 24) such as reading books, online alerts and reading, and discussion with others, both online and in person, in their exploration of vocational options.

I visualize the Choosing and Entering Vocation zone as a way-station of sorts, a place where the participants spent time reflecting, exploring and synthesizing information from which,
in several cases, they launched into a new vocational direction. The activity of people operating in this zone may include a considerable degree of vocational learning (as indicated by the overlap between Zones 4 and 6) such as the learning associated with the activity of exploration, or such as the learning undertaken in undergraduate professional or apprenticeship programs, as the individual prepares to assume a new vocational identity (as indicated by the overlap between Zones 4 and 5). I also visualize the initial stages of transformational learning (Mezirow, 2012) may also take place within Zone 4 as a person chooses a new direction such as those that result from undergraduate professional or apprenticeship programs, or from decisions to embrace a new vocation. Nevertheless, the transformation will not advance far within this zone until sustained action consistent with the new meaning perspectives of the individual have taken place (Taylor, 2007), which I visualize as largely occurring in Zones 5 and 6. I also note, that in my limited reading of the identity status literature, the Choosing and Entering Vocation zone is where vocational identity related moratoriums (individuals exploring their vocational identity options) would be observed spending their time (Kroger & Marcia, 2011; Marcia, 1966, 1980).

I suggested that the narrative threads of each participant probably influenced their decisions at various stages throughout Figure 6, as illustrated by grey lines passing through each zone. I mentioned certain narrative threads in reference to Vocational Interest (Zone 2) and Disruptive Events (Zone 3) because they seemingly influenced the decisions of the participants. I further speculate that all narrative threads given in Chapter Four probably influenced the participant’s decision-making, to a greater or lesser degree as they operated within the zones of Choosing and Entering Vocation, Vocational Identity Development, Vocational Learning, and Possible Stagnation. I illustrate using the narrative threads identified for Aaron as examples.
I suggested that Aaron has a well-developed vocational identity as a fixer of IT organizations. I visualized Aaron’s narrative threads coexisting with him as he exercised his vocation. Aaron’s threads were *Dutch Cultural, Faith, Abuse by Peers in Childhood, Interest in Science, Self-Sufficiency, Transformational* (reference to Redecision Therapy), *Toughness, Independent Learner, Fixer,* and *IT Organizational Design* and they are consistent with his solo fixer vocation. In a similar way, I suggest all participants’ narrative threads, as identified in Chapter Four, coexist within them, perhaps creating vocational decision consistency, perhaps influencing vocational decisions, as they move among all the zones of Figure 6.

**Vocational Identity Development (Zone 5)**

I did not have the emergence of vocational identity in sight at the beginning of this study. It was only after I first pursued vocational *interest* (as can be seen from the research questions) that I started to see a transition to *identity* in the working lives of the participants. I expected the participants to make statements such as “I am interested in nursing,” but what I was eventually given by the participants were statements such as “I am a nurse” or “I am a fixer of IT operations.” Alison, Aaron, and Rand (me) made direct, unambiguous identity statements in their vocational narratives. The statements emerged naturally from the narratives and were unsolicited.

When the identity statements were ambiguous or largely missing (particularly from Jules, George, and Fly), the vocational narratives at least supply the context to understand why that might be the case. At the time of the interviews, Jules and George both seemed to be exploring new vocational identities in the Choosing and Entering Vocation zone, although it seems evident that Jules was at least beginning to emerge as an entrepreneurial businessperson. Fly was
passionate about his vocation, as a firefighter-training officer, but his potential to assume the identity of teacher in this role ended with his retirement.

The experiences of Alison, Jules, and I (Rand) showed the way professional and apprenticeship post-secondary programs on vocational education, in conjunction with professional associations or regulatory bodies, appeared to manage the creation of vocational identity in the participants. Once the participants made their program choices and entered their programs, they became students of “the vocation” (nursing student, engineering student, apprentice tile-setter). In the case of Alison’s nursing program, upon graduation, she was eligible to become a registered nurse with the professional association and embarked on her profession, considering herself “a nurse.” Jules also became a licensed journeyman tile-setter and considered herself “to be a tile setter,” upon completing both the experiential and educational components of her program. In my own case, I became an Engineer-in-Training for two years under the supervision of a professional engineer before I was eligible, and felt able, to take on the professional identity and call myself “an engineer.” In the context of Figure 6, I visualized both the educational and gradual vocational identity development activities for these professional and apprenticeship participants as taking place in the zones of Vocational Identity Development (Zone 5) and Vocational Learning (Zone 6), although both zones overlap with Choosing and Entering a Vocation (Zone 4), where the participants made their original vocational choices.

Finally, I returned to some literature of interest psychology and saw new meaning in the content. Krapp (2002, 2007) theorized that changing interests may be closely related to individual concerns such as personal growth and identity formation. Based on the experience of the participants, I speculate that identity formation may at times be the ultimate realization of interest development. Also, Krapp and Prenzel (2011) speculated that interest may develop from
childhood exposure, dwindle or solidify, depending on the experiences of the child. According to the authors, if the child’s interest endures through to adolescence, it becomes integrated with the child’s personal aims and identity. The vocational narratives developed by this study suggest this type of process may continue throughout adulthood.

The vocational narratives provide context to the identity statements, which suggests that a relationship exists between learning and the formation of vocational identity in the individual participants. I explore this relationship further in the following section.

**Vocational Learning (Zone 6)**

I broadly categorize the vocational learning undertaken by the participants into change, or transformative learning (Illeris, 2014a; Mezirow, 1991, 2012) and into informational learning (Kegan, 2000). The micro-level facets of transformative learning are described in Figure 3 and begin with an activating event, disjuncture, or a disorienting dilemma (Cranton, 2002; Jarvis, 2006; Mezirow, 1991) and end with a new set of assumptions, meaning structures, or a new way of knowing (epistemology) the meaning of our experiences (Cranton, 2002; Kegan, 2000; Mezirow, 1991). Taylor (2009) suggested that transformative change may have taken place when the ideas, beliefs, values, and feelings of individuals were changed. Taylor (2007) further suggested that authentic transformation may have taken place when the result is sustained action consistent with changed meaning perspectives.

I propose that several participants experienced transformative learning during periods when their vocational identity was changing. Firstly, Alison, who was educated in adult learning theory, described the period around her master’s program as transformative. Her vocational identity at the start of the period was as a nurse. She encountered a traumatic and disorienting event, the domestic murder of her client. She explored domestic violence extensively in the
master’s program. Within a few years of the disorienting event, she had evolved her vocational identity into nurse-educator, but was also slanting her work or favouring the counselling-related elements of her vocation.

I believe Aaron also underwent a transformative learning experience during the loss of his position at ACOC. His vocation changed from manager of IT operations (a role he was never comfortable with) to a roving fixer of IT departments. This period of change probably began with his highly traumatic departure from ACOC and ended a few years later as he settled in to his self-created fixer role, a role he continued to perform for nearly 15 years, at the time of our interviews. Aaron attributed a great deal of his vocational knowledge, his formula for fixing IT departments, to the knowledge he gained a few years before and after his time at ACOC. Notably, Aaron’s peers encouraged him to write a book documenting his fixing knowledge. In more recent years, Aaron continued to learn in his role as he moved from organization to organization but I suspect most of his recent learning has been informational in nature.

I believe my own period of significant learning and vocational change was transformative after I lost my position at the oil and gas company, accepted a position as dean, and then developed my own vocational identity as educator over several years. I adapted to my new role, I undertook a doctoral degree in order to stimulate a deeper understanding of what it meant to be an educator and how I might be more effective in the profession. For 10 years, my skills, values, goals, and roles have gradually become aligned to my educator identity, although with the continuing influence of my engineer and managerial identities.

With further reference to Figure 6, Alison, Aaron and I all appear well advanced in our respective vocations, proceeding to the right of the diagram, within elongated Zones 5 and 6. The nature of our learning may have transformative elements in it still, or it may have become almost
fully informational. It is possible that any one of us will encounter a future disruptive event and return to choosing and entering a new vocation. Furthermore, these three examples of the alignment of transformative learning and vocational identity change were probably not unusual in our lives. At earlier stages in our lives, both Alison and Rand benefitted from university level professional education and entered provincially regulated professional organizations because of early life decisions. Professional programs of this nature appear to be very effective in creating a transformative learning experience. I note that my first semester as an engineering student was both traumatic and highly disruptive in my life, which is consistent with the notion of transformative learning beginning with disorienting dilemmas or disjunctive experiences (Jarvis, 2006; Mezirow, 1991).

I suggest that Jules was engaged in a transformative learning experience when the loss of her tile-setting position disrupted her life and she undertook her own learning project as a result. Her learning project created interaction with other women who faced challenges from both within the trades and as entrepreneurs. Her learning project caused a major reassessment (change) of her perspective on what her vocation should be. If Jules continues to follow through with her new vocational direction then perhaps she will embark upon a new vocation and her learning through this period may have been transformational in her life. Nevertheless, the experience should not be counted as transformational unless sustained action results (Taylor, 2007).

Fly, as a retiree from firefighting, may yet embark on a new vocation teaching fly-fishing although this likely depends on how well he follows through on his plans. Fly’s vocational learning during his four years as a training officer (TO) appears to have been more informational than transformative. His vocational move from firefighter to firefighter training officer did not
appear to be traumatic or disorienting. Fly and his fellow TOs appeared as a *community of practice* (Fenwick, 2003; Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Fly played a strong role in this community of practice in terms of synthesizing the thoughts of others and espousing his service philosophy. His description of his learning, nevertheless, sounded informational (Kegan, 2000) in nature.

**Non-vocational Transformative Learning**

This study examines passionate *vocational* learning and yet three participants described episodes in their lives that may well have been transformational but of a largely *non-vocational* nature. Firstly, George may have been in the midst of a personal *worldview* changing, learning experience, at the time of the interviews. His beating incident appeared highly disjunctive or disorienting (Jarvis, 2006; Mezirow, 1991), in nature, and from his descriptions, initiated dramatic worldview change in George’s life. Although George described a congenial childhood and family relationships, after the beating incident, he became highly “other oriented,” stressing his relationship with mentors and how he liked to learn from, and help others, even to the point of writing a book about “life through the eyes of a smile.” George described an energized personal learning process, but one only partially related to his work-life vocation. This view at least gives some indication why I had difficulty identifying George’s vocational direction and state on the Vocational Development diagram (Figure 6).

Aaron described a life changing experience based on Redecision Therapy that helped him deal with the peer abuse issues from his childhood. IOC initiated the therapeutic process because of a toxic relationship with his supervisor. Aaron’s description of the process sounded remarkably similar to the description of transformational learning (Mezirow, 1991) contained in Figure 3, and he stated that the therapy was both effective and persistent in his life. Aaron’s
experiences in this case helped him deal with emotional trauma and were largely unrelated to his vocation or vocational identity.

Finally, Jules undertook a transformative experience with the assistance of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), the organization and people who supported her recovery. Jules decided to join AA because of a traumatic personal experience while she was teaching in Seoul. She embraced the AA recovery process, which included a great deal of learning that she reused while an apprentice and in her more recent coaching practice. Her continued freedom from addiction bears witness to the sustained action (Taylor, 2007) that resulted from this personal recovery experience.

**Possible Stagnation (Zone 7)**

Fulfilment of the need for competence (White, 1959) was interpreted as the “proposition that people often engage in activities simply to experience efficacy” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 233). I interpret this to mean that the need for competence is closely related to a heartfelt desire and action toward growth in learning, continuous improvement, or development toward continually improving efficacy. I suspect that the boredom or anticipated boredom experienced by Alison, Aaron, and me (Rand) came from a feeling that growth, learning, or improving efficacy had stopped. Aaron deliberately and at several times in his life sought new positions to avoid the onset of boredom and to stimulate growth. Alison and I also took deliberate steps to stimulate personal growth, but possibly due to the influence of own personal narrative threads, we chose to use degree programs. George’s first job kept him occupied for three years before he lost a key mentor and felt he had lost an opportunity for professional growth. In the end, George chose to follow a new mentor into a role in a new company in the hope of stimulating his personal growth. Finally, Fly saw a need to promote continual professional growth in his training
officer position, which he felt he was accomplishing, although there was no indication that he had reached a point of boredom at his retirement.

I now respond to the secondary research Question a: How do adult learners interpret, describe and define passion?

**Passion in Adult Learning**

The statements made about passion by all participants are contained in Chapter Five. In order to understand these statements, I believe it is essential to examine the context of the study. All participants stated explicitly that they were passionate vocational learners as their many comments confirmed throughout the narratives. Starting with the characteristic definition of passion as “a strong inclination toward an activity that people like, that they find important, and in which they invest time and energy” (Vallerand et al., 2003, p. 757), it is easy to see that several participants invested time and energy in the learning and identity-formation processes. Alison invested several years of effort in her doctoral degree in the area of domestic violence, while she was working as a nurse-educator. I (Rand) most recently did very much the same, as I put much of my non-working activities in suspension while I studied the topic of passionate vocational learning. Jules’s effort to create and operate her “women in trades” support and research web site had several benefits for her learning process and provided both speaking and coaching opportunities, but had no monetization model. She devoted her time to the effort largely without compensation. George is writing his book and interacting with co-workers and others to fulfil his “life through the eyes of a smile” vocation, essentially with no expectations of financial compensation.

A review of the statements in the previous chapter quickly reveals that each participant *liked* what they were passionate about, and all participants found *meaning* in the objects of their
passionate engagement or importance, using Vallerand’s (Vallerand et al., 2003) terminology. Interestingly, some participants seemed vague about whether they were passionate about their vocation or about learning in their vocation. Fly, for example, seemed to refer to his passion for helping his students, rather than the learning he undertook on behalf of his students. Aaron referred to his passion for finding elegant solutions to problems rather than the associated learning. The dividing line between the individual’s vocation and vocational identity and the vocational learning is blurry, shown overlapping in Figure 6.

Self-determination theory posits that passion arises from actions that are intrinsically motivated (Deci & Ryan, 2012). The participants revealed many signs of intrinsic motivation as an outcome of their fulfilled needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness. It is apparent, for example, that every participant selected their vocational identity and associated learning autonomously. Aaron created his vocation to match his particular circumstances and personality, and readily likened his vocation to his hobby of restoring automobiles. Alison chose her research topic to match her own vocational and learning interests. Her doctoral topic is the most recent example of passionate learning in what is for Alison a 20-year quest for understanding in this field. In my own case, my research topic was also a compelling personal choice, with little or no external influence. I perceive both Jules and George embracing vocational and learning change at a very high rate and yet their particular vocational and learning directions are of their own design. Fly chose his vocation for reasons that may seem somewhat parochial (pension and loss of physical capability), but he seemed to have been simply lucky in finding something that fit his personality and identity formation well. Fly was one of two participants (the other was Jules), who used the word fun in describing his work, a sure sign of intrinsically motivated activity (Ryan & Deci, 2000).
The energizing effect of autonomous choice may not be directly visible in the learning of the participants, but consider Alison’s *amotivating* experience with the clarinet. When her peer group changed in Grade 9, her mother forced her into the band as a clarinetist, a role she disliked intensely, and ultimately ended when the pressure departed. Later in her life, Alison declined to pursue a doctoral topic and direction that was not her own but rather one that she felt pressured to undertake by her master’s supervisor.

Several of the participants deliberately placed themselves in growth environments in order to avoid stagnation. This action may be viewed as a way in which they fulfilled their innate psychological need for competence, thereby creating action toward growth in learning, continuous improvement, or improving efficacy (Ryan & Deci, 2000), the second ingredient toward generating passion.

Curiosity is “a strong desire to know or learn something.” (*Oxford Dictionary of English*, 2010) The word *curiosity* itself suggests strong motivation for learning. Three participants, Aaron, Rand and Alison, emphasized the curiosity behind their learning. Aaron gave an example of his constant curiosity in his water clock story. This might well be a narrative thread in Aaron’s life, although I did not identify it as one. I did create a curiosity narrative thread in my own life and find curiosity intimately connected with the desire to build stuff. Alison mentioned how her counselling work appealed to her curiosity, risk-taking, and learning growth potential, which shows she recognized the presence of curiosity in her life. Jules expressed unusual curiosity about the work of the stonemasons that originally led her into that vocation, although she did not use the word directly. George seemed curious about other people. He wanted to find out what was going on in their lives and how he could help improving their happiness. Finally, Fly spoke of his curiosity indirectly though his references to his learning at work as a never-ending series
of puzzles, a word he also used to describe his development of new fly-fishing flies. White (1959) referred to both curiosity and a need for mastery as included in his *effectance motivation* construct. Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000) considered White’s concept of effectance motivation to be synonymous with their own construct, the innate psychological need for competence, and referred to White’s work when discussing curiosity. From this perspective, the participants appeared to be fulfilling their own needs for competence as they exercised their curiosity.

The innate psychological need for relatedness was the last need identified by Ryan and Deci (2000) and has the most “distal” (p. 71) impact on intrinsic motivation. Relatedness “refers to the desire to feel connected to others—to love and care, and to be loved and cared for” (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 231). Narratives might have been an inappropriate vehicle to detect the need for fulfilment of relatedness. In a number of the narratives, the participants expressed a strong sense of care and concern for others, and at times concern to the point of generativity (Erikson, 1963, 1968; McAdams, 2006, 2013) was evident in, and quite likely contributed to the motivation of the individuals. For example, Alison concentrated on teaching relational practice to her nursing students, a focus that is both her particular specialty as an educator and generative in nature. Her research topics on domestic violence are motivated by the desire to detect and prevent domestic violence, entirely motivated for the benefit of others. Fly used a philosophy in his teaching that stressed public service. This philosophy was present in the fire service, but became Fly’s particular passion when teaching his students. There was a generative aspect to Fly’s passion for his teaching vocation, where he emphasized his passion about teaching people to help other people. He was passing on his passion for service to the next generation. Jules’s research into her project of love, about why women love their work, was oriented toward helping other women who faced obstacles to success in the trades. The people she met and the support
that she generated because of her project, motivated her to learn about and to begin forming her emerging identity as a business entrepreneur. My own research interests around passionate vocational learning were motivated largely by my desire to provide an environment where both the instructors and students under my accountability could become successful learners in their respective careers. Finally, the particular and other-oriented vocation that George chose, and the associated learning, also seemed strongly motivated by the desire to assist others. In general, it appears all these participants (I have not included Aaron) fulfilled their needs for relatedness as strongly represented in their learning and identity creation motivations.

The participants’ stories of their passionate involvement in learning appeared to be consistent with self-determination theory and, in particular, the definition of passion developed by Vallerand: “A strong inclination toward an activity that people like, that they find important, and in which they invest time and energy” (Vallerand et al., 2003, p. 757).

I now discuss my response to secondary research question d: What are some of the tensions and contradictions experienced by adult learners when they have not aligned passionate interest and vocational choice?

**Tensions Arising from Mismatched Passionate Interest and Vocational Choice**

Four participants described times in their lives when there was poor alignment between passionate interest and vocational choice. Alison was misaligned with her original doctoral supervisor over the topic of her research. Jules’s work as a tile-setter and a teacher of apprentices ended with her pregnancy because of the structure of the apprenticeship-teaching environment. Fly’s ranger position, in which he enjoyed teaching in an active outdoors setting, was abruptly lost when the conditions of employment changed and he was required to perform intensive enforcement duties. Finally, my personal passionate interest in my TQM process improvement
work suddenly lost its potential application, and therefore significant meaning, when I realized it was a low executive priority. All these situations created considerable tension for the individuals involved. In three cases, Jules’s, Fly’s, and my own, the tensions influenced choices to depart the current employment and change vocation. In Alison’s case, she refused to continue the doctoral program at that time and until she was able to arrange circumstances, in another program, that were aligned to her choices.

There is little doubt that all these circumstances created a deep emotional impact in the individuals. The circumstances in each case were highly demotivating. In each case they represented an infringement on the autonomous choices of the person, to which the individuals apparently responded by seeking circumstances where their autonomous choices could be followed. In essence, these situations may be seen examples of the importance of fulfilling the innate need for autonomy as described by self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000, 2012).

I now summarize the discussion chapter, in which I proposed responses to the research questions as derived from the narrative data obtained from the six research participants.

Summary

The relationship between passion for a vocation, interest in the vocation, and the associated learning are highly complex and variable for each individual. I devised a graphic, named a Vocational Development Zone Relationship diagram, containing seven zones that I find useful in understanding these relationships more fully. I then used the seven zones, as outlined in Figure 6, to explore the experiences of the six participants and form a response to the primary research question, and to Secondary Questions b. and c. I provided a response separately to Secondary Question a., as an exploration of how the participants experienced passion in their
vocationally oriented activities. Finally, I responded to Question d, concerning the experiences of individuals who had misaligned passionate interest and vocational choices.

In Chapter Seven, I explore my conclusions from the study.
CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

Overview

This final chapter concludes the research with some key reflections on the findings from this study. In addition, I add some thoughts about where I would like to see future research in this area, in light of the knowledge gained during this study.

Key Reflections

Six Narratives

Six individuals contributed their experiences as passionate vocational learners to the research base of life experience. The narratives described here represent valid knowledge of those life experiences, enhancing the breadth of such knowledge recorded.

Vocational Development Zone Diagram

The diagram in Figure 6 illustrates the relationships among the seven vocational development zones including: Narrative Threads, Vocational Interests, Disruptive Events, Choosing and Entering Vocation, Vocational Identity Development, Vocational Learning, and Possible Stagnation. The relationship among these zones was extremely difficult to articulate before I created the diagram.

Vocational Narrative Threads

The vocational narrative threads flowed out easily and naturally from the larger vocational narratives. It seemed evident that each person had authored these narratives over time and in a few short hours of discussion on the topic area they were able to describe what I believe were practiced stories of their lives. This process lends support to the theory of narrative identity creation (McAdams, 2011; McAdams & McLean, 2013), simply because the narrative threads were readily available to the individuals and particular to each person. I, as narrator, was able to
link clearly each thread to the idiosyncratic life of each participant. If, in future research, there were an opportunity to produce the life narratives of large numbers of participants, it is likely that the researcher would eventually see similarities in the narrative threads among individuals, although in my opinion, the substance (details) of any two threads would likely be identical.

The function of the narrative threads is to provide insight into why the individuals made the decisions they did, in all facets of the vocational development diagram. I visualized the narrative threads as being stories that the individual internalized and retained, and that helped the participants make sense of their experiences. These stories are accumulated, modified, and enhanced as time passes and the individual’s experiences grow. In a sense, they form a thread that travels in the person’s memories throughout their lives. The stories appear to influence the decision-making of the individual as did Alison’s Care narrative thread, Fly’s Love of Outdoors, and Physical Activity narrative threads, and my own Building Stuff narrative thread. The narrative threads no doubt also have an impact throughout an individual’s life as the person grows in experience.

I based much of this description of the narrative threads on the research of McAdams (2011; McAdams & McLean, 2013) and many others, yet the description was also based on my own experiences and particularly on those greater, more meaningful events such as the loss of a job, a divorce, or relationships with children. I recalled clearly how I worked, pondered, adjusted, and reworked my own stories around these events until I resolved the inconsistencies and other elements of these events that troubled me. In the end, I created versions of the narratives that fit what I knew, or made sense to me. I believe this study would have been richer had I visualized the narrative threads in the beginning and pursued their significance interactively with the participants during the research process.
I suspect it would be difficult to use the identification and alignment of narrative threads in counselling younger people, who have less life experience to draw upon. Firstly, research by Habermas and Bluck (2000) showed that few individuals produce fully integrated life narratives until late adolescence. Secondly, even in the early years of adulthood, the consistency in the narratives of the individual may be relatively weak and relatively unsupported. My youngest participant, George, seemed to be largely extrinsically motivated toward his career until his beating incident, right at the end of his post-secondary education, apparently led him to consider his current dual-faceted vocation. George’s vocational narrative seemed to me to be the least well developed of the six participants. Savickas (2012) developed a practice for career counselling individuals using narrative identity theory, which appears to be similar to aligning narrative threads.

The Influence of Narrative Threads

Upon reflection, the individuals’ narrative threads appeared to have greater influence on their decision-making in the zones (of Figure 6) where a greater degree of decision-making was required. In particular, in the zones of Vocational Interest, Disruptive Events, and Choosing and Entering Vocation, the influence of the participants’ narrative threads seemed significant. I speculate that the narrative threads were largely consistent with the thinking of the individual during the periods of Vocational Identity Development and Vocational Learning, provided they were making decisions consistent with the “values” inherent in their narrative identities. When the participants perceived the onset of the zone of Possible Stagnation, they initiated change in their vocational lives (back to Vocational Interest, Disruptive Events, and Choosing and Entering Vocation), which their narrative threads again influenced.
Separation of Vocation and Vocational Identity

I did not visualize when I started this study, that an individual might enter a vocation (a life role) and then begin the process of internalizing their vocational identity. Nor did I visualize that a person might begin assuming a vocational identity before he actually entered the vocation. For example, I entered the management group at a post-secondary and yet probably two or three years passed before I began to think of myself as an educator. Jules, on the other hand, was assuming a vocational identity as an entrepreneur arguably before she entered the vocation, in the sense of spending her time doing the activities of an entrepreneur. Aaron built his own vocation and assumed the vocational identity, almost concurrently, as he told the story. The concluding thought is that, when working with the two concepts, vocation and vocational identity, the researcher needs to keep these concepts separate and consider their implications separately. My personal usage of the word vocation was loose until I started detecting the nuances in the development of vocational identity.

Transformative Learning and Identity

Illeris (2014a) recently posited that transformative learning should be redefined as: “The concept of transformative learning comprises all learning that implies change in the identity of the learner” (p. 40). Illeris offers no systematic research as evidence of this assertion but rather draws upon his review of the literature and his experience as an educator of both youth and adults. I propose that the evidence revealed by this study provides support for Illeris’s assertion, insofar as it shows that, in the lives of four individuals (Aaron, Alison, Rand, and Jules), transformative vocational learning was directly linked to vocational identity development in those individuals. I illustrate this proposal in Figure 7.
I note that vocational identity is an important part of the identity of many adults (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2007, 2011). However, the evidence from this study does not exclude informational learning (Kegan, 2000) as a factor in the developing identity of the individual.

**Multi-faceted Vocational Identities**

I realized from studying Alison’s experience that individuals might retain multiple vocational identities, coexisting as a *collection* of vocational identities. Alison was a nurse, then a nurse-educator, by her own description, but also appeared to think of herself as a nurse-educator-counsellor, although the counsellor identity was still developing in comparison to her other vocational identities. Jules saw herself as a teacher-entrepreneur although again, the entrepreneurial identity was still developing. George became a process-safety professional but also embarked on developing a vocational identity as a counsellor of sorts, helping others to become fulfilled in their lives. Fly was a firefighter, a vocational identity he liked, but he was also creating a vocational identity as firefighter-teacher, although Fly truncated this vocational identity with his retirement. I developed a multifaceted vocational identity as well, which included the facets of engineer-manager-educator. Aaron was the only participant who had a
single identity of fixer of IT organizations. There were undoubtedly many other facets to Aaron’s broader (non-vocational) identity, but he concentrated his vocational identity on one particular facet only. My conclusion from the research is my implicit assumption that people would have a single vocational identity was simplistic and erroneous.

Identity Statuses

When I began forming this research, the role of vocational identity, and of the identity statuses identified by Marcia (Kroger & Marcia, 2011; 1966, 1980) were not in view. After developing the narratives, it became apparent that some of the participants were probably operating in different identity statuses in regard to their vocations. It might have been useful to have this theory in mind during the interview process, in which case I may have been able to prompt the participants to describe their experiences more fully. My conclusion is that it would be useful to explore this research base further in future work in this area. Nevertheless, in what I have read of this theory, particularly as it pertains to adulthood (Kroger, 2007), I have seen no references to people collecting achieved vocational identity facets as was evident among five of my participants.

View of Post-secondary Learning

The connection between the broad array of post-secondary programs and the eventual formation of vocational identity, judging from the six participants in this study, was more tenuous that I had imagined at the start of the work. However, I note that the two individuals, Alison (nurse) and Rand (engineer), were both graduates of university-level professional programs who entered their respective professions, became members of regulated professional organizations, and retained the vocational identities of nurse and engineer throughout their working lives, thus far. Both these participants were influenced by their own narrative threads as
far as choosing the discipline was concerned, and their parents as far as university level was concerned. Circumstantially, their professional programs and associations assist in creating a strong vocational identity, aligned with vocational learning, probably to the degree of transformative change in the individual. None of the other participants, all of whom benefitted from post-secondary education, three at the university level, developed the same degree of vocational identity at such an early stage in their working lives.

**Possible Future Research Directions**

**Narrative Inquiry as Methodology**

The addition of more life narratives would provide greater understanding of the topic of passionate vocational learning, further validating the model described in Figure 7. After reviewing the literature of motivational psychology, vocation, identity development, and adult learning theories, I became acutely aware of how shallow the theory is without the human stories that illustrate, show the real meaning behind, and validate the theory. I suspect the human narratives, with all their variation, are critical in understanding, teaching, and applying theory on human experience in any reasonable fashion. The challenge with the methodology is the time and effort required and the availability of participants; nevertheless, I find the worth of such an approach far exceeds the required effort.

**Related Areas of Focus**

In light of the current effort, several areas that stand out as requiring more concerted effort in order to provide greater understanding of the relationships inherent in passionate vocational learning. Firstly, I would like to see more concentration on the processes of establishing vocational identity, the circumstances under which individuals achieve their vocational identity statuses, and their narratives on this process. Secondly, I would like to
explore further the nature of transformational learning (Mezirow, 2012) and the vocational and vocational-identity-related circumstances under which it is experienced. There may well be extant literature in this area that I have not seen, but I have seldom seen the adult learning theorists extend their discipline into the disciplines of identity development and of motivation (Illeris, 2007, 2014a appears unique in this regard). Thirdly, I am curious to explore further stories on the transition from (again referring to Figure 6) initial Vocational Interest to Vocational Identity Development. This would seem to be a major leap and yet is highly significant for the individuals who make that transition easily. Finally, as a post-secondary educator, I am curious about the narratives of our vocationally oriented program graduates, especially in the first five to ten years after they graduate. Two of my participants could have been educated at my institution but neither applied their skills for long after graduating, and both had transitioned into quite different disciplines within a few years.
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Appendix A – Introductory Letter

To whom it may concern:

My name is Rand Ayres and I am a researcher associated with the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary. I am researching the ways in which people become passionate learners within their chosen vocations. I use the word *vocation* here to mean how they make their living.

I am looking for participants who are passionate about learning in their chosen vocations and who would be willing to share with me their life stories about what passionate learning means to them and how they became interested in their vocations in the first place. The stories will be published as part of my doctoral dissertation; however, the confidentiality of the participants will be strictly protected.

Research interviews will be used to collect the stories from the participants. The interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. It is expected that as much as a year may pass between the participant’s initial agreement to take part in the study, and the return of the final story to the participant. I expect there may be in total three interviews that will add up to about three hours total interview time.

Each participant will have at least two opportunities to read their personal stories as written by myself as the researcher. The participants will be requested to read and comment on two drafts, while they are being prepared and one final version, prior to publication. If there is
any material that the participants are uncomfortable having published, that material will be
adjusted within the narrative according to the wishes of the participant. Pseudonyms will be used
for all participants.

If you would be willing to participate in this project, please contact me at
krayres@ucalgary.ca. I can also be reached at (403) 284-8442. I am seeking five participants in
total, and in order to ensure some diversity in the group, unfortunately, some volunteers may not
be able to be part of the study. Please note that this study has been approved by the University of
Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board.

K. R. Ayres
17 February 2015
Appendix B – Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

Name of Researcher, Faculty, Department, Telephone & Email:

Mr. K. Rand Ayres, Werklund School of Education, Adult Learning, 403-284-8442, krayres@ucalgary.ca

Supervisor:

Dr. Colleen Kawalilak

Title of Project:

Passionate Vocational Learning

Sponsor:

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study.

Purpose of the Study

This study will explore the meaning, origin and development of passionate learning within a chosen vocational field of study. The study will contribute to knowledge of how interest in a particular vocational field develops and the motivational factors that contribute to the ongoing engagement of the participant within their chosen vocation.

What Will I Be Asked To Do?

Participants will be asked to tell their personal life stories as they relate to the origin, development and ongoing engagement in their chosen vocation. The researcher will ask broad questions inviting the participant to share and understanding of their life events that have contributed to the development of their vocational engagement. The participant’s narration will be recorded audibly and transcribed. It is
expected that the interviews together will take approximately six hours in total, spread over five sessions, spanning perhaps as long as nine months to a year. After the first two interviews, the participants will be given a draft written account of their story as understood by the researcher and will be asked for corrective or additional details and insights that may have arisen since the interviews. This session will comprise the third interview. A second, revised, draft will be provided and accompanied by the fourth interview. A final narrative account will then be returned to the participant. If the participant wishes to add any further insight into the narrative, they may contact the researcher who will further modify the account, for one additional draft only. The participants if they so desire will receive back copies of all audio recordings, transcripts, and narratives written by the researcher.

In the course of the interview, the participant may show the researcher particular artifacts relating to the narrative. The researcher may request to photograph the artifacts as a form of note taking, but such photographs will only be used in the final written narrative with the permission of the participant.

Sample high level interview prompts might be:

a. I would like to hear of times when your passion for learning was ignited …
b. Sometimes things capture our imagination because we’re in a particular place in the world at a particular time …
c. Some people seem to decide “what I was going to be” when they are quite young …

In all cases the researcher will explore the stories through the temporal (time), place and relationship dimensions. The audio recordings and transcripts will be used as the basis for the narrative account, which may include direct quotations from the interview.

Interviews will be scheduled to take place at a suitable location as preferred by the participant. These places might be the participant’s home, place of work, or other locations where privacy is assured as agreed by the researcher and the participant.

What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected?

Personal contact information for the participants will be retained, including name, address, phone numbers and email information. This information, including a pseudonym-personal identity key, will be encrypted and held secure by the researcher until five years after the completion of the study.

Should you agree to participate, personal information such as gender, ethnicity, educational details may form part of the story details and may contribute to an overall understanding of your experiences.

Are there Risks or Benefits if I Participate?

The nature of the subject matter does not inherently suggest significant risk of distress to the participants. If the interviews cover areas where the participant is uncomfortable proceeding, the conversation will be redirected into other areas, upon notice to the interviewer. The interviews may cease at any time as requested by the participant.

What Happens to the Information I Provide?
Upon completion of the study, all field text research material collected in the course of the interviews (audio recordings, transcripts, draft stories, photographs) will be retained, securely as described below, as evidence of the integrity of the research.

Each participant will be asked to choose a pseudonym that will be used throughout narrative. Other measures will be taken to protect the privacy of the participant by, for example, disguising place names or other revealing information. The participants may decline to answer any question, or remove information within the narrative previously given, at any time. All participation is completely voluntary, and if the participant wishes to withdraw from the study, they may do so at any time. There will be no consequences for withdrawal.

Participation is completely voluntary and confidential. You are free to discontinue participation at any time during the study. No person, except the researcher and his supervisor, will be allowed to see or hear any of the answers to the questionnaire or the interview tape. All data containing the participant’s identity and all audio, transcription and photographic data will be password protected and encrypted.

Please indicate what pseudonym (first name) you would like used: __________________________

____________________________

Signatures

Your signature on this form indicates that 1) you understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) you agree to participate in the research project.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant’s Name: (please print) _____________________________________________

Participant’s Signature: ___________________________________________________ Date: __________

Researcher’s Name: (please print) _____________________________________________

Researcher’s Signature: ___________________________________________________ Date: __________
Questions/Concerns

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

Mr. K. Rand Ayres
Werklund School of Education
(403) 284-8442, krayres@ucalgary.ca
and Dr. Colleen Kawalilak, Associate Dean, International, Werklund School of education
Appendix C – Sample Thematic Prompts

Introduction
- My topic is passionate vocational learning
- I’m interested in your stories
- I’d like to know about your thoughts, experiences, what your experiences mean to you … this is about you, your life experience … it’s all worth knowing

Let’s Talk about Your Learning Passions

d. Tell me about yourself. I’m interested in your stories about how you grew-up, how you got interested in your vocation, perhaps your experiences in post-secondary, and then afterward in your working life. Start when you were young, and come forward to the present.

e. As you think about your experiences, I would like to know what passionate learning means to you …

f. I would like to hear of times when your passion for learning was ignited …

g. How would you describe what it feels like when you are in the moment learning passionately …

h. Tell me about the things you like to learn about passionately … the topics or subjects … have they always been the same …

i. At times we might need to spend a great deal of time learning about things we’re not really all that passionate about …

j. Can you imagine passion for something without some active learning …

k. People might move from passion to passion in their lives, or possibly retain a life-long passion …

Let’s Talk About Interests

l. Have you any thoughts about how your interests arose … how do you feel …

m. Sometimes things capture our imagination because we’re in a particular place in the world at a particular time …

n. Sometimes we are influenced by particular people, role models or perhaps social groups we encounter in our journeys …

o. There are things that stretch back far into our childhoods, … even as far as our earliest memories …
p. How do you feel about the idea of “triggered” interest, as a result of some meaningful event or happenstance or encounter with someone or some dramatic event in our lives …

q. Some people believe interests “build” over time … how about you …

r. Sometimes there are dramatic shifts in our lives …

s. We sometimes develop positive or negative images of ourselves and our abilities or aptitudes over time … does this sound familiar …

t. Sometimes we encounter discouraging or demoralizing events that need to be overcome …

u. We all need to “make a living” somehow, how about you …

v. Some people seem to decide “what I was going to be” when they are quite young …

w. Some people really get emotionally involved in the field where they make their living …

x. Some people seem to stay in one vocation, others seem to change over time …

y. Some days I’m just not into going to work, but it …

z. Fantasy or daydreams can help us sometimes help us visualize doing something different with our lives … does that sound familiar?

aa. I wonder what it would be like to align passionate interests with how we make our livings …

bb. Sometimes things happen that we have no control over, but they cause us to shift directions … does this mean anything to you?