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A Study of How Kitchen Employees Learn through Informal Learning and Learning through Practice in the Workplace

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Abstract

This thesis identifies how restaurant kitchen employees learn to do their jobs, with a primary focus on methods such as informal learning and learning through practice. The findings of this study contribute to adult education and lifelong learning literature pertaining to informal learning and learning through practice in the workplace.

I collected data using a small-scale qualitative research approach consisting of semi-structured interviews. I interviewed seven participants working in family style restaurants kitchens in the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) area of Nova Scotia. All those who volunteered to be interviewed were male. Although the levels of experience varied amongst participants, none reported working in entry-level positions.

The main theoretical approaches taken up in this thesis include the three categories of learning: formal, non-formal, and informal learning with an emphasis on informal learning and learning through practice. I take up theories such as workplace learning, scaffolding and learning in the workplace, learning organizations, communities of practice and learning through practice.

The data indicates that many factors influence informal learning including: workplace structure; mentorship; learning through practice; trial and error; and communities of practice. The results also demonstrate that informal learning and learning through practice are integral components of how restaurant kitchen employees learn to do their jobs. Therefore, it is important that these methods of learning are recognized and valued for their contributions in the workplace.

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Chapter One

Introduction

This thesis explores how kitchen employees working in restaurants learn to do their jobs. After completing an industry analysis regarding the research data available on informal learning in the workplace, I was unable to find studies relating specifically to kitchen employees who work in the restaurant industry. This knowledge gap provided an opportunity to contribute to the literature on understanding informal learning in the workplace. Although I address formal learning in this thesis, informal learning and specifically that of learning through practice is the primary focus. While kitchen employees may have opportunity to participate in formal training inside and outside the workplace, particularly in larger organizations, informal learning plays a significant role in how kitchen employees learn to do their jobs. This thesis shows the importance of learning in restaurant kitchens and reveals how informal learning is a viable and valuable way for kitchen employees to learn to do their jobs.

I used a small-scale qualitative research approach as a means to explore kitchen employees' perspectives regarding how they learn to do their jobs. I chose this type of approach because I wanted to converse directly with each of the participants so I could hear their stories. Semi-structured interviews allowed me to do this. Interview questions were open-ended and allowed for discussion and clarification between the interviewer and participants. During the interview, I asked interviewees about the benefits and challenges associated with opportunities for informal learning and learning through practice in restaurant kitchens.

There are challenges and barriers to learning in restaurant kitchens that relate to human resources, finances, the size of the operation, and power. Human resources can be a challenging side of this industry. Many restaurants experience a high level of employee turnover, a high ratio of part-time to full time employees and in some cases, a lack of staff compared with the jobs that need to be completed. Work environments experiencing strains on human resources are often counter-productive as it is difficult to reach a full learning potential and maintain a well-trained workforce with compromised human resources.

Hierarchy and financial resources may influence opportunities for learning in the workplace. Sometimes these factors relate to the size of the operation. Larger operations often have a higher staff compliment and more resources set aside for learning opportunities than smaller operations. A larger staff compliment often affects the degree of hierarchy that exists within organizations. In restaurant kitchens, there are invariably employees with some level of formal education or credentials and years of experience working directly with those with little experience and a level of education less than that of high school. This layering of education (and in many cases experience) creates positions of power within the work environment, which directly influences learning in the workplace. All of the barriers to learning in restaurant organizations identified thus far make informal learning in the workplace a viable and potentially beneficial resource for employees as well as employers.

The data obtained in this study contributes to literature related to the contexts of learning in restaurants. Educators who teach in chef schools, those responsible for educating kitchen staff in their operations, as well as restaurant managers who read this

thesis will see evidence of this, which may assist with identifying the significance of the learning that takes place through practice, conversation and employees mentoring one another. Recognizing this type of learning as important and providing support for this practice has the potential to benefit individual employees and the overall workplace. Working in an environment that is supportive of informal learning can improve employee job satisfaction and employee retention and productivity, a growing concern for the Tourism Industry in general.

Some of the overall questions that guided my research include: Do restaurant kitchen employees learn through informal learning and learning through practice. If so, how can I prove it? In what ways does this learning occur? Is informal learning valuable to individual employees as well as the overall organization? How can those within organizations recognize and value informal learning and learning through practice? These questions informed the literature review for this thesis.

Literature Review

The literature review takes up the theories of formal, informal and non-formal learning, workplace learning, scaffolding and learning through communities of practice, learning organizations, and learning through practice. I also consider how hierarchy impacts learning in the workplace.

Although I examine formal, non-formal and informal learning theories in this thesis, the focus is on informal learning in the workplace. I provide an overview of various components related to informal learning referring to the perspectives of Livingstone (2002, 2005) and Gouthro & Plumb (2003). I have included literature pertaining to incidental learning which happens sometimes when people learn something

new because of learning something else. I also discuss the idea of implicit learning. Implicit learning is a case of people learning without being cognisant of the process. The concept of intent participation whereby learners have a desire or intent to learn and experiential learning, including the works of Fenwick (2000) and Senge (2006) are explored. The basis of experiential learning is that people come with life experiences on which they draw as they learn new things. I examine the theory of scaffolding and its role in workplace learning. The idea of scaffolding recognizes how knowledge is gradually builds over time and is supported and influenced by previous knowledge and experiences. Although I discuss each concept in the context of having its own identity, many overlap when applied to informal learning in the workplace.

A definition of workplace learning is provided that overviews why it is important, the challenges associated with identifying it, and the difficulties that may arise when studying it. I take up Fenwick's (2003, 2004, 2008) theoretical perspectives of workplace learning in this section noting that it is often difficult to meet the learning needs of everyone in the workplace. The drive behind workplace learning varies from circumstance to circumstance and influences what and when learning will take place. Senge (2006) and Gherardi's (1999) work, in reference to the idea of learning organizations and the challenges associated with it is also examined in this chapter.

Communities of practice, a theoretical approach influenced heavily by the earlier work of Lave & Wenger (1991) and subsequent works by Wenger both independently and collaboratively in (1998, 2000, & 2002) are explored as contributing factors to learning in the workplace. Tacit learning and its relationship to communities of practice is explored from the works of Duguid (2005) and Davies (2005). Tacit knowledge

gained from such a process may be difficult to recognize as what at one time might have been recognized as new knowledge may later be considered as what is already known.

Hierarchy in the workplace influences learning. The influence may be intentional or unintentional. It may come from those in managerial and supervisory types of positions or from co-workers. I address some of the possible power implications associated with workplace learning and the potential challenges associated with that from the works of theorist such as Livingstone & Sawchuck (2005), and Mojab & Gorman (2003).

Gathering data based on how informal learning occurs in the workplace is not without its challenges. Collecting data using qualitative research takes time and it can be difficult to ask questions that get people to identify how informal learning takes place. Therefore, the methodological approaches have to be carefully thought through.

Methodology

The Methodology chapter addresses the research method, challenges associated with participant recruitment, and the approach used to analyze data in this chapter. I also examine data collection and the process used for data analysis.

I used a qualitative research approach using semi-structured interviews to complete this thesis because I was interested in hearing directly from kitchen employees regarding how they learn at work. I interviewed seven kitchen employees who work in family style type restaurants in the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) area of Nova Scotia. All participants were male. Although the status of their positions varied within their organizations, all had previous work experience and most had completed some type

of formal training. The interviews were semi-structured in nature and provided an opportunity for participants to express their thoughts and ideas based on questions asked.

I used a modified grounded theory approach to analyze data. This approach is based on the premise that the researcher will make a conscious effort to separate herself from pre-conceived notions of what she thinks the data will show. The researcher is to keep an open mind ensuring things like previous experiences and data collection do not influence the way interview questions are asked or the way data is analyzed.

Discussion and Results

The discussion and results chapter describes the findings of this study. I discuss the value of informal learning in kitchens in general as well as from the perspectives of the participants using a modified grounded theory approach to analyze the data. I fully transcribed each interview, which provided time to listen to the words of participants without the pressures of being in the interview process. I read the transcripts and coded the data using a color coding system. After completing this process, I re-analyzed the data by cutting statements out of each transcription and reassembling the information based on like categories.

The categories or themes that came out of the data are as follows: learning; structure; corporate training; media; mentorship; motivators to learning; communities of practices; and learning through practice and its connection to tacit knowledge. Structure is an important component in kitchens as it provides organization in what can be a chaotic work environment. Participants identified learning opportunities both in and outside of the workplace. All participants spoke of corporate training opportunities in the workplace and some spoke of formal types of learning outside of the workplace.

Virtually all participants identified mentors and forms of media that have influenced their learning over the years. Most participants spoke of their roles as mentors and indicated that providing mentorship by way of teaching others contributed to their personal learning. Another area of interest that emerged from the data is incentives or motivators for learning in restaurant kitchens. Participants spoke of examples of communities of practices within and outside the workplace and the corresponding influences on learning. Tacit knowledge and learning through practice can relate to communities of practice, however, I have identified them as separate categories, as they are forms of informal learning that can also be independent of communities of practice.

Conclusions

The conclusions chapter of this thesis provides an overview of the results and offers suggestions on areas for further research. To answer the thesis question regarding how restaurant kitchen employees learn to do their jobs, the data shows that a great deal of learning in restaurant kitchens occurs through methods of informal learning. Some of these methods include learning through conversations, observations, listening, teaching, mentorship and learning through practice. Data results also show that learning occurs through informal methods such as organizational learning and learning through communities of practice. Motivators to learning such as a desire to become more efficient and employee remuneration are discussed.

Areas for further research include widening the geographical scope of those being interviewed to determine whether learning opportunities would be the same or different. Complimenting the interviews used in this thesis with an ethnographic approach may

enrich data collected by potentially obtaining the perspectives of those not represented in this study such as women and kitchen employees working in entry-level positions.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

The literature review focuses on theories associated with informal learning and learning through practice. I provide an examination of the three categories of learning including formal, non-formal and informal. The theories of workplace learning, scaffolding and communities of practice are explored. The literature review also identifies how previous knowledge and experiences affect learning.

Three Categories of Learning in Lifelong Learning Theory

The three main streams in lifelong learning and adult education literature are formal learning, non-formal learning and informal learning. Although I discuss each stream as if it exists independently with its own identity, in fact this is often not the case. In many instances there are characteristics of each category of learning that overlap with one another making the boundaries less defined. Each of the three types of learning has potential to impact learning in the workplace.

Formal learning is structured, often offering credentials, and is taught by someone formally trained in the discipline. James (2006) describes formal learning as "often associated with schools and universities, has an inherent relationship with structure in terms of, for example, layout, teachers, and timetables" (p. 1). An example of formal learning for kitchen employees is the theoretical classes that are part of the Culinary Arts program offered by Nova Scotia Community Colleges.

Although unique within their own categories, informal and non-formal learning have more unstructured qualities than that of formal learning environments. As quoted by James (2006) "informal and non-formal learning, on the other hand, often signifies a

lack of organisation and structure" (p. 1). Non-formal learning opportunities often exist in the way of scheduled programs. Someone who may or may not be an expert often leads these programs. A credential is not often given for this type of learning. Although non-formal learning may be transferrable to the workplace, participants often take part in this type of learning for pleasure. Informal learning is social in nature and is primarily dependent on the learner rather than that of an instructor or educator. Learning that occurs informally is filtered and interpreted by the learner as she sees fit. Livingstone (2002) states that "informal learning includes anything we do outside of organized courses to gain significant knowledge, skill or understanding" (p. 2). This may include working alongside someone during a demonstration as she provides an explanation of how to cut an onion.

Formal Learning

Formal learning is a very important aspect of knowledge acquisition in the restaurant industry and although not the primary focus of this research, is relevant. Eraut (2008) defines formal learning "as having any of the following characteristics: a prescribed learning framework; an organised learning event or package; the presence of a designated teacher or trainer; the award of a qualification or credit; and the external specification of outcomes" (p. 114). A university degree such as a Bachelor of Science is an example of a traditional formal learning program. Chef programs offered by community colleges, Workplace Hazardous Materials Information Systems (WHMIS), and food safety and sanitation courses possess characteristics of formal learning opportunities of which kitchen employees may take part. The information presented in these types of programs provides structure, offers credentialing, and is presented to

students by an instructor. WHMIS and Food Safety programs are also available as an independent study option. The simulated work environments set up in Chef training programs and the fact that courses such as WHMIS and food safety and sanitation are in some cases offered as on-line independent study options also reflect characteristics of informal learning.

Although situational examples are often used to create an association to the workplace and therefore enhance learning, in the training of Chefs, the information remains "codified, defined as explicit knowledge including propositions about skilled behaviour, but not skills or 'knowing how'" (Eraut, 2000, p. 114). Formal learning uses the jargon of the discipline, is often theoretical in nature, and consists of information that has been peer reviewed. In formal learning, discussions may come up that provide examples of the ways people do things in practice; however, there are generally not opportunities to actually work with the knowledge being learned unless it is simulated.

Although it may seem on the surface that we all have equal access to formal education, there are barriers associated with gaining assess to formal learning contexts such as costs, prerequisite credentials, and for many, a perception that formal learning is overwhelming or intimidating. Gouthro & Plumb (2003) argue that "formal learning must be understood as a specific and intensely managed learning context that frequently serves to regulate pre-existing indigenous learning processes for particular purposes" (p. 83). Learning new information through formal education cannot stop when a course is complete. Students need an opportunity to apply the knowledge and skills learned to practical situations so they can achieve a deep understanding of the material.

Most employers require a minimum credential of high school education for full-time employment in today's society, regardless of whether the knowledge itself is technically required to fulfill the requirements of the position. This is interesting since employees with less than high school have been able to fulfill positions such as that of a dishwasher in the past. Beaver (2009) indicates that credentials are useful to help reduce the number of potential applicants:

> it isn't unusual for employers to receive many more job applications than they can reasonably handle. To ease the process, employers limit the applications they'll seriously consider to those who hold a college degree, or a degree in a certain major, or even require a graduate degree (p. 23).

The question is whether the requirements of a high school diploma for an entry-level kitchen position actually influence a person's ability to perform the skills necessary to do his or her job.

Kitchen employees sometimes progress through the "ranks" over the years, gaining experience that enables them to move into positions considered to be of more responsibility and worth higher wages. It would be interesting to conduct a research study inquiring about the minimum level of education requested for those kitchen positions that in the past have traditionally required lower levels of formal education. It would also be interesting to inquire as to why organizations have moved towards including this requirement, and whether employers find an improvement in the level of performance as a result.

Formal learning has arguably received the most respect in both adult education as well as in general learning contexts over the years. Gouthro & Plumb (2003) "argue that

the reason formal learning has retained such a prominent position in adult education is not because it is intrinsically more valuable than other forms of learning but simply because it reinforces the values of a profession that would like to assert greater control over adult learning processes" (p. 83). In many cases, those who teach are those who conduct research. Those who participate in research are often those who represent the status quo. As a result, research results are often not representative of those considered to be on the margins and therefore reinforce the status quo.

Non-formal Learning

Non-formal learning takes the form of non-credit courses, often offered in the community. Enrolment in non-formal learning courses generally results from an interest in a particular topic. Clark (2005) states that "non-formal learning environments refer to settings outside of the traditional school context where learning occurs; such as after-school programs and community technology centers" (pp. 431 – 432). Previous levels of education and experience are generally not a pre-requisite, as can be the case for formal learning situations. Although the programs are organized and run based on a particular purpose, competency testing and credentialing are not part of the program and course structure and content is often flexible. As stated by Reed (1988), "those continuing education courses offered by higher education for credit and degrees are much more academically oriented, where as non-credit "non-formal" continuing education learning opportunities can open up a wider range of content" (p. 177). Participation in these courses is generally voluntary and for the sake of personal development. A non-formal course a restaurant kitchen employee may be interested in participating in, which may also relate to the workplace, is a cooking course offered at a local community centre.

With these types of courses, the initiative is entirely self-directed and the class takes place in a non-formal learning environment. The information learned in the class could also prove useful in the workplace.

Barriers to Participation in Formal and Non-formal Learning

Although formal and non-formal courses are theoretically available to all community members, there may be barriers such as time constraints, finances and low levels of education that discourage participation. The Adult Education and Training survey completed by Baran, Berube, Roy & Salmon's (2000) identifies particular groups of people who may be discouraged from participating in formal education:

> these include the self-employed, employees in small firms, blue-collar workers, older workers and individuals with low levels of initial education. For one reason or another, such groups may be using informal modes of training as a substitute for formal training and, in fact, may be training mostly at an informal level (p. 23).

Although not all kitchen employees fit within the categories identified, there are some that do.

Time and money can present barriers to formal and non-formal learning. Time is a commodity for many kitchen employees. The work is hard and the hours are long, making time off something that is valued. Formal and non-formal learning sessions commonly come with a cost. The salaries for kitchen employees vary depending on employee positions and organizational finances, providing a potential barrier for some employees who may be interested in this type of learning.

Another potential barrier is similar to the challenges related to recruiting employees for studies such as this; even when non-formal opportunities are accessible, people may feel uncomfortable learning in the community context, particularly those who have little to no formal education. The results of Smith and Smith's (2008) study indicate, "respondents with the lowest educational attainment were found to be least likely to participate in informal learning" (p. 67). As seen in this study, often those who have some formal education take the initiative and have the confidence to participate in learning sessions shared by others in the community. Breaking down these types of barriers is difficult and people may not take advantage of non-formal learning opportunities as a result.

Informal Learning

Informal learning, although a category of its own, plays an important role in enhancing learning in formal and non-formal learning environments. Informal learning is "learning not organised by programmes or courses but occurring in everyday life, either with mentors or without them" (Livingstone, 2005, p. 114). People learn informally as they try new things, observe others in the workplace and engage in problem solving. Informal learning can occur in a variety of ways, some of which include "self-directed learning, networking, coaching, mentoring, and performance planning that includes opportunities to review learning needs" (Marsick & Watkins, 2001, pp. 25 – 26). Learning informally is a social process and therefore requires interaction with others.

Livingstone (2002) has completed extensive research on informal learning in Canada. The scope of the research project he began in 1998 is the first of its kind:

In the fall of 1998, 1500 Canadian adults were surveyed about their

> current learning by the National Research Network on New Approaches to Lifelong Learning (NALL). The NALL survey is the first large-scale survey in Canada and the most extensive one anywhere to look at the full range of adults' learning activities (Livingstone, 2002, p. 2).

Livingstone's work on this project reinforces the importance of informal learning in the workplace as well as in our everyday lives. Livingstone's research (2002) shows that "in spite of the great increases in educational participation, about 70% of Canadians say that their most important job-related knowledge comes from other workers or learning on their own, rather than employment-related courses" (p. 7). This type of research may lead to greater respect and support for informal learning in the workplace. Smith & Smith (2008) take up the idea that "informal learning provides an often fruitful and satisfying alternative to formal learning in school or the workplace" (p. 68) so for those who face barriers to formal learning, informal learning may be an accessible way to gain higher levels of knowledge.

Informal learning can occur through individual activities or while interacting with others. "Formal knowledge is generally disseminated by authority figures within each field (teachers and trainers) through technologies (pedagogical strategies) that frequently do not permit the full participation of learners in a process of negotiating the meaning of knowledge" (Gouthro & Plumb, 2003, p. 84). Informal learning more frequently focuses on what the learner is interested in and how he makes sense and use of the information learned through practice. In informal learning, the learner often decides what is important to him, whether the information is relevant, and if or how it will be used. This is one of the difficulties associated with gaining respect for informal learning. Increased

value is commonly on learning that is “controlled” by someone in a position of authority such as an educator or an employer. As a result, this lack of control or politics over what is learned may lead to an environment that is not supportive of informal learning.

Gouthro & Plumb (2003) argue that even in the field of adult education “the informal learning context is viewed as something that has no value or contribution to make in its own right” (pp. 84-85). This is an interesting concept as there is a great deal of informal learning that takes place within organizational contexts including that of restaurant kitchens, which have traditionally placed an emphasis on learning through practice. This type of learning is generally at a very low cost to the organization.

Learning may be intentional or unintentional, and may occur without awareness. For example, a kitchen employee working as a sous chef may choose the head chef of the kitchen as her mentor. As the two participate in the mentoring process she discovers answers to her questions - intentional learning. However, it is very likely that through the learning process she will learn more than the information she was looking for, but still be aware that learning occurred. This type of learning is unintentional or incidental learning. Kelly, Burton, Kato & Akamatsu (2001) define incidental learning as “people learning regularities in their environment without the intention to learn anything” (p. 86). In the case of the sous chef and the chef, as the two work through a demonstration about how to put together a particular dish, conversation leads to talking about the politics of the environment they work in. Although the intention was to learn something different, learning still occurred.

An extension of the concept of incidental learning is that of implicit learning. Implicit learning like incidental learning is not intentional but rather occurs without

recognition. Frensch & Runger (2003) describe implicit learning as being "laxly defined as learning without awareness – is seemingly ubiquitous in everyday life" (p. 13). "The measurement of implicit learning is difficult as learners are not aware that information has been learned causing debate around its existence" (Frensch & Runger, 2003, pp. 14 - 15). What is implicit for some may not be implicit for others, depending on experience. Working in a restaurant kitchen can be very busy. Someone who has a lot of experience working in a restaurant kitchen may implicitly learn to recognize when his fellow employees need assistance during busy periods. If the experienced employee is asked to describe how he knows or specifically when he learned to realize the point when others need assistance, he may find it a difficult question to answer.

Rogoff, Paradise, Arauz, Correa-Chavez & Angelillo (2003) introduce the concept of intent participation as one way to learn informally. Watching and listening to others are key components to learning through intent participation. "In the tradition of intent participation, motivation is generally inherent in the obvious importance and interest of the activity" (Rogoff et al., 2003, p. 188). Learning is self-directed and purposeful to the learner and he has a particular interest in using the knowledge gained by observing or listening to others in a similar environment. As an example, a restaurant kitchen employee may take part in intent participation as he watches and listens to another kitchen employee who is explaining and demonstrating how to garnish the specialty dessert for the evening, in anticipation of having to do it himself. Learning new information through listening can be effective when presented in the form of narrative learning or storytelling.

Workplace Learning

Learning is an important part of our daily working lives as we interact with people and objects in our work environments. As with learning in any situation, it may be intentional or occur subconsciously. It may be formally organized and structured or may emerge informally through conversations with or by observing others. Events in the workplace may influence learning at work; however learning that happens away from the workplace often transfers to work situations. Ashton (2004) notes, “learning is an ongoing part of our daily lives in which we are all actively involved” (p. 43). One of the ways we can become actively involved in our own learning is through practice and participation.

Fenwick (2008) defines workplace learning as “expanding human possibilities for flexible and creative action in contexts of work” (p. 18). This implies that learning is good in that it provides increased opportunities and options for employees in their working lives. Workplace learning can be beneficial from a humanistic and economic perspective, two of the central reasons businesses exist. Humanistic perspectives entail such things as workplace safety and learning in communities, while economic perspectives focus more on business practices such as improving existing products, new product development and increasing performance levels. As a result, managers have been attempting to increase their competitive advantage in our dynamically changing world by implementing ways to offer and support workplace learning, formally and informally.

The workplace has seen many changes over the years and continues to be a volatile entity. Fenwick (2008) indicates that “the nature and organization of work has

changed so rapidly in the past decade with the effects of globalization that learning has become a lightening rod, attracting all sorts of new attention outside educational debates" (p. 18) and in some ways putting increased pressure on employees to learn. Knowledge is not static but rather situational and so as situations change knowledge must change to fit the context. "Knowledge is processual and therefore in constant evolution" (Gherardi & Nicolini, 2000, p. 332). In the past, employees frequently remained with their employers for much of their working lives. In today's society, it is more common that people work for many different employers as they progress through their careers. "In the New Economy individuals are expected to adapt flexibly to new jobs and work locations, to become increasingly multi-skilled, to adapt to changing technologies, and to develop the skills necessary to 'perform' decision-making in self-directed cooperative work teams" (Fenwick, 2004, p. 176). This means that employers and employees need to make more time for learning in the workplace.

Multi-tasking is a significant part of any position in the kitchen. A head chef working in a large kitchen is required to maintain adequate kitchen inventory through ordering, receiving and storing food. This same person must develop staff schedules, prepare, and cook food during operation. In order to be able to effectively multi-task through these activities, the Chef requires knowledge of food safety, computer applications, inventory control and the ordering process, as well as staff training. Ideally, the employer will provide time and resources for employee learning to meet these expectations.

The introduction of technology into the workplace over the years has created an additional need for employee learning. Although there was a time when managers

documented and filed business transactions manually, the majority of workplaces today store information on computers. Restaurant managers use Point of Sales Systems (POS) to make short and long-term business decisions. The numbers of systems available are many but most packages offer similar capabilities. POS systems consist of a back-office management computer and one or more terminals for servers and bartenders to input customer orders. Restaurant menus are programmed into back office systems allowing servers to enter customer orders. Once inputted, servers send orders to the kitchen for employees to prepare food. When service is complete and the customer is ready to leave, servers process the bill using the POS system. The back office component of the system provides the ability for mangers to create a wide variety reports. Reports based on daily, weekly, monthly and annual sales can be complied. Managers can use the system to monitor and control inventory, and develop and maintain employee schedules. Although these systems are wonderful business tools, employee-training time is required at all levels of the restaurant for its effective implementation.

Equipment upgrades and replacements often require kitchen employees to learn about new technology. Learning technology associated with the equipment can be an important part of optimizing its operation. Although traditionally user-friendly, equipment such as blast chillers and combi-ovens do not operate with a simple dial, as do many refrigeration units and ovens at home. Learning is particularly important in the initial stages, as employees work to perfect recipes. These types of equipment contain computer technology, requiring programming and an understanding of how the technology works. On another level, food safety monitoring systems that have become part of a technology innovation are available for use, requiring the training of employees.

For example, the Wireless Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) Temperature Manager made by BIOS Professional is able to automatically record food and equipment temperatures using a thermometer, which is stored in the monitoring unit. Managers upload results from the monitoring unit directly to a computer in the kitchen for record keeping. This efficient management tool reduces the likelihood of human error however, still requires proper training.

Increased demands associated with learning in the workplace does not stop with technology but is also influenced by changes such as those associated with the globalization of food. Global access to food opens up many opportunities for the restaurant industry but is not without its challenges. Food accessibility and food safety is of prime importance in the restaurant industry. Global transport has enabled access to a variety of foods not produced locally. With this comes the challenge of ensuring food is safe prior to service. With ready access to information, people are becoming more aware of problems associated with food safety, locally and globally, and the importance of following regulations to prevent harm. As a result, customers are demanding more in the way of food safety knowledge and practices from people working in local restaurants. Although food safety codes are not the same worldwide, the responsibility rests those working in restaurants to ensure the food they are serving is safe. In Nova Scotia we are required to follow the Food Safety Regulations made under Section 105 of the Health Protection Act (2009), therefore food brought into local establishments must be safe to eat according to our regulations.

Meeting the learning needs in restaurant organizations can be difficult. Time and financial resources can play a significant role in ensuring employees are well educated,

particularly in an industry where a high rate of turnover can be part of the culture. As research is continually conducted in the area of social learning, there is opportunity for managers in organizations to learn from this research with the possibility of supporting the sharing of knowledge and improving of employee learning at all levels. Hara & Schwen (2006) state that "since the 1990s we have seen an increase in consideration of social and cultural aspects of learning as a way to foster organizational learning and human performance" (p. 93) however, the question that remains is how can this be done? Does one model fit all? Is each organization unique or does it come down to individualistic needs? Are restaurant managers considering these ideas?

Scaffolding and Learning in the Workplace

Identifying learning in the workplace is challenging as people often learn to do their jobs without realizing that learning is taking place, particularly the longer they have been in a position. When people enter new positions, there is often a steep learning curve due to the high volume of information and unfamiliar territory of which they are now part. As learning occurs, learners process and integrate knowledge as it relates to current knowledge. There is a discovery period of finding out how previous knowledge fits into a new position. There is a need to learn the culture of the overall workplace as well as how to do specific jobs. Help from others may assist with this process and relates to the theory of scaffolding.

According to De Grave, Dolmans & Vleuten (1999), "a scaffold is a support, like the temporary framework that supports workers during the construction of a building" (p. 901). "Scaffolding is a term that has become widely used in educational contexts to describe the precise help that enables a learner to achieve a specific goal that would not

be possible without some kind of support" (Sharpe, 2006, p. 212). Knowledge is built gradually, often with the help of others through the process of mentorship or the use of tools that help people through the learning process. Mentoring occurs through conversations, story telling, and observation through demonstrations. A great degree of what is learned through scaffolding is heavily influenced "using language as people make meaning of new knowledge" (Sharpe, 2006, p. 212). The term scaffolding is not one that would be familiar to most restaurant managers and employees. However, scaffolding through mentorship is often a significant part of learning at all levels of the restaurant organization as kitchen employees work with others, particularly when they are new to an organization. Although the 'learning curve' is not as steep and the base of knowledge more extensive, learning remains an important component for those employees who have been in the same position for a while; the pace and focus is simply different. Informal learning that takes place for long time employees often centres on improving current practices, solving problems, and adapting to new situations.

Jack Mezirow takes up meaning making, which has a constructivist's orientation, in his theory of transformative learning. "The theory's assumptions are constructivist, an orientation which holds that the way learners interpret and reinterpret their sense experience is, central to making meaning and hence learning" (Mezirow, 1994, p. 222). Meaning making involves relying on experiences and knowledge to help make sense of and understand new experiences and situations. Mezirow's (1994) transformative aspect of meaning making occurs when "we are confronted with a disorienting dilemma which serves as a trigger for reflection" (p. 223). New situations cause people to rely on

understandings from similar experiences in an attempt to gain new understandings. When this does not work and there is a need or strong motivation to work through a situation, people may begin to critically examine their current understandings and consider something new. Grabove (1997) states that:

> as part of the process of learning content or attaining new skills, adult learners should also develop an awareness of assumptions – both their own and those of others, which they have hitherto taken for granted – and become critical of those assumptions (p. 91.)

Transformation occurs when realizing that what you, and possibly others know to be true is no longer true for you.

Transformative learning involves the ability to change the way you previously interpreted things by communicating with others. As people share ideas and perspectives using dialogue, communicators may begin to see new and alternative ways of looking at things, potentially leading to transformation. Grabove (1997) states that "the validation of what and how a learner understands is rooted in communication – critical discourse – when learners are encouraged to challenge, defend, and explain their beliefs; to assess evidence and reasons for these beliefs; and to judge arguments" (p. 91). A transformative experience becomes real for the learner as she expresses her new ideas and experiences to others. Being able to rationalize perspectives through communication with others provides an opportunity for enhanced understandings and a sense of validity for the learner as well as educators.

Learning Organizations

Although idealistic in nature, Senge (2006) defines "the basic meaning of a learning organization as an organization that is continually expanding its capacity to create its future" (p. 14). By this definition, organizations are never static in position because its people are continuously learning. Individuals working in organizations are continuously looking forward, evaluating where the organization is, and comparing it with where it could be. Ideally, learning organizations employ people who work together in a way that allows them see beyond their own ideas, are mindful of the details in the organization of how people do things, and have the opportunity and desire to see the broader picture for new possibilities. Unfortunately, this is not how many organizations operate.

Organizations commonly function in departmentalized and individualistic ways. People in organizations often recognize problems that affect them directly, or at best their departments, but have more difficulty seeing how their problems and the problems of others affect the overall organization. Senge (2006) states that "when people in organizations focus only on their positions, they have little sense of responsibility for the results produced when all positions interact" (p. 19), a key component for innovation and maximizing potential. An individualistic or compartmentalized culture is therefore not conducive to working as a collective that aims at gaining from the ideas and experiences of many.

Senge (2006) recognizes the difficulty of overcoming such cultural challenges and does not place blame on individual employees for organizations that operate in such a way. His examination focuses more on how the structure of the organization contributes

to this type of behaviour, one of those being our sometimes inability to recognize the significance that small changes can make over the long term. “Learning to see slow, gradual processes requires slowing down our frenetic pace and paying attention to the subtle as well as the dramatic” (Senge, 2006, p. 23). This suggestion is somewhat idealistic in nature as it is much easier in theory to say it is important for people to slow down and put some effort into small changes. However, it is difficult for employees under pressure to meet deadlines and sales quotas. Decisions that result in instantaneous improvements are gratifying as people like the feeling of success. On the other side of that, people also naturally react less enthusiastically and possibly even negatively towards mistakes and failure, creating a culture of defensiveness, short term thinking and avoiding failure at all costs.

What Drives Learning in the Organization?

The desire to create change may drive learning within organizations and, according to Gherardi (1999), “organizational change is the outcome of a more or less rational procedure of the production of knowledge and its practical application” (p. 104). Although it may be optimistic to indicate that all organizational change is a result of “rational procedures in the production of knowledge,” ideally this is the case. There are times in the workplace when a policy or practice changes because of a transformational learning experience, relating back to Mezirow’s (1994) work. A new belief system or crisis situation may drive the learning of an individual or group of individuals. It is upon reflection of a circumstance or an event(s) that people may decide to change the way they do things. It is for this reason that:

> in seeking to understand how individuals engage with, ignore or

> embrace change in their working lives at a time of frequent and sometimes significant change in the requirements of work and work practices, it is important to understand the relationships between individuals' identity, subjectivity and intentionality and how they engage in responding to changes in the workplace, and themselves change through that engagement, and how factors outside of the workplace act to shape that identity and subjectivity (Billett & Sommerville, 2004, p. 320).

Individuals come with life experiences that influence what and how they learn and their actions concurrently affect these experiences. Two people may experience the same personal crisis but because their life histories differ, their learned response may differ significantly. It is not always easy for people to identify exactly what it is that makes them see or learn things the way they do, presenting challenges for educators as they attempt to get to the bottom of these situations.

The Challenge for Educators Studying Learning in the Workplace

Fenwick (2003) argues, "learning in work is fast becoming a primary focus for scholars and practioners in adult education" (p. 3). Educators are interested in how people learn in the workplace and who benefits from this workplace-learning phenomenon. Study in this area can potentially lead to improved learning practices in the workplace. Fenwick (2008) states that:

> the most pressing issues of workplace learning for adult educators have tended to fall into two main categories: 1) figuring out how people solve workplace problems through learning, problems that have become increasingly complex and difficult even to recognize

> through learning and 2) understanding how particular groups of workers learn (p. 18).

A problem with studying workplace learning is that it can be difficult for people to identify when learning occurs, particularly in solving problems or creating new ideas.

The ability to learn, how people learn, and what is learned depends a great deal on experiences. Learners start out with a knowledge base that influences how new knowledge is understood. The two may combine as new learning influences problem solving and the development of ideas. Asking people to identify the process or specific point when this learning occurs may sound easy but can be very difficult to explain. Often learning is not a single incident and occurs gradually. This gradual process and unconscious thought makes it difficult for employees and educators to identify how people solve problems through learning, individually and collectively.

Learning in the Workplace via Communities of Practice

The concept of communities of practice and its association with learning in the workplace has been widely taken up by authors such as Lave & Wenger (1991), Gherardi (1999, 2006), Lesser & Storck (2001) and Davies (2005). Lave & Wenger (1991) have brought the notion of communities of practice to the forefront of adult education and lifelong learning literature:

> a community of practice is a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice. A community of practice is an intrinsic condition for the existence of knowledge, not least because it provides the interpretive support necessary for making sense of its heritage (p. 98).

Lesser & Storck (2001) define communities of practice as “groups whose members regularly engage in sharing and learning based on their common interests” (p. 831). Communities of practice are authentically formed by those who participate in them. As people become members of communities they learn from one another and the artefacts they have available to them. Gherardi (1999) has also built on research regarding learning as a social practice, the value of artefacts, and their relationship to communities of practice and learning in the workplace; which she terms learning-in-organizing. The term artefacts include “all the non-human entities that facilitate performance of a task” (Gherardi, 2006, p. 196). In a restaurant, artefacts may include such things as temperature monitoring charts, thermometers, and computer programs.

Participation in a meaningful way within communities is essential to learning and in a sense to productivity on a personal and organizational level. From a participatory, situational theoretical perspective of learning through experience “the emphasis is on improving one’s ability to participate meaningfully in particular practices and moving to legitimate roles within communities” (Fenwick, 2000, p. 254). In order to do this, people need to be able to make sense of and understand the language, artefacts, and knowledge embedded within the community of practice of which they participate.

As stated by Gherardi (1999) “participation in a practice entails taking part in a professional language game, mastering the rules, and being able to use them” (p. 114). Gherardi & Nicolini (2000) define knowledge as “competence-to-act, and as such is primarily tacit and taken for granted, as well as being deeply rooted in individual and collective identity” (p. 331). This type of knowledge is not accessible to everyone, but

develops over time through participation and experience in the context of a specific job position and organization's culture.

This knowledge often leads to the development of tacit knowledge which is defined as "a way of knowing what comes next as a result of being part of a community of practice and having to respond to it without having explicit instructions on how to do it" (Duguid, 2005, p. 111). As employees progress through the learning process, new knowledge converts to old knowledge and becomes part of the person. What they know becomes second nature to them. The process is often gradual and therefore difficult to identify.

Tacit knowledge is important in cooking. Although most operations have standardized recipes for employees to follow as far as ingredient lists and cooking times are concerned, those who have tacit knowledge of preparing particular dishes can do so without being able to identify the specific details regarding how they did it. Repetition of activities results in experience, which inform their work. Employees who have perfected the skill of making bread will use a recipe as a guideline for the amount time to knead dough, as much of the decision of when to continue or stop kneading comes from knowing the feel and look of the finished product. Making candy garnishes operates on the same principle. It is important to remove candy mixtures from the stovetop when the mixture forms "a ball" when placed in cold water. This is a difficult description to communicate to someone without experience. Those with tacit knowledge will know simply by looking at the ball formation in the water whether the mixture has finished cooking or not. This type of knowledge also allows people to understand how they may

correct problems or make desired modifications to a product based on the texture, feel and look of a product.

Tacit knowledge is also important in communities of practice within organizations as people work together. When there is a feeling of knowing what comes next when working with other people, the flow of work much easier. As stated by Davies (2005) “the core of the community of practice concept resides in the importance of doing, and more particularly, doing things in a way which reinforces membership in that community of practice” (p. 560). As an example, people cook in their homes every day, reading recipes and creating their own dishes. Some research cooking terminology and garnishing ideas, but that does not mean that those same people are qualified to work in restaurant kitchens. There are food safety practices that are required to be in place in a restaurant kitchen, garnishing techniques, industrial equipment to use, as well as servers and managers to communicate with. All of this comes with a common language, tacit knowledge, and set of rules to follow that those working in kitchens at home are not privy to. Duguid (2005) states that “the ability to read gives any competent users of a language access to knowledge codified in that language, but access to that explicit knowledge does not confer the ability to put it into appropriate use” (p, 114). Gherardi (1999) also argues that “practical understanding is often inarticulate and tacit” (p. 115), something that would be unfamiliar to those involved other industries.

Reciprocation in a community of practice is important in that each member contributes to the community in some way and therefore members learn from one another. As far as an organization goes, the advantages of becoming members of a

community should benefit the individual, which in turn will often benefit the entire organization. A community of practice can be a way of learning in organizations.

Lave & Wenger (1991) use concept of learning through apprenticeship to explain situated learning in their examples of how midwives, tailors, and meat cutters learn to do their jobs. In each of these examples, learners are privy to bits and pieces of information. As participants master one component, they move on to the next until eventually they are able to fully participate in the community of practice. Wenger's (1998, 2000, 2002) work further contributes to knowledge development as he focuses his theoretical approach of learning as a social process in the workplace. He emphasizes the importance of learning initiatives coming from the communities of practice membership.

Lave & Wenger's (1991) discuss how participants engage in "legitimate peripheral participation" with the hope of becoming a full participant in communities of practice, recognizing that learning is a social process. Legitimate peripheral participation is the first step to becoming a full participant in a community of practice. Learning occurs gradually as participants become apprentices, totally immersed in situated learning environments. "Legitimate peripheral participation is proposed as a descriptor of engagement in social practice that entails learning as an integral constituent" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 35). Those with limited knowledge and experience cannot fully participate in a community. Lave & Wenger (1991) term these people as "newcomers". Those who fully participate in communities of practice do so as what Lave & Wenger (1991) have termed "oldtimers". Oldtimers have gained extensive knowledge and experience in a specific environment to the point that it has become part of their identities. Newcomers learn from oldtimers through observation, conversations,

mentorship and practice. Newcomers actively practice observing and conversing with others in the workplace. Mentorship relationships often develop that significantly contribute to learning through legitimate peripheral participation. Lave & Wenger (1991) note that "newcomers' legitimate peripherality provides them with more than an 'observational' lookout post: It crucially involves participation as a way of learning – of both absorbing and being absorbed in – the 'culture of practice'" (p. 95). Immersion in a community provides opportunity for understanding the cultures and contexts in which learning is taking place. It also provides time to reflect on how new information fits with previous knowledge and experiences.

Benefits of Learning through Communities of Practices

Learning within organizations is of interest to researchers, employers and educators alike as businesses that place a high value on learning benefit those involved in the organization. The benefits of knowledge in organizations may evolve and provide organizational advantages in different ways, one of those being oriented in the context of problem solving. As stated by Lesser & Storck (2001) "communities of practice appear to be an effective way for organizations to handle unstructured problems, to share knowledge outside of the traditional structural boundaries, and to maintain long-term organizational memory" (p. 832). Communities of practices allow time for employees to discuss problems on their own terms, often resulting in solutions. Community learning environments also create potential for higher levels of knowing. This may result in employee job satisfaction and therefore job retention, as well as the creation of new and innovative ideas. These types of benefits can be valuable to any organization, including that of restaurants.

Communities of Practice in Restaurants

Human resources and learning are important to the function and growth of restaurants so they can benefit from the existence and support of communities of practice within their organizations. According to Wenger (1998) "supporting the process of acquiring knowledge as well as offering a place where new ways of knowing can be realized in the form of such an identity" (p. 215). Support can come in various forms, depending on the nature of each type of community. Communities of practice may exist formally where meeting times and places are scheduled or informally where people regularly meet face-to-face at lunch or talk casually in the workplace.

Davies (2005) states that "for a community of practice to exist, its members must engage in regular interaction with each other such as face-to-face in the corridor at school, or over the coffee machine at work" (p. 561). Some communities of practice exist on larger scales and communicate virtually, particularly when distance poses a problem or issues need discussing in a timely matter. Lesser and Storck indicate that "in the past few years e-mail, electronic discussion groups and electronic chat rooms have facilitated the development of communities of practice whose members are not collocated" (p. 832). Kitchen employees are more likely to participate in communities of practice through face-face communication because of limited computer access in the workplace. However, those at the managerial level may communicate electronically with managers in other cities. Organizational support therefore might take the form of providing time and an appropriate place for community members to meet. Organizations may also provide technology to allow members to communicate virtually. What can be seen as "small talk" may be discouraged and interpreted by "outsiders" as wasting time in

organizations, but in fact may well result in an essential contribution to learning in the community.

Hierarchy within Communities of Practice

Hierarchy is a reality in the workplace, resulting in some people having more power than others. This will inadvertently affect learning in the workplace. Fuller, Hodkinson, Hodkinson & Unwin (2005) state:

> as the concept of 'communities of practice' is being embraced by a range of occupational fields (e.g. education, health and social care, management) it provides another useful vehicle by which the new capitalism can further its aims. There is a need, therefore, for case studies that explore more dynamic settings, where power relations and inequalities are more explicitly addressed (p. 53).

The idea behind communities of practice is that those who participate in them form them. Ideally, management does not force communities of practices in the workplace but provides support with respect to time, space and finances.

In organizations where communities of practices are valued, there is opportunity for reciprocating relationships consisting of trust, respect and understanding between employees and employers. Livingstone & Sawchuck (2005) state:

> power and context are constitutive features of the learning process, rather than separate from it. Power relations can be experienced as a form of domination, as form of accommodation, a form of resistance and even revolutionary transformation (p. 114).

Although power can create positive learning experiences, for example when managers advocate for annual budgets that allow for monies for learning, it may also create a negative effect on learning in the workplace when managers attempt to control communities of practice.

The idea behind communities of practice is that communities form on a voluntary basis, allowing learning to occur naturally without the obstruction of power implications that may come from management. Problems may occur when managers attempt to organize communities of practice under the guise of benefiting both the employees and the organization, when in fact it is the needs of the organization that are put first. This often directs or stifles communication and therefore the learning processes within communities of practice. Mojab & Gorman (2003) indicate:

> the learning organization is an organizational model based on certain emancipatory promises such as the empowerment of employees, a transformation in the role of managers from controlling to facilitating, and the creation of a broader and collaborative vision for the organization that transcends short-term goals of profit maximization (pp. 228 – 229).

As a result, it is imperative that mangers do not ignore the needs of employees for the benefit of the overall organization.

Managers may use employee friendships to benefit the organization. Mojab & Gorman (2003) take up this issue in the form of "appropriating social capital as a means of social control" (p. 236). In this instance, the idea of social capital is that managers observe employee friendships and encourage working relationships amongst friends to maximize team building, collaboration and learning. Mojab & Gorman (2003) argue that

“the way the worker’s labour is appropriated by the organization, the worker’s relationships are commodified and appropriated by the organization” (p. 236). Although this may be true, the idea of supporting and acknowledging friendships in the workplace is not always exploitative. Encouraging or even forcing people to work together does not guarantee the development of friendships. Even though the formation of friendships may provide benefits to the organization, it can also provide personal benefits to the employees.

People who form communities of practices may discuss work issues during paid hours, but may also participate in discussions during employee breaks or after hours. This means that the learning takes place on the employee’s personal rather than paid time. I expect that this situation occurs more frequently for those in lower levels of the organization, depending on the value and therefore level of support management lends to learning through communities of practice. Employees may also choose to broaden their knowledge to benefit themselves in the workplace in ways such as participating in trade shows, learning from television shows based on cooking and restaurants, or spending time volunteering with another organization to improve their knowledge. Some adult education theorists view unpaid learning, which may benefit organizations, as a form of exploiting employees.

“Dimensions of race, class, gender and other cultural and personal complexities determine flows of power, which in turn determine an individuals’ ability to participate meaningfully in particular practices of systems” (Fenwick, 2000, p. 256). Remuneration is often less for women than for men working in the same positions. In many cases, women also fulfill ‘lower ranking’ jobs in an organization. Women in the workplace

who have children or family to take care of require job flexibility that others may not. Fenwick (2004) states "Canada is not unlike other developed nations: gendered divisions in paid and unpaid labour persist despite decades of feminist protest, which continue to create barriers to women's motivation and ability to participate in formal and informal learning opportunities" (pp. 172 – 173). If women make up half of the population in a workplace, then half of the workplace may not receive the same opportunities for learning.

Language issues can create barriers for employees, particularly for those who speak English as a second language. If participants are not fluent in the language of a community of practice, meaning may be lost and contributions by that person compromised. As stated by Lave & Wenger (1991) "language is a part of practice, and it is in practice that people learn" (p. 85), making it an essential part for members to be able to communicate effectively.

Another consideration is whether those with high levels of education and experience, stronger personalities, and hierarchy in the workplace dominate what is happening in communities of practice, resulting in the marginalization of others. Fenwick's (2000) comments that "power flows through the system according to the way positions are connected, the way they address one another and the nature of the resulting space between the positions" (p. 256). Experience, education, and hierarchy are unavoidable in organizations. All of these attributes have potential to provide positive or negative influence on a community of practice. As research in this area expands and people become more aware of these implications, maybe organizations can move towards the positive attributes of these situations.

Many organizations hire a significant number of part-time and contract employees for economic reasons. The restaurant industry is a familiar participant in this process, particularly with regard to part-time employees. One problem with part-time positions is that less time at work often means less opportunity for workplace learning. Sometimes organized learning opportunities are offered when part-time employees are not at work, which means although the employees may be welcome to participate in the learning programs, they may be required to do so on their own time. Mojab & Gorman (2003) state, "learning-on-the job time that used to be factored into a paid workday is now pursued as unpaid work hours, thus effectively lengthening the workday without increasing the wage" (p. 232). This is even more prevalent for those employed on a contract basis, as they are responsible for knowing how to get the job done before being hired.

Learning through Practice

Although a great deal of importance is placed on formal learning, not all learning that is required to do a job can take place in the classroom. Social learning can occur within the context of formal and informal learning situations. According to Gherardi (2006), "knowledge is fabricated by situated practices of knowledge production and reproduction, using the technologies of representation and mobilization" (p. 19). The amount and level of formal education attained by those working in the restaurant industry varies. The restaurant industry as a whole has placed a great deal of reliance on the value of informal learning or learning through practice, possibly even without the realization of

doing so. Brookfield (1995) refers to the importance of learning through practice using the example of teachers in his statement:

> like the reflective practice movement, the adult learning tradition renders suspect the idea of preservice professional preparation for teachers. It calls into question the assumption that a large part of what teachers need to know can be inculcated before they start their work (p. 222).

This context is similar to learning in restaurants in that formal learning may not be the most important aspect of education. Learning through practice is an important component of learning how to do a job.

Learning through practice is not always beneficial to the employee and/or the organization. People could potentially reinforce 'bad habits' or undesirable ways of doing things. Fenwick (2000) states that "not all learning in communities is laudable as unsupervised people learning in authentic environments may make do, finding ways to participate that actually reinforce negative practices that a community is trying to eliminate" (p. 255). An example of this in a restaurant setting may be that although a chef has learned through her 'formal training' that putting a dishcloth over her shoulder for use around food is unsanitary, she observes others in the workplace doing it, and therefore begins to view it as acceptable. As a result of participation in that community, she begins doing as others do in the organization.

Learning Influenced by Previous Knowledge and Experiences

Eraut (2000) defines learning in a general sense as "the process whereby knowledge is acquired, including that of when existing knowledge is used in a new context or in new combinations" (p. 114). Learning is often influenced by our current

knowledge, acquired by our past learning opportunities and experiences. What people learn will be individualistic in nature as previous experiences and knowledge helps individuals make sense of new information. In adult learning, and specifically in learning through practice, the idea that "learners' experiences must be recognized and valued" (Brookfield, 1995, p. 222) is a prevalent concept.

Learners 'come to the table' with life histories which have not only impacted what they already know, but what and how they will learn new things.

> Given that individuals play an active role in constructing meaning from what they encounter, this suggests that a focus on learning for change, working life and participation in the workplace needs to account for individuals' sense of self and identity, which are both shaped by and shape their agency and intentionality (Billet & Sommerville, 2004, p. 315).

Fenwick (2000) defines experiential learning as "a reflection-action (or mind-body and individual-context) binary: recalling and analysing lived experience to create mental knowledge structures" (p. 244). Reflecting on experiences and prior knowledge is an important part relating to and processing new information. "The learner reflects on lived experience and then interprets and generalizes this experience to form knowledge that are stored in memory as concepts that can be represented, expressed, and transferred to new situations" (Fenwick, 2000, p. 248). Experiences influence the processing of information around what people decide is important and worth reflecting upon. For instance, two restaurant employees may attend the same food safety class but learn very different things. One student may have worked in restaurants where the level of importance placed on food safety was based on "lip service", obtaining required certifications for the

record but virtually non-existent in practice. As a result, this employee takes the course very lightly with no intention of using the majority of course content in the work environment. A fellow student may work in an organization that is committed to a food safety culture. Therefore, this student is very engaged in understanding how the information will be put into practice. Although both students learn something from the class, their experiences result in different learning outcomes.

Supporting employee learning in the workplace does not mean employers can assume what works for one will work for all. Employers must value individual subjectivities and experiences to enhance learning. One of the ways employers can do this is to include employees in learning strategies. Billet & Sommerville (2004) argue that "instead of top-down implementation strategies, ongoing development for work and learning throughout working life should be seen as being more reciprocal, with individuals invited to assist in the transformation of existing practices" (p. 324). Respect and trust develop when employees are part of workplace learning strategies, enhancing not only the effectiveness of the effort but also individual and group learning experiences. Workplace managers who opt for the top-down approach often meet with individual and sometimes group resistance. The importance of trust, respect and understanding individual perspectives does not only relate to those in the workplace, but extends itself to those conducting research as well.

It is important to recognize that we often make decisions based on what we have learned through previous experiences for which we may never fully realize the results. Senge (2006) states that "we learn best from experience but we never directly experience the consequences of many of our most important decisions" (p. 23). This is particularly

true for those in management positions who make decisions that directly affect others in the workplace but may have no immediate effect on the person making the decisions. The other component of this is that sometimes employees make decisions based on prior learning experiences and the current situation. As time progresses and variables are added to the mix new problems arise, requiring yet another assessment of what is now a new situation. This often leads to making more decisions before being able to realize the effects of the original decisions.

Therefore, it can be seen that learning in relation to the workplace is a complicated process to assess and understand. A review of existing literature provides a solid framework for the basis of my research study.

Chapter Three

Methodology Chapter

This thesis involved a small-scale qualitative research study to discover how restaurant kitchen employees learn to do their jobs in their work environments. This chapter provides an overview of the research method and content analysis, and discusses the rationale for using a qualitative research approach in the form of semi-structured interviews. I discuss participant recruitment, the challenges associated with it, and the process of overcoming some of these challenges. The chapter concludes with a description of the participants and an overview of the data collection process.

Research Method

This research project was conducted using a small-scale qualitative research study. Creswell (2003) states that "qualitative, unlike quantitative methods which have been around for years, have emerged over the last three or four decades" (p. 3). Researchers who choose to use these complex qualitative methods are interested in trying to uncover and understand the thoughts and experiences of participants. Qualitative research methods are "discovery based and interpretative methods used by researchers to understand and articulate the meanings of people's experiences from their perspectives" (Hadjistavropoulos & Smythe, 2001, p. 163). Qualitative methods are often used in educational research as a means to enable the researcher to move beyond research as a fact finding endeavour and provide an opportunity to learn more about people's beliefs and learning experiences.

I used a triangulation of methods to examine data related to how kitchen employees learn to do their jobs. "Triangulation involves the careful reviewing of data

collected through different methods in order to achieve a more accurate and valid estimate of qualitative results for a particular construct" (Oliver-Hoyo & Allen, 2006, p. 42). Using three methods to analyze data allows for data comparison, which assists with producing accurate results. The methods of data collection used include a content analysis consisting of a literature review, interviews with participants working in restaurant kitchens, and an overview of relevant materials related to the requirements for the training of kitchen employees. A literature review of informal learning in the workplace and learning through practice was developed using journal articles, books, and the internet. I used interviews to obtain data related to informal learning and learning through practice in the workplace.

Content Analysis

I conducted a review and content analysis of relevant materials such as food safety guidelines, Workplace Hazardous Materials Information Systems (WHMIS) course materials, and related literature. All employees working in restaurant kitchens are required to be trained in food safety and the safe handling of controlled chemicals used in the workplace as it relates to each position. The same concept applies to WHMIS training.

The Nova Scotia Food Retail and Food Services Code (June 2005) is the code used by Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture Health Inspectors to inspect restaurant establishments in an effort to ensure minimum food safety requirements are being met. The Code is concerned with the activities of foodhandlers including kitchen employees, since these people are primarily in charge of foodhandling. The requirements for food safety training differ from province to province and state to state. Those interviewed in

this study worked in restaurant kitchens in the Halifax Regional Municipality; therefore, I focus on the requirements for Nova Scotia.

The Nova Scotia Food Retail and Food Services Code states "every operator of a food establishment must ensure that food handlers have the necessary knowledge and skills to enable them to handle food hygienically" (The Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, 2005, p. 64). It also states that retraining is a necessary component to ensure all employees are up-to-date regarding food safety knowledge. Not all kitchen employees require training and certification in a food safety course approved by the regulatory agency; however, training is required regarding how to handle food safely as it relates to specific positions. As a result, food safety training may be offered informally within an organization, in a more formalized learning environment involving an instructor and testing, or it may be accessed as an on-line course. The Code also makes references to methods used to provide retraining, which encompass informal learning approaches; "every food premise should promote food safety education through ongoing training, which may include additional classroom instruction, on-the-job training, food safety certification from a recognized program of instruction, seminars, and employee meetings" (The Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, 2005, p. 64).

There are mandatory educational regulations for food safety training that apply specifically to managers or supervisors of restaurant organizations or someone else in the establishment they have designated to be in charge of the operation in their absence. "Mandatory educational programs are required for managers/supervisors of food establishments, or a designated person in their absence" (The Nova Scotia Department of

Agriculture and Fisheries, 2005, p. 63). These types of food safety programs are based on minimum standards and provide regulations regarding what is acceptable. "Food safety training programs must be must approved by the National Food Safety Training Certification Group or by the Department of Agriculture and retraining is required every five years" (The Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, 2005, pp. 64 - 65).

Workplaces that use controlled materials deemed potentially hazardous require employee training in Workplace Hazardous Information System (WHMIS). Restaurant kitchens often use cleaning and sanitizing chemicals that fall under WHMIS regulations and in such cases, employees require training in WHMIS.

> The Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) is a nationwide system to provide information on hazardous materials used in the workplace. WHMIS affects workers, employers, suppliers, and regulators. Nova Scotia's WHMIS Regulations place duties on employers at any workplace covered by the Occupational Health and Safety Act where hazardous materials are used, stored, or handled (Occupational Health and Safety, Labour Workforce Development, 2007, p.1).

The purpose of WHMIS training is to ensure employees know how to handle chemicals safely and what to do should a problem arise.

WHMIS training is legislated in Nova Scotia as being "the responsibility of the workplace to ensure employees are properly trained and evaluated on what they have learned" (Occupational Health and Safety, Labour Workforce Development, 2007, p. 21). The primary focus of WHMIS training is to educate employees on how to use, store and

dispose of controlled products in a safe way. A significant part of this education centers on learning how to read and understand Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS), which among other things identifies the dangers associated with each product, the proper equipment that should be worn when handling the product and what to do in the event of an accident. Regulation of WHMIS products is an attempt to prevent injury and keep employees safe.

WHMIS training is offered in different ways. Management, supervisors or chemical sales representatives may conduct training informally. On-line courses such as those offered by Safety Services Nova Scotia are also available. In this case, an employee will study independently, write an online exam, and a certificate is provided upon completion.

I did not complete a content analysis per se of Chef School curriculum, although I will provide a brief overview of a training option available to Chefs in the Nova Scotia. Chefs who attend Culinary Arts programs in Nova Scotia, Canada often receive their training from one of the Nova Scotia Community College sites. Nova Scotia Community Colleges are located in different areas around the province and although not all sites offer culinary training, many do. I have not taught in the Culinary Arts programs at any of the Community College sites. However, I do have experience working in restaurants and teaching in a “teaching kitchen/restaurant” [at my university], of which restaurant management is the focus. Students taking the restaurant management course I am involved with have an opportunity to apply the theory learned in the classroom in a hands-on environment as they operate our “teaching restaurant”, while working in the positions of service, kitchen production, and management. These experiences enabled

me to become familiar with the managerial elements of culinary training and the importance of informal learning and learning through practice in restaurant kitchens.

Interviews

I used semi-structured interviews as one means to collect data for this thesis. "Semi-structured in-depth interviews are the most widely used interviewing format for qualitative research and can occur either with an individual or in groups" (DiCicco-Bloom & CrabTree, 2006, p. 315). Interviews provide an opportunity for discussion between the interviewer and participant. Clarifying questions assist with obtaining a better understanding of participant responses. The primary reason I chose to use the interview method for this thesis is that it provided participants with the chance to tell their stories. "The in-depth interview is meant to be a personal and intimate encounter in which open, direct, verbal questions are used to elicit detailed narratives and stories" (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 317). It was important to me to be able to converse with and try to understand participant perspectives as each person spoke of their experiences.

There are however, challenges in using the interview method. There is limited opportunity to develop trust relationships in the short period of time the researcher and participant have together. In this study, each interview took approximately forty-minutes, which is not a lot of time to spend with someone with whom you are asking to share personal experiences and information that may otherwise be confidential. In such a short time, participants may not be comfortable revealing that their employer is not supportive of informal learning in the workplace for fear that they may be indentified when the research data is reported. Therefore, the development of rapport between the interviewer

and participant is important. In order to accomplish this, the researcher must be approachable and able to make the participant feel comfortable very quickly. In studies when researchers conduct multiple interviews with the same people, there is a much longer time to develop such relationships.

Participant Recruitment

The recruitment strategy for this research was to complete eight semi-structured interviews with kitchen employees working in the restaurant industry in the Halifax Regional Municipality area of Nova Scotia, Canada. One of "the key elements which are commonly agreed to give qualitative research its distinctive character includes samples that are small in scale and purposively selected on the basis of salient criteria" (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, pp. 3, 5). I considered eight interviews to be small scale as well as a manageable number of interviews for a qualitative research study in a Masters program. Funding was not available and therefore a large-scale study was not practical. Limited resources was a component considered when deciding where the interviews would be conducted. Participants located in the HRM area were easily accessible and therefore the cost associated with completing the interviews was manageable.

I used a grounded theory approach to collect data, which indicates that data collection is complete at the point of saturation. "Theoretical saturation is considered to occur when coding of an interview does not seem to reveal any new information" (LaRocco, 2007, p. 122). Due to recruitment issues, I interviewed seven kitchen employees and was able to achieve a saturation of data.

Participant recruitment proved to be more challenging than anticipated. I began by approaching five managers by either phone or email to see if they would be willing to

notify their kitchen staff of the opportunity to participate in this study. After some telephone discussion and having received the Participant Information Package [Appendix I] to read, most managers seemed responsive in the way of agreeing to post the advertisement [Appendix I] on their kitchen bulletin boards. In some cases, I dropped off copies of the advertisement to restaurant managers or supervisors and in others, the managers indicated they would prefer to print the ad from the email I sent and post it that way. Approximately ten days passed and I received no response from any of the employees working at the five restaurant locations I contacted. At that point, I continued with the task of calling other restaurant managers in the Halifax Regional Municipality area and expressed my concern to my thesis supervisor as I was beginning to question the effectiveness of my approach. I was also concerned that even though managers indicated a willingness to post the advertisement, there was no way for me to know how many kitchen employees were seeing the advertisements and/or participant information packages I had sent out.

At this point, I decided to talk directly with restaurant kitchen employees with the goal of breaking down potential barriers to participation. I felt I needed to explain the study not only to the restaurant managers but to the kitchen employees as well. Conversation provides opportunity for immediate answers to questions and may minimize concerns that otherwise may be the deciding factor as to whether or not someone will volunteer to participate in a study. Personal contact also reassures people that what they have to say is valuable and important, with the added opportunity of lessening possible feelings of intimidation.

After considering these factors, I began to use a more direct approach. I spoke first with a manager or supervisor at each restaurant operation, and then asked to talk with someone on the kitchen staff over the phone or by visiting the restaurant. Although not all managers responded positively to this request, the majority did. Those in favour generally provided me the opportunity to speak with a kitchen manager. In a couple of instances, I had the opportunity to speak with someone who was a kitchen employee but not in a management position. Once I spoke to the kitchen staff, the volunteer response rate was significantly higher.

Ethical Issues around Recruitment

There are ethical issues related to participant recruitment, some of which include ensuring participation is voluntary, having participants sign forms of consent and maintaining confidentiality. I discussed the voluntary nature of agreeing to participate in this study with each participant just prior to beginning an interview. I recognized that communication regarding this matter was of particular importance to ensure participants did not feel pressured by their employer or me to take part in the study. All participants indicated that they had indeed volunteered and wanted to take part in the study. I asked participants to review the Participant Information Package, which provided details related to the overall study to ensure an understanding of the processes involved and possible implications of agreeing to participate. Following that, I asked participants to sign the forms of consent.

One of the issues of asking participants to sign a form of consent while not knowing exactly what questions will be asked is that it is somewhat misleading, as "qualitative design is inductive, emergent and precludes researchers being able to predict

where the study will take them" (Malone, 2003, p. 800). The very nature of open-ended questions makes it difficult to predict where discussions will lead. Having recognized this challenge, I made every attempt to provide as thorough a consent form as possible, including that of making participants aware that withdrawal from the study was not only acceptable but within her rights at any point in time. Reassuring participants of this is important, as some may not feel comfortable telling a researcher when there is something they are unhappy with; parts of this may relate to power. Participants may feel intimidated by or be fearful of disappointing the researcher, which can unknowingly put the researcher in a position of power. As stated by O'Leary (2004) "researchers need to recognize that power can influence the research process, and that with power comes responsibility" (p. 43).

It is difficult to tell what motivates or discourages people to participate in research studies. Acquired levels of formal education, commitment to it as well as respect for it ranges for employees working in the restaurant industry and may have a bearing on whether people decide to participate. Those who volunteered in this research study had a minimum of high school education and the majority had at least some experience with vocational or community college education. Since I only had an opportunity to speak with those who volunteered for this study, I cannot be sure of the reasons why those with more or less formal education did not volunteer.

Gaining access to potential participants is a key component of being able to conduct research. Gaining access "involves both securing entry into a particular organisation and ensuring that individuals associated with it, such as employees or users, will serve as informants" (Shenton & Hayter, 2004, p. 223). Adult educators often refer

to those who allow and deter access to potential participants as gatekeepers. In the case of this study, the gatekeepers were primarily restaurant and kitchen managers. Restaurant and kitchen managers were instrumental in providing access to the majority of those interviewed and therefore may have influenced who was approached within each organization. In many cases restaurant managers recommended I speak with a kitchen manager as the starting point for recruiting participants. Some of those kitchen managers volunteered as participants, generally ending the request for further participants from that particular operation. Not all those who expressed an interest in participating in the study were able to do so due to challenges such as limited human resources in the workplace and personal and family commitments.

Potential participants who have lower levels of formal education may have found the wording, formal nature, and length of the Participant Information Package overwhelming. O'Leary (2004) states that "the respect afforded formal schooling can vary tremendously; from admiration to deference, to scepticism over the value of book learning" (p. 46). There is no way to know who saw the posters and Participant Information Packages however, those with an aversion to school and those with language barriers or literacy challenges may have been disinterested in participating because of the length of the document.

Brann-Barrett's (2009) research on youth from the margins lead her to report on how the ethics requirements of conducting research, which is supposed to be a form of protection for research participants, often becomes a barrier to participation:

> it may be argued that many of the regulations and criteria designed to protect potential research participants reflect the needs and characteristics

> of dominant members of society. When such criteria limits the involvement of less dominant members of a community there is less opportunity to use their perspectives to help expose existing inequalities" (Brann-Barrett, 2009, p. 60).

Completing a thesis requires that detailed information related to the interview process, informed consent, transcription, and anonymity be included in Participant Information Packages. Reading the details associated with participating in such a process may not be inviting for those on the margins. These types of barriers prevent participation from those who we traditionally do not hear from, those from whom may provide new perspectives on learning.

In restaurant kitchens, dishwashing is an entry level, lower skilled position considered to be on the margins; therefore, potential participants filling these positions may be hard to access. Dishwashing positions generally do not require as much experience, education, or levels of literacy as those working in the positions of Chef. Some or all of these barriers may explain why those who volunteered to participate in this study were cooks, chefs and managers rather than those from hard to access populations. As a result, data collected is more representative of the perspectives of those from the dominant population.

Identification of Participants

The seven participants came from five family style restaurant locations within the Halifax Regional Municipality area of Nova Scotia, Canada. All participants were required to be 19 years of age or older in order to provide consent to participate.

Accessibility and the manageability of data collected were factors that influenced the decision to recruit participants from this area.

At the beginning of each interview, I asked participants whether they had questions regarding the information received. I reminded participants that participation was voluntary and that should they decide not to go forward with the interview, I would not inform their managers of that decision. Those who had not read the Participant Information Package prior to the interview were provided time to do so prior to signing the Informed Consent Form. A signed "Free and Informed Consent Form" is an indication that each participant understood the purpose and use of material for the study and that participation on their behalf was voluntary.

The dynamics of kitchen positions as well as the opportunity for learning through practice may vary from restaurant to restaurant, style to style, as well as from region to region. Therefore, interviewing participants only within HRM, narrows the scope of data collected. The types of family restaurants located within HRM differ from those in small communities. Urban style family restaurants may be part of large franchises and hotel chains whereas those in suburban locations are generally small family type businesses. These differences often influence monies available for learning opportunities and staff compliments, which in turn may influence how learning through practice occurs. Organizations with more monies available to them generally have the ability to offer employees better compensation packages, which tends to attract employees of higher levels of education starting out.

Hierarchy amongst participants in this study varied. Hierarchy of positions within restaurants is not consistent and may relate to the style, size and/or the location of the

organization. For example, a Chef employed at a small family style restaurant may or may not have the same qualifications, experience and/or status as a Chef working at a restaurant that caters to families located within a high or even low-end hotel.

All participants interviewed had completed a minimum grade twelve education. The majority also had some experience with vocational type courses or community college education. As a researcher recruiting participants, I had no way of knowing the gender of those employed in the kitchens of the restaurant locations I contacted. All those kitchen staff with whom I had an opportunity to speak with about the possibility of being interviewed were male. I am aware that the narrow scope of restaurant locations and participant gender orientation may skew the results of the data. The results of this study cannot be generalized broadly; however, it may contribute to the development of research on informal learning, learning through practice, and in particular, learning in restaurant organizations.

Collecting Data through Interviews

Data was collected using interviews as an attempt to gain insight into how participants learn in the workplace through practice. Interviews were semi-structured in nature and questions were open-ended, allowing time for discussion between the interviewer and participant. Semi-structured interviews "most commonly are only conducted once for an individual or group and take between 30 minutes to several hours to complete" (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 315). Interviews were conducted individually and lasted approximately forty-minutes.

Di-Cicco-Bloom & Crabtree (2006) have indicated that as interview questions are organized "the first question should be broad and open-ended, should reflect the nature of

the research and be non-threatening" (p. 316). They suggest basing the first few questions on something participants can answer easily without requiring much in the way of personal sharing. In the case of this study, each interview began with the opportunity for participants to talk about their positions and their workplace. These questions allowed participants to begin the interview process discussing areas of familiarity, which required more factual answers than that of personal sharing. This allowed time for participants to gain a preliminary level of comfort with the interviewer before delving into questions that ask participants to share something more personal such as their thoughts and experiences.

Weiss (2004) states that "qualitative interviews ask about the details of what happened: what was said and done, what the respondent thought and felt; and attempt to come as close as possible to capturing the full process that led to an event or experience" (p. 44). This type of disclosure of information is personal and therefore warrants a level of trust and respect between the researcher and interviewee. The interactive nature of the semi-structured interview for this project assisted with developing a level of rapport between the interviewer and interviewee. DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree (2006) state that "unlike the unstructured interviews used in traditional ethnography where rapport is developed over time, it is necessary for the interviewer to rapidly develop a positive relationship during in-depth interviews" (p. 316). Participants in this study did not express concern regarding the interview questions and appeared to be open with their responses. However, this is not always the case as there is limited opportunity to get to know participants and develop trust relationships in a forty-minute interview, which can influence the quality and depth of the answers provided.

Since participants may not be familiar with terms such as communities of practice and learning through practice, I had to use questions that would provide an indication of whether these types of learning occur. For example, I asked participants whether they learn from others in the workplace. If participants answered "yes" then I asked questions to find out how they learn from others. Responses such as "through mentorship relationships" and "meetings over coffee" lead to more questions and answers that together may indicate that there is a community of practice learning environment.

Although I used some basic questions as a guide for each interview, not all questions were the same given that much of the interviews were conversation based. The Interview Schedule is included in Appendix II. As stated by DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree (2006) semi-structured interviews "are generally organised around a set of predetermined open-ended questions, with other questions emerging from the dialogue between interviewer and interviewee/s" (p. 315). Participants were able to ask questions and note points requiring clarification throughout the interview, as they felt comfortable. I was able to do the same as participants provided answers, often veering in unanticipated directions as conversations unfolded. It is through this process that I was able to try to understand participant perspectives.

Semi-structured interviews are conversation based and allow time for clarifying questions. Shamberger (1997) suggests that, in order to assist with relationship building on a short-term basis such as this, researchers can introduce "clarifying questions which are asked to clarify statements given by interviewees" (p. 2). This gives the participant an opportunity to accept or reject the researcher's interpretation of participant responses,

ensuring clarity and accuracy of data collected and increasing level of trust and likelihood of information sharing.

Ethical Issues in Interviewing

The notion of reciprocity in research is that participants give their time and knowledge to the researcher and in exchange for that, the researcher sometimes offers participants a token of appreciation. The token extended to each participant in this study is a $10 Empire Theatre gift card. “Reciprocity, the give and take of social interactions, may be used to gain access to a particular setting” (Harrison, MacGibbon & Morton, 2001, p. 323). Although this was a nominal amount for their time spent, participants seemed to appreciate the gesture.

Confidentiality is an important ethical issue that must be considered when conducting research. This study created minimal risk for participants. In order to maintain confidentiality during the reporting process organization titles and identifying quotes were not used and participants were randomly assigned alternate names. The results of this study will be reported based on summarized data. Data collected was stored in a locked site. It will remain in storage for a maximum of three years at which time it will be destroyed. Data collected included recorded interviews and transcriptions. Participants were notified of this process as part of consenting to take part in the study.

Dissemination of Results

Results from this research will inform restaurant managers of how kitchen employees learn informally and through practice in the workplace. This may help bring the benefits of informal learning and learning through practice to the forefront. Recognition of informal learning may lead to increased personal development for

restaurant employees and enhance learning in organizations. This research may also be useful for educators who are preparing students to engage as lifelong learners in the workplace.

Chapter Four

Findings and Analysis

This chapter describes the modified grounded theory approach used to analyze the data for this study. The processes used to code data is discussed and an overview of the resulting themes that emerged including learning, structure, corporate training, media, mentorship, communities of practice and tacit knowledge is provided.

Grounded Theory and Data Analysis

I used a modified grounded theory approach to analyze the data for this thesis. "Grounded theory is based on the premise that the researcher will attempt to derive a general, abstract theory of a process, action or interaction grounded in the views of participants in a study" (Creswell, 2003, p. 14). The method is presented as a modified version since the core of grounded theory is that the researcher will go into the data collection process without having preconceived notions of what the data will conclude. Researchers with experience and knowledge in any subject area must be aware of previous knowledge and/or experiences that may have potential to influence their decisions as they analyze and identify codes or themes that emerge from research data.

Coding Data

As suggested by Kirby & McKenna (1989), the first step in data analysis is to manage and organize the data (p. 134). Given that interviews for this study were recorded, the first step in this process was to transcribe data from each interview. This allowed me to listen to participants' perspectives and stories without the pressures of being in the interview process. I then read each transcript until themes began to emerge. I identified these themes using a color coding system. At this point, I felt further analysis

was required. I decided to re-read the transcripts and cut out like statements or bibbits from each. Subsequently, I sorted the statements into common themes. A bibbit is defined as "a passage from a transcript, a piece of information from field notes, a section of a document or snippet of conversation recorded on a scrap of paper than can stand out on its own but, when necessary can be relocated in its original context" (Kirby & McKenna, 1989, p. 135). As I went through this process, I began to feel more confident about the themes that were starting to emerge.

This process was ongoing as on more than one occasion I felt that some statements either definitively or potentially fit into more than one category or theme. "The analysis and data collection continually overlap (i.e., whenever the researcher records reflections on either the content or the process of the research, analysis is taking place)" (Kirby & McKenna, 1989, p. 130). It is at this point that interpretation of data and the ability to support such decisions becomes important. The other interesting component I found when analyzing the data was that it was important for me to walk away from it for short periods. This time away occasionally provided me with a new perspective on my analysis.

The categories that emerged from the data on how kitchen employees learn through informal learning and through practice are: learning; structure; corporate training, media, mentorship, communities of practice and tacit knowledge. Each category defined ways that those interviewed learn to do their jobs. The following section provides an in-depth description of each category and examples of how it applies to the learning of the participants interviewed for this study. I use quotes from participants to illustrate these points.

Learning

Adult educators note that learning is continuous and takes place in our every day lives, both inside and outside of the workplace. Learning may occur because of something positive or something negative. It may be something we intend to learn or something that we learn but do not even realize it. Over the years and to varying degrees, those with the ability to influence learning within organizations, have begun to recognize the positive potential of continuous learning. Restaurant organizations are no exception. Virtually all those interviewed made some mention of the importance of continuous or lifelong learning and the role it plays in moving forward, either personally or within the organization. Todd expresses his feelings about continuous learning stating, “Well, goodness if you stop learning you may as well just check out”.

Learning in kitchens, as with other organizations, takes place in stages rather than all at once. This idea is similar to Lave & Wenger’s (1991) theory of legitimate peripheral participation, in which learning occurs gradually through an apprenticeship type model. In restaurant kitchens, time is an important factor as participants achieve an understanding and level of proficiency in each task prior to moving on to new responsibilities. Jeff explains, “So usually you’d learn the fryer station first, and then you would learn the sandwich station and the grill would be the last because to work the grill you need to know how the other two come together”.

Approximately half of the participants interviewed mentioned having participated in some type of formal training prior to working in their current positions. Participants felt the value of this training is primarily in the form of a resource. All participants

reported having training in food safety and noted its value. Two participants indicated they had attended and completed culinary school. Todd states:

> School room learning is a little more structured than what you'd find in the actual workplace…I draw back on it maybe 10% or 20% of what I would incorporate into my daily workings. I find it more of a fall back when I can't remember or find something I haven't done in a while.

In essence, those who had formal culinary training felt it valuable but that it is not a replacement for learning through practice. Alex also says:

> In school, what they teach you is not really practical…in the real world. I've hired a lot of people over the years who have been through…college…and you know they make great stuff…but in reality; we don't have that much time when you're running a restaurant. They don't really train you for reality.

Formal education is often organized to provide students with time to learn. There are time constraints and pressures when working in restaurant kitchens that are not present in classroom or practical lab type settings, making it necessary for people to learn either new or modified ways of doing things.

Structure

Structure in the form of hierarchy and job specific tasks is a key component to the success of many restaurant organizations, which influences the learning opportunities available. Escoffier is credited with developing the kitchen brigade which is defined as "a system of staffing a kitchen so that each worker is assigned a set of specific tasks; these tasks are often related by cooking method, equipment or the types of foods being

produced" (Labensky, Hause, Malley, Bevan & Sicoli, 2006, p. 11). Under this system, each person within the kitchen brigade has a specific job. Positions commonly found in larger organizations in history include "chef, sous chef and chefs de partie who were assigned specific tasks to complete" (Labensky et al., p. 11). Although the traditional brigade system has become more lateral over the years, there are still varying degrees of similarities that exist. For example, larger, more traditional hotel operations often employ a large staff with a structure that resembles a more traditional brigade system. In smaller operations, many tasks that at one time may have been concentrated to one position now spread across multiple positions, but even within these organizations, structure still exists.

Some participants worked in organizations that resembled the more traditional brigade system and others worked in smaller organizations where structure and hierarchy still exist but to a lesser extent. Although kitchens are known for being structured, the types and degrees of structure present are unique to each organization. Interestingly enough, Ryan describes it as "Being in the kitchen…some people would compare (it) to being in like the army. It's very regimental and very structured right…I find I thrive in those environments."

In this study, all seven participants had a level of experience above others in their places of work and as a result, were in positions of power. Although participants reported to management, two worked in the positions of kitchen Chef and therefore had the responsibilities and power to hire and fire staff. Three participants were in supervisory positions with responsibilities for other employees and two had experience helping and working with other staff members on a regular basis. All participants

commented on their experiences of learning from others as well as with helping others learn to do their jobs.

Structure influences learning in the workplace and learning through communities of practice. Employees who work in restaurant organizations create and maintain structure, which helps provide consistency. Many participants spoke of how learning in kitchens requires structure in the way of having certain things that need to be done as well as certain ways of doing things. Alex notes, "I'm their Captain…I determine what they have to do for the day…the day's already set for them…here's what needs to be done today so if you have any questions, please ask me". Verbal communications as well as lists are common ways of helping to ensure tasks are completed.

Corporate offices in larger organizations also heavily influence structure. Consistency and standardization are important components for success in the restaurant business. Structure can help achieve these goals. Those that are part of a franchise for example, have corporate policies on ways of doing things. A chicken salad ordered at a restaurant franchise located in Halifax, Nova Scotia should look and taste the same as one ordered from the same franchise chain in Victoria, British Columbia. Participants noted how corporations provide instructions on how to prepare recipes and/or pictures of what items should look like.

Providing a structured work environment does not imply that everything runs flawlessly. Chaos often comes with working in a busy, multi-tasking, "real time" environment like a restaurant kitchen. There is no time to rehearse, practice, or proof things prior to performing, as may be the case in other types of organizations. When a customer orders a meal, the kitchen employees responsible for food preparation are

immediately "on stage" and expected to get it right the first time. The hard work, long hours and often poor remuneration in restaurants means staff may not come to work when scheduled, which contributes to a chaotic work environment. Jeff explains, "Like the Chef, if all he had to worry about was….the cooking and stuff it would be easy, but its all the other stuff…the dishwasher's not showing up and people just doing stupid stuff and breaking, and hiring, you know". The structures that exist within restaurant organizations are important so that as unexpected problems and chaotic situations arise, employees can still function effectively.

Corporate Training

Participants working for large corporations or franchises referred to corporate training opportunities available in their places of work. In some cases, corporate managers/trainers go to restaurant locations to train employees; most commonly, when a restaurant opens or there are specific needs such as ensuring employees know how to make new menu items. Other organizations provide similar types of learning opportunities by offering sessions in-house. Participants indicated that the organizational training provided is informal in nature, often consisting of demonstrations and subsequent opportunities for employees to practice the tasks with or in front of the trainer. Luke states, "normally the managers will come in and we'll have a day…as soon as the new stuff comes out… they'll kind of run through it with us once and then it's really easy to just pick it up". Organizational learning in this form is learning based on the needs of many and the focus of information sharing is on what those in the organization, generally in positions of power, feel employees need to know. Learning in this context may be beneficial to the employee, but also benefits the overall organization.

In other instances, participants reported that employee input plays an integral role in planning for learning in the workplace. Greg says:

> We…do a lot of corporate training when it comes to food and beverage standards, service standards, quality standards…I would also say that after that it becomes very flexible…we will often ask our staff 'What do you guys want to know'?

Other participants referred to opportunities for employee input regarding training sessions that allow employees a form of power over what they are learning in the workplace. Idealistically, whether managers in the organization or employees themselves identify the learning need, learning in the workplace will meet the needs of individuals as well as the organization.

Those working for larger organizations spoke of occasional opportunities for formal training beyond that of what their own organizations provide, with the provision that courses relate to the employees' positions. The employee sometimes initiates input regarding these training opportunities. Greg states that:

> When the opportunity (for training) is there, we go after the opportunity…it's not very often that the company would say to us 'oh no, we cannot send somebody on a three day course because it's too expensive'. For the most part, they're going to say 'yeah sure, go ahead'.

Those participants working in smaller, more independent operations did not mention the same types of learning opportunities. Independent operations often operate with less staff whose positions may be blended and not as well defined as those working in larger organizations. Small restaurant organizations may not have financial means for

providing training outside the operation. Those with a limited number of staff may not have the time or human resources to set aside time for intended informal learning opportunities within the organization. Although there are independent restaurant organizations that do very well financially, training budgets in smaller organizations are often limited or non-existent. As a result, allocations of monies are limited to "on an as required" basis. On the other side of this, larger organizations often plan and budget for employee training opportunities.

Participants employed by larger corporations indicated that their organizations make corporate learning resources available to them. One participant indicated that there is a library in his organization containing resources related to cooking that employees can access. Others mentioned accessing videos, binders and recipe cards containing ingredient lists and in some cases photographs of how the finished product should look. Participants use these resources for learning until they complete the tasks enough times that the process becomes second nature to them and the resources are no longer required. Learning at this point becomes tacit, information they know without having to think about it. Ryan states that:

> (the franchise) actually has training guides and books for the employees basically when they start…they're quite thick…you can learn it a lot faster on the go by…someone showing you and telling you how to do it…we don't have the time or money for them to sit around and read books or watch videos".

Although having corporate resources such as videos and information sheets available can be beneficial when employees are not expected to perform at top speed, it seems a bit

idealistic as kitchens are fast-paced working environments with little time for sitting and watching videos prior to completing required tasks.

Media

Many of the participants expressed interest in learning on their own time. Participants found outside resources important for learning not only in their current positions but also during times when they had less industry experience. Since the information accessed relates to the food/drink industry as a whole, the knowledge gained can be useful in the workplace as well. The types of resources used consisted of industry related magazines, cookbooks, and on-line sources. Greg states, "I read things that I want to read…I read Wine Spectator cover to cover every month…I don't read as many cookbooks anymore, but I'll read sections of cookbooks that have interest to me".

One resource that consistently stood out as being valuable for the majority of participants was the Food Network, a Canadian specialty channel and website that focuses on cooking and restaurants. A couple of participants felt that the Food Network not only influences their own work but the work of other employees as well. Todd explains:

> You can ask just about any cook that comes after me, if they don't watch the Food Network, I guarantee you they do…I haven't met someone that I've worked with yet that hasn't like watched it religiously or at least have their favourite shows.

The Food Network provides informal learning opportunities for kitchen employees that they access on their own time rather than on time paid by the organization.

The majority of participants felt that information learned by watching the Food Network not only directly influences what takes place in the workplace but also affects the image of the industry as a whole. Greg states:

> I have a strong belief in the Food Network. I think it's an awesome thing. I think that it has brought culinarians…and chefs to the forefront and…has helped us advance a lot; and a lot of my staff swears by them.

The media exposure the food industry has received because of food related shows broadcast on stations such as the Food Network has provided the industry a much greater presence in people's everyday lives. This exposure not only serves as a readily accessible resource for those working in the industry but it also adds a level of prestige and respect to kitchen positions. Although commercialized and in some instances sensationalized, the Food Network broadcasts a variety of shows that would appeal to different populations, providing some representation of what it may be like to work in the industry.

Mentorship

Mentorship can be an important component for learning in the workplace in any organization. Mentorship is an important factor in Lave & Wenger's (1991) theory of learning through legitimate peripheral participation and communities of practice. As people move into new learning situations mentorship relationships often develop. This provides an opportunity for those with experience to assist newcomers in moving from a position of learning from the peripheral to being able to actively engage in and participate in a community of practice.

The majority of participants interviewed mentioned that mentorship influenced their learning in the workplace. How and what each participant learned from their mentor(s) varied from person to person. In most cases, participants identified the mentorship relationships they had earlier in their careers. This may have been at point when participants had not yet reached a level of full participation in a community of practice. Participant responses also seemed to imply that the ability to mentor others came with years of experience. This is in line with Lave & Wenger's (1991) theory of apprenticeship and legitimate peripheral participation whereas those who have reached a level of full participation within a community of practice are in a position to be able to mentor others.

Mentoring types of relationships have the ability to influence not only today's learning but also learning in the future. Participants talked about the importance of learning by through mentorship and the value they placed on those relationships. Todd describes one of his mentors, "Joe has an infectious quality…he has a lot of charisma, is very knowledgeable…but worked well with everyone. Every single one of us…would have jumped out in front of a car for him". This relationship resulted in feelings of respect and loyalty towards the mentor.

As people are mentored, they not only learn how to do their jobs or how to fully participate in a community of practice, in many cases, they also learn how to mentor others. Todd explains his own mentorship style:

> I ended up becoming pieces of each and every one of my mentors at any given time…like an attachment on a chopper, sometimes you need to shred,

> sometimes you need to chop and you pick them out and use them as you need them, just a tool bag.

Greg describes what he learned from one mentor in particular "there were 1500 employees… he knew every single person's name. He knew a little bit about their family…and…had a genuine care for everyone…his genuine interest in his employees, I learned that from him. I learned how important that is…"

Mentorship and teaching provides opportunities for learning through reflection. Many participants identified the ability to mentor and teach in the workplace as an opportunity to give back. Mentorship and teaching in this sense has a dual role, as participants were able to help others learn but they too were able to learn in the process. Teaching others how to do something requires being able to reflect, identify and explain the intricacies of how and why we do things in a particular way. In some cases, teaching can result in people revisiting things they have not done for a while which in turn refreshes their memories and even provides potential for looking at things in new ways. Todd states, "teaching hones skills that most people are comfortable with anyway…you learn how to teach, while teaching you learn".

All too often people feel that they should do things in a certain way because that is the way it has always been done. Having to think through the details of how to do something so that it makes sense to another person with less or different experiences than you provides opportunity for critical thinking pertaining to the reasons behind why things are done the way they are. This process can result in learning. Jeff explains:

> it keeps you sharp…a lot of times people will ask you why you do something and sometimes it reminds you…of why you do it…sometimes you fall into

> the trap of just doing stuff. It also helps you measure where you're at because if you have to tell someone how to do something and they've already done it one hundred times…they can tell you whether or not they think your way is good or whether…they've got a better way.

The person teaching may discover that learners do particular tasks in a certain way because that is what works. Alternatively, the teacher may also discover that it is time to make a change and find a new way of doing things.

Another aspect of teaching is that learners often contribute to the learning process through their knowledge and experiences as they question why things are the way they are and possibly provide new insight and suggestions on how to make existing practices better. Greg states, "when my staff can teach me something…they're like 'hey, I just taught the Chef how to do... and he didn't know how to do it'…they get a lot out of that…it's that whole mentorship thing right?" This type of information exchange creates an opportunity for those with less experience to contribute to a community of practice. High levels of engagement amongst participants can strengthen relationships and therefore the beneficial impact of a community of practice.

Motivators that Influence Learning in Organizations

Learning in the workplace is continuous for kitchen employees. The results of this study indicated that many factors influence whether employees learn or choose to resist learning in the workplace. Some participants were motivated to learn to do their jobs because of "yelling chefs" or negative feedback in kitchen work environments. Others have a desire to learn in the workplace with the goal of becoming more efficient which may result in being able to go home earlier, work at a more leisurely pace, become

more organized and/or provide opportunities to move on to other tasks. The potential to receive remuneration from employers was also a motivator for learning in the workplace.

Some participants reported responding to negative feedback or yelling Chefs in the workplace. Not all indicated they enjoyed the approach, but did feel that it encouraged them to learn. Alex explains, "some of the chefs that were…pretty 'yelly', you kind of get afraid of them…I don't know if it's a bad thing…I mean, it made me learn real quick". This type of environment results from the use of power in the form of negative feedback from superiors and/or co-workers. Some participants felt that the uncomfortable feeling of having someone yell or speak negatively to them provided an incentive for not only learning but also engraving information in their minds. Todd indicates, "you can have someone orate to you why this is so but the first time you burn a sauce and Chef yells at you…it tends to leave more of an impression".

Other participants spoke disapprovingly of this type of negative and often fear provoking work environment. Some participants viewed the negative tactic as an inhibitor to learning. Employees become afraid to ask questions or try new things when fearful. Ryan comments:

> if you're an ignorant chef…you're not going to learn and…people aren't going to even question what you do…people will just 'that's the way he does things, don't question that, he gets angry if you ask him'. You don't want to be like that…you want to have an open mind and you want to be able to learn and you can't look down on people.

Participants spoke of the value of becoming more efficient, a motivator for learning in the workplace. Working in kitchens is not easy. Kitchen employees often

work long hours and are on their feet for long periods. Although the physical and mental demands associated with each position vary, stress can be a regular component of the workday. Greg states, "as a Chef, it is a stressful job. I mean it is really, really stressful…you've got a lot coming at you non-stop". Learning to multitask and become efficient by maximizing the time available can save time and make an employees' job easier, a motivator for learning new ways of doing things in the work place. Ryan refers to how he learns new ways of doing things:

> I just got really quick at it where I'd take all the bottles out, I'd line them all up, go down the line, find more efficient ways to do things…anything that makes the day easier…kitchen work is hard. You're tired at the end of the day. Your feet hurt. Your back hurts. Everything hurts so it's just anything to make your day easier; you're going to do it.

Alex also comments:

> being able to get things done as fast as possible with…the least amount of stress…I hear from a lot of people in this industry…that people get stressed and… I don't find there's any reason…if everything's working properly.

Learning to get better and faster at particular jobs allows for a smoother operation, which makes the workplace less stressful for all those involved.

Management within organizations sometimes try to encourage learning through remuneration. A number of organizations offer tangible incentives and rewards to employees above and beyond their usual monetary remuneration for hours worked. Some participants reported being motivated to learn to do their jobs in part based on these types of rewards. Alex states "here's a great incentive...he put a bonus package together,

so he said ‘if you reach this number, I’ll give you this’...you start to learn real quick…incentives, they work real well”. The rewards the participants referred to were extrinsic rewards in the form of money and free meals.

Communities of Practice

While participants would not use the term “communities of practice”, some indicated that they are trying to create a supportive work environment to help their employees and co-workers learn. Indicators of this attempt included knowledge sharing amongst participants and time and space for this to take place. Some examples mentioned were within the physical confines of the organization, while others took place outside of the organization. Those who described opportunities for learning within these community environments felt them beneficial for the employees as well as the organization.

Becoming part of a community of practice takes effort and time on behalf of all participants. Learning environments vary, as does what is learned. Sometimes employees participate in communities of practice during work hours as they participate in discussions about work and sometimes life in general. Greg tries to support his employees in this way:

> I am a senior food and beverage person for the two hotels…so it doesn’t just mean being a mentor for my own team but it also means being a mentor for the service side...some of our junior supervisors…they need somebody that they can come and ask questions to and have conversations with. Sitting in my office this morning, I had one of the supervisors …say ‘Can we meet next week and just have a little mentor half an hour together

> because I need some help with these financial sheets', and I said Absolutely…let's sit down and let's do that'.

Greg is in a position in the workplace where he has the power to spend time with other employees and provide a supportive learning environment.

In other cases, communities are developed and maintained on unpaid time, whether it is at break time or during social outings outside of work. Todd explains the value of these relationships:

> I mean you're with these people at work all the time…you can't just break off into a new type of relationship. You sort of fall back on the day's work…yeah you get some pretty good…kitchen debates…I find the crew that drinks together stays together.

Todd's comment reinforces the idea that learning through communities of practice may also influence the connectivity amongst kitchen employees. Providing it is a positive experience, this type of bonding can enhance the potential for employee retention within the organization, although as Mojab & Gorman (2003) note, some may also see this as exploiting the employees by having them engage in work even when they are not paid.

Another participant noted discussions related to the workplace that happen over smoke breaks. In Ryan's states, "we go out for two or three smokes a day…and usually we're either talking about work or sometimes we won't, sometimes there's other stuff". When kitchen employees talk about work and even other things, there is potential for learning how to do their jobs. Sometimes even getting to know your co-workers on another level can contribute to the learning that occurs in the workplace. Relationship

building in the way of developing trust relationships and friendships with co-workers has the ability to enhance learning opportunities.

Jeff expresses:

> me and the Chef, we'll sit down…especially if someone needs a little bit of guidance…we'll sit down in a very comfortable setting…just an informal talk of whatever questions you have…I think it's very important to have friendship with your staff.

This is an example of how those in managerial positions and mentorship roles can support informal learning and communities of practice in the workplace. This participant identified this situation as a valuable opportunity to share information with a co-worker. Although not specifically stated, it is my understanding that employees were paid during this meeting time, indicating a level of management support for informal learning in the workplace.

Large-scale communities of practice can provide valuable learning opportunities for kitchen employees. Greg states:

> I was fortunate enough to go to… this celebration…and cook dinner…this past summer in…[a city in the United States]…with four other chefs…we had time to be working in the kitchen and chatting about it but then also going out to dinner…we were able to have…multiple course dinners and sit around five chefs at a table…and being able to deconstruct and talk about all these dishes and each person's…take on that dish. Location alone as well as the timing of when specific events are scheduled and how this conflicts with

work schedules influences opportunities for coming together as a community to learn outside of the workplace.

People who live and work in different locations often have unique perspectives on situations because of their knowledge and experiences. Although we are very fortunate to be able to purchase a wide variety of foods in Canada, each area of the world has its own culinary specialties. Participation in large-scale communities of practice enables sharing of such knowledge and experiences.

Part of learning within a community of practice is being able to understand what is happening in the workplace. Virtually all workplaces have a culture or way of doing things, not all of which those outside the organization would understand. This knowledge may be in the form of just knowing what to do next, or it may be a matter of knowing what the person beside you will do next. It may also be in the form of a special language. Although not all participants felt that there was a special language used in their places of work, a couple did. Ryan states, “When you’re in it so long there’s a language, an understanding language…sometimes it’s not proper English…but we know where you are going with it”.

Providing support for employees to participate in communities of practice can benefit both the employee and the organization. Participants often spoke of opportunities to participate in community of practice environments outside of paid work, although there was some mention of learning in this way during the workday. None of the participants indicated a lack of support from management for such learning environments. This may have been because the idea of having or not having support in

this area did not occur to them because of their being in higher-level kitchen positions. It may also be a reflection of the questions asked.

Learning through Practice and its connection to Tacit Knowledge

Learning through practice creates tacit knowledge. Experience influences learning and is often associated with a person's level of formal education. Those who have experience in the industry can draw on what they already know, potentially enabling people to move through the learning processes quickly. Although experience may expedite the learning process, those with experience still need time to learn new things. An example of this is when after years of experience and learning, a kitchen employee moves up the ranks from the position of Dishwasher to that of Chef. This was actually the case for one of the participants interviewed. Alex began his career as a dishwasher and with a combination of years of experience, formal education and mentors has moved into the position of Chef, kitchen manager of a restaurant and he has had the opportunity to help owners open restaurants.

Alex speaks about the role a mentor played in helping him on this learning journey "when I was a dishwasher I had a couple guys that took an interest in me. You know they would take me off the dish pit and put me on the line and became really good friends. Yeah, I was really fortunate." Dishwasher positions generally require less experience and education than those working in the positions of Chef but with time, initiative, opportunity and often mentorship kitchen employees have successfully made such transitions. Adult educators refer to this type of gradual learning or knowledge building over time as scaffolding.

Todd indicates how past experiences influence what we think, but with time and practice, we can learn to build on our previous knowledge and learn new ways of doing things:

> I'd say the lion's share of my knowledge that I draw on is purely experience based, and I think cooking more so than any other industry. It is hugely devote to experience...there is some structure theory to it but each and every individual location will have their own ways of making a certain dish where as…you've always been told the eggs go this way and its like 'well no, we do it like this here'…different kitchens…can have different variations on dishes you thought would have been standard.

Todd's perception of the importance of experience in the cooking industry reveals that while theoretical aspects of cooking are important, what is equally as important is actually putting that theory into practice and learning how to do tasks independently. Working in kitchens requires people to be flexible. Todd addresses this when he identifies how each restaurant organization has their own ways of doing things. The culinary arts are exactly that, there is an art to cooking. Although there may be general standards, there is an expectation that Chefs will be creative and make dishes their own. The only way to learn the intricacies of each kitchen is by working in it.

Comments from the participants varied based on the premise of learning to do something new as well as learning by doing as a way of perfecting or honing in on a particular task. In many cases as participants learn new tasks such as preparing new dishes by observing others as they work, watching demonstrations, participating in discussions, and subsequently by trying to make dishes after being shown how. This is

an example of intent participation as take up by Rogoff et al. (2003). Co-workers rather than corporate trainers, as was discussed earlier, conduct the demonstrations identified in this section.

Participants often spoke of the importance of demonstrations and either simultaneous or subsequent opportunities to practice the task. Luke states, "hands on…I think is necessary when it comes to this cause you can't sit there and…watch videos of people making food…you…need to get in it and do it yourself". Jack comments, "I learn…if I see it being done, then I can do it". Reading a textbook or watching videos is interesting and informative but the intricacies of the job are only found by seeing it and by having the opportunity to gain experience doing it yourself. Greg discusses:

> You can't learn everything by reading. You need to have hands on…how to make a hollandaise sauce, you can read a book a million times…when that hollandaise sauce splits, the book tells you how to fix it, but until you've actually…brought that separated hollandaise sauce back…you're not going to get it…somebody had to be there to show you how to do it at some point.

Participants commented on how repetition, making mistakes and working through the processes of trial and error enhance and in some cases accelerate learning. This may facilitate becoming a full participant in a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Jeff explains, "do it again and do it again and just keep doing it because once you know how to do it, you're not going to forget and then you can move on to something else". Other participants mentioned the relationship between repetition and learning as well.

Many participants identified making mistakes as a key component of learning. Learning through mistakes is an example of incidental learning as taken up by Kelly et al.

(2001). Participants in this study felt that, although not intentional, mistakes they had made throughout the years made an impression on them that they did not forget, and therefore helped them learn what to do and what not to do as they looked back on those situations. Todd summarizes this:

> I can't minimize the actual importance of making mistakes in the kitchen…that's probably the largest…driver of experience based learning…when you've got to bag out about one hundred people and you've just thrown out…the sauce by accident and…its ten minutes before plate up. Those huge red flags come up and you do not do them ever again.

In instances like this, the mistake affects the larger community. Mistakes that affect others in the workplace can elicit negative responses from peers that can sometimes lead to a lasting impression.

The concept of trial and error is similar to making mistakes but takes on a slightly different theme in that as people make mistakes it may not be with the intention of trying something new, whereas trial and error generally is. Alex explains:

> you…learn from your mistakes, especially in cooking…it's all trial and error…I still make mistakes but to me they're not mistakes, they're experience…you can't be afraid not to try because that's how you get to where you have to get.

Being able to learn through practice either by trial and error, making mistakes or solving problems is not isolated to the immediate situation but rather provides employees an opportunity to draw on past knowledge to assist in the process of learning. Todd says,

"I'll find circumstances that I've been around…that are similar, draw from experience and…go and whack at it". Experiences enable us to draw on previous learning, which helps us to get through and learn from our mistakes or experimental situations. For some, past experiences give that added bit of confidence that allows people to try something new.

The majority of learning described here is intended learning. Demonstrators show participants how to do things because it is felt the information is important. Employees initiate learning processes as a desire to increase their knowledge. Valuable learning results from problem solving. Learning new things provides opportunities for employees to improve themselves in their jobs and contribute to their "knowledge bank" of which they can draw from at any time.

Tacit learning can be implicit as taken up by Frensch & Runger (2003), in which case learning may not be the intent nor is the participant aware that learning has occurred. Knowledge becomes an imprint in people's memories as they gain experience in their jobs. When the point comes that information is tacit for someone, the mystery or uncertainty of how or why something is done in a certain way is gone. There is just a sense of knowing how to do the activity. Ryan explains, "They [the corporate office] come up with…recipe guides and…I don't even think about it…you just…read what's on the paper and you make (it)". The information embeds in the person's mind. Adult educators refer to this type of knowledge as tacit knowledge. Learning may also be implicit, unintentional and unrecognizable as learning. Information that becomes tacit or imprinted in the minds of individuals is different for each person.

Some participants who gave examples of tacit knowledge referred to it as "common sense". They did not recognize the knowledge they were talking about as something they have gained over time through experience. Todd notes:

> you get to a… kitchen culture where you wake up one day and realize 'wow, I'm actually organizing my station, I'm getting everything ready and now I have time to spare whereas before that wasn't even an ability'.

Todd provides another good example of tacit knowledge:

> if you can use an analogy…cutting, dicing an onion…outsiders watch a chef dice an onion in twenty seconds…you do it several thousand times and…you can do most of these things as a knee jerk reaction…purely through repetition and…you might not have experienced a certain situation but can call on a different one that's similar and anticipate an outcome.

One of the reasons the development of tacit knowledge is not always recognized is that it develops through repetition or experience. In most professions, there is repetition of particular tasks or skills on a regular basis. Knife handling is one of those skills many kitchen employees practice every day and develop over time. As a result, kitchen employees develop an ability to use their knives to cut items such as onions without even thinking about it.

A form of tacit knowledge can develop between employees in the workplace as they develop a sense of what they can expect from one another. As employees gain experience working together, they develop as sense of trust and an understanding of the

way each person does things. It is often as if they know what the other person is thinking or what is going to happen next. Jeff explains:

> a lot of times at night time there's only two of you on…it gets kind of busy…I know it sounds kind of weird but you don't…have time to talk sometimes…its just more a of a matter of you know what that guy can do and he knows what you can do.

Employees do not often realize this knowledge exists until something changes. Luke states, "somebody new comes in, it just throws you off…cause now…he's got to do things but he doesn't know how to do them so before you can start anything you have to…show him". He, as well as others recognized that generally, new tacit relationships can develop but it takes time and learning not only as an individual but together. These types of relationships can be a community of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991) as employees are working and learning together in a social environment towards a common goal.

Participants in communities of practice often acquire a language that those outside of the community may not understand. Understanding the language of a community of practice is a component of tacit knowledge. Ryan states:

> I can have…ten orders up …and my other guy will have them all in his head and I'll have them all in my head… and we'll be able to talk about all the orders at different tables…we'll know what we're talking about…the communication kind of becomes like kitchen talk…it'd be different for every kitchen for sure.

Some kitchen language would be specific to the menu items offered by each restaurant. There would however be some level of consistency of language across kitchen organizations.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

Summary of Findings

People generally think of learning in the sense of formal learning, which includes characteristics such as learning lead by a knowledge bearer, often referred to as a teacher, identified learning objectives for which materials are organized accordingly, and an evaluation of some type that measures the knowledge gained by the learners, (Eraut, 2008). Formal learning also typically occurs in a classroom type setting and offers some type of credentialing. Although participants in this study admittedly recognized formal learning as valuable, a great deal of emphasis was placed on the importance of informal learning and learning through practice as they responded to questions regarding how they learn in their places of work. However, since we live in a culture that has traditionally considered formal learning as the way learning occurs, it will take both time and a continuing build up of evidence for people to begin to have the same regard for informal learning.

Participants in this study provided examples of how informal learning methods such as mentorship, conversations and observation of others were opportunities for learning in the workplace. Most participants interviewed identified at least one person he considered a mentor. Mentors influenced learning in different ways for different people. Participants noted observing the way mentors took time for and showed respect for other employees and how some were able to spend one-on-one time with employees, focusing on individual needs. Participants commonly referred to mentors who influenced their learning early in their careers, when they had less experience. This leads me to wonder

whether it is more common to regard someone as a mentor during times of less experience, at a time when participants need guidance from others with more knowledge and experiences, or if these results are merely representative of those interviewed. Peripheral learning such as this relates to Lave & Wenger's (1991) work on legitimate peripheral participation and learning as an apprentice rather than participating as full participants in a learning situation. Mentorship is not only an opportunity for the participant to learn but for the mentor to learn as well.

The results of this study indicated that organizational structure influences informal learning, specifically in restaurant kitchens. Position hierarchy contributes a great deal to the structure and organization of kitchens. Job tasks, remuneration and even respect relate to the hierarchical structure of positions, potentially influencing employee learning. Hierarchy in kitchens is historical in nature and although has changed over time, many elements of this tradition still exist today. Results showed that those in higher positions within the kitchen organization direct, mentor, and teach others in the workplace. The results of this study provide evidence that informal learning is in fact a significant contributor to the learning that takes place within restaurant kitchens.

Participants in this study spoke of the significance of mentoring and teaching others in the workplace as an opportunity for learning as mentors and teachers. The ability to truly mentor and teach others requires a comprehensive knowledge of and thorough understanding of the intricacies of the information being relayed. Mentors and teachers are required to reflect on processes that are tacit or simply put, information they just know and do not normally have to think about.

It is important for mentors and teachers to be able to convey what they know in a way that learners who do not have the same knowledge or experiences as the mentor or teacher can understand. As learners ask questions regarding content and process, mentors and teachers are forced to explain their answers and sometimes actions, providing an opportunity to recognize what is tacit knowledge and potentially re-think what is already known. The way we think about things influences our previous knowledge and experiences, often resulting in preconceived notions that influence the way we do things.

Mentoring or teaching others with different knowledge and experiences provides an opportunity to be critical of and potentially improve the way we do things. Although thus far I have reported on mentoring and teaching from a positive approach, interestingly enough not all teaching approaches are positive or nurturing. In the next section, I will explore how conflict and negativity sometimes influence informal learning in restaurant kitchens.

A point of interest that arose from the data was the motivators that encourage kitchen employees to learn in the workplace. Some of the not-so-surprising motivators included employer related incentives such as remuneration in the form of money or rewards as well as a personal desire to become more efficient in the workplace. The one point that stood out most for me was the divide amongst participants who spoke of the influence of "yelling chefs" as a motivator to learn. Some participants felt this approach is one of the past and is no longer acceptable in the workplace while others identified it as an approach that not only still exists but one that is actually a motivator to learn for some.

Petrone (2010) published research regarding how communication of a conflicting tone influences not only how skateboards learn to skateboard but also how they become

part of the skateboarding community of practice at the Franklin Skate Park. One of the ways they do this is through the process of "heckling" others. This is a way of teaching boarders what is acceptable and what is not within a particular community of practice. "Heckling is a practice in which skaters verbally condemn, ridicule, and/or tease other skaters" (Petrone, 2010, p. 119). This definition of heckling resonates with me as I think back to how some restaurant kitchen employees described the negative feedback they received from other kitchen employees and how this motivated them to learn in the workplace. It would be interesting to research this area further to discover why it is that these types of power influences and negative and conflicting responses to their work motivate some people. Does gender play a role in how learners interpret the responses? Would women respond positively to such negativity when used as a teaching tool? Is this approach a way of including/excluding people from the culture and communities of practice that exist within particular organizations?

Virtually all participants in this study recognized the importance of learning through practice. Many explicitly stated that it is not enough to have a conversation with a mentor or co-worker, observe someone in the workplace or read information on how to do something; to gain a true understanding of new knowledge, hands on experience or practice is extremely important for learning in restaurant kitchens. Participants also raised the point that experimentation through trial and error and the ability and right to learn from one's mistakes is valuable to thoroughly understand new knowledge and for knowledge retention. Experimenting with and practicing what has been learned is an integral component of informal learning in restaurant kitchens.

Some of the challenges associated with the views that informal learning is a valuable and viable way of learning in the workplace may include a lack of control over the learning content, when it is learned, and who is providing the information. Another potential barrier is the fact that the results are not always immediately evident, making it difficult to measure. When employees experience learning through conversations, observing others, or participating in communities of practice, the learning that takes place may not be visible to those non-participants. Since managers are not often planning or influencing the learning that is taking place, they may view it as socializing or standing around rather than learning. As a result, sometimes managers and supervisors find it difficult to see its value. Being able to recognize and appreciate the potential value of informal learning in the workplace requires a level of trust and willingness to release control, which for many of us is difficult to achieve. However, there is potential for employees, managers and as a result, the organization as a whole to benefit from such opportunities, particularly when they embrace and support informal learning in the way of time and resources.

A*reas for Future Research:*

What is learned from completing a research study also leads to ideas of what can be learned. The findings from this study suggest areas for future research. The structure of restaurant kitchens may provide potential barriers for women interested in working in restaurant kitchens, which in turn may have influenced a lack of response from women volunteers. In addition, adding an ethnographic approach to the study of informal learning in restaurant kitchens may assist in breaking down some of the barriers to being able to access data from voices of those not heard in this study.

In this thesis, I was interested in hearing from restaurant kitchen employees regarding their experiences with learning to do their jobs. My goal was to obtain information representative of a diverse group of people including women and men of varying ages, those from different cultures and past work experiences, and participants with varying levels of education and hierarchy within the workplace. Participants in this study were in fact of different ages with some variation in educational backgrounds and the numbers of years working in restaurant kitchens. The hierarchy of positions held amongst participants also varied, although not as much as was intended. However, even with these variations, there were categories not covered. The gender of all participants interviewed was male and although represented varying levels of hierarchy within their organizations, all had some level of power because of their previous experiences and/or formal education. As a result, the voices of women employed in restaurant kitchens, those with minimal work experience and employees working in positions of lesser power have yet to have their experiences reported on, providing an opportunity for further research. I will now raise some questions as to why these groups of people did not volunteer to participate in this study, beginning with potential gender issues.

Women in today's society often take care of much of the traditional domestic types of responsibilities including that of childcare. Gouthro (2005) states that "women's participation in education programmes is often co-ordinated around domestic and childrearing responsibilities" (p. 8). Childcare responsibilities are often time sensitive and therefore may influence women's interests in as well as opportunities to work in restaurant kitchens given the number and flexibility of work hours required for many positions.

Restaurant kitchen employees often work not only what may be considered irregular hours but also many hours each day. For someone who needs to be home to look after their children during certain hours, these types of work expectations can provide barriers to this type of employment. If such barriers exist, the balance of men to women employed in restaurant kitchen may be affected which may in turn have influenced the fact that women did not volunteer to participant in this study.

For those women who are employed in restaurant kitchens, home life responsibilities may limit the amount of time available to learn from informal learning opportunities that take place outside of work hours. Some participants in this study referred to informal learning that occurs in what I would categorize as communities of practice, where kitchen employees or colleagues get together after work for a drink or dinner to discuss the events of the day, what was learned, and/or ways to solve problems. "Domestic and/or childcare responsibilities mean that women are frequently not able to take as much time for their studies as conventional students, or participate in informal learning situations such as going to a pub to have a beer with the professor" (Gouthro, 2005, p. 12). This also leads me to question whether participant responses to learning through communities of practice would be different if those interviewed were women, as although learning through communities of practice often takes place during work hours a lot of informal learning also happens after hours.

Although not intended, the research process itself may have marginalized those kitchen employees in positions of lesser power, knowledge, and in some cases experience. In order to be granted permission to conduct research involving humans, researchers are required meet criteria as set forth by their University Ethics Board. While

not unique to this study, this process required providing participants with a lot of information, which they may have viewed as overwhelming. Asking participants to provide informed consent, as well as permission to record their interview may have seemed unfamiliar and intimidating for many.

Much of the information disseminated to restaurant managers and employees comes in the form of best practices or short reports; whereas in order to cover the components required by University Ethics Boards for the completion of a thesis, participant information packages often turn into documents that appear relatively formal and detailed. Although some kitchen employees have been to university, not all have and the idea of having anything to do with one may be unappealing and seem overwhelming. It is for these reasons I would suggest future researchers expand the data collection process to include a component of ethnographic research in order to obtain results that represent a more diversified group of kitchen employees.

An ethnographic approach such as observing and/or working with participants in the workplace may provide additional data related to learning through communities of practice in restaurant kitchens. In an ethnographic approach, "the researcher seeks to establish the meaning of a phenomenon from the views of participants. This means identifying a culture-sharing group and studying how it developed shared patterns of behavior over time" (Creswell, 2003, p. 21). As a researcher, it may be easier to observe learning in communities of practice than it is to draw the information out in the interview process. However, the ability to obtain research data as an observer and participator in restaurant kitchens requires a significant amount of time to develop trust relationships.

Much of Lave & Wenger's (1991) work in studying communities of practice is based on an ethnographic approach. Brann-Barrett (2009) comments on her experience using an ethnographic approach for her doctoral research of which the intent was to gain the perspectives from a hard to reach population, "the time required to establish trust and create a climate of reciprocity is significant" (pp. 63 – 64). Although one of my committee members brought the benefits of using an ethnographic research approach to my attention, due to a change in focus and the time involved with completing an ethnographic study, I chose to use interviews as my main research method to collect data. James (2006) used an ethnographic approach in her doctoral study, which examined how apprentice chefs learned to cook and hone their craft as they started to work in restaurant kitchens. "This method (of working with participants) proved more conducive to conversations with the apprentice and was a way of gleaning data that might otherwise have stayed under the surface if using non-participant techniques" (James, 2006, p. 3). Being able to observe and potentially work with participants in one or more restaurants for a period of time should provide opportunity to enrich the data collected as a relationship between the researcher and participants is established with the goal of establishing trust relationships and reducing any feelings of intimidation.

Many qualitative research studies are small scale. Each study generally represents the views of a small portion of a population. As people research similar topics over time, ideas, knowledge and theories gradually begin to build. This thesis is no exception as it captures the experiences of a small number of restaurant employees; it is a contributor to a greater body of knowledge regarding informal learning through practice. What is unique about this study as opposed to other studies on informal learning is that it focuses

specifically on the learning of kitchen employees. However, since it encompasses specifically the views of seven participants working in restaurants appropriate for family dining within HRM, the scope is narrow and there is room for further research.

Further research could be done regarding whether there is a difference between the learning opportunities for those working in larger organizations in HRM with those working in smaller restaurants outside of the city. I would predict that there would be an even greater focus on informal learning in the workplace for smaller locations in more remote areas than for those restaurants located in HRM. I think both finances and location would play a role in the results.

The results of this study indicate that although restaurant kitchen employees reported having benefited from formal learning opportunities, a great deal of value is placed on informal learning and learning through practice in the workplace. Therefore, it is essential that educators and managers understand how this learning takes place. Being able to recognize and provide support for informal learning in the workplace will provide benefits for individual employees and in many cases organizations.

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Appendix I

Masters in Lifelong Learning Research Thesis

How Kitchen Employees Learn Through Practice
Nova Scotia, Canada

Participant Information Package

Student Researcher: Paulette Cormier-MacBurnie

Overview of Research Study

This research study is being conducted as part of the requirements for the researcher's Masters Degree in Lifelong Learning at Mount Saint Vincent University (MSVU). The focus of the study is to enquire about how kitchen restaurant employees learn through practice in the workplace. The research is intended to inform those who work in the restaurant industry of the benefits and challenges of learning through practice and how this concept can be further supported to enhance employee learning
The interview will be more like a conversation, and these are some of the questions that will be asked.

1. Describe how you learned to do your job.
2. Do you exchange information with your colleagues? If so, in what way?
3. How do you learn to do new things or improve on the ways you currently do things?
4. Does helping others or receiving help from others influence your learning in the workplace?
5. Does the majority of your learning take place in the restaurant environment? Where else do you learn about things that influence your job?
6. Do you have formal education that helps you do your job?
7. What types of formal training are available through the workplace? How do you use the knowledge you learned when you return to the kitchen?
8. Do you take part in non-work, social events with your colleagues? Does learning occur in these environments?

Researcher Information

Paulette Cormier-MacBurnie
MA.Ed. Candidate, Masters Lifelong Learning program, MSVU
Halifax, NS
B3M2J6
paulette.cormier@msvu.ca

Education
MA.Ed. Candidate - Masters of Arts in Education, Lifelong Learning program at Mount Saint Vincent University
BSc. Applied Human Nutrition, Mount Saint Vincent University

Current Job Position
Paulette has been teaching as a Lab Instructor in the Department of Business Administration and Tourism and Hospitality Management at Mount Saint Vincent University for the past 13 years. The primary focus of this position is teaching restaurant management in a practical learning environment.

Restaurant Kitchen Employees Needed!!!

Are you a restaurant kitchen employee?

Are you 19 years of age or older?

Would you be willing to share your ideas in a research study about how you learn to do your job?

A $10 gift card for Empire Theatres will be given to those who participate in the interview.

For more information please contact
Paulette Cormier-MacBurnie by June 10th.
paulette.cormier@msvu.ca
457-6517 (day) [redacted] (evening)

Letter of Informed Consent

In this study, interested restaurant kitchen employees who are 19 years of age or older are requested to participate in a qualitative research study focusing on learning in the workplace. Your participation in this study will assist the researcher with completing her Masters degree in Education at Mount Saint Vincent University. Interviews will be conducted with volunteer participants who are employed as restaurant kitchen employees working in family style, mid-range restaurants in Nova Scotia, Canada. Findings from the study will help inform those who work in the restaurant industry of the benefits and challenges of learning through practice to enhance employee learning.

Interviews will be conducted face-to-face at a time and location that is convenient for you. Interviews are expected to last approximately 40 minutes. During the interview process, a set of semi-structured interview questions will be used to guide conversation regarding learning through participation as a restaurant kitchen employee. The interview you have volunteered to participate in will be recorded and quotes may be used in papers and a summary report on this study. The source of quotes used will not be identified in publications. The interviewer will also take notes as you are answering questions. You have the right to answer only the questions you so desire and may ask to have the recorder stopped at any time.

The researcher will keep recorded tapes and interview transcripts for a maximum of three years in a locked site at the researcher's home, and then they will be destroyed. The student's thesis committee will see the raw data but only summary results will be shared with other people. Summary data and quotations collected during the interview will be used in the researcher's thesis report and may also be used in the classroom, future research studies, professional publications, or at conferences. Research participants will have the opportunity to review transcripts to verify that the information included represents what the participant wishes to report.

Strict confidentiality will be maintained, although complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed. The procedures for maintaining confidentiality and protecting your identity will consist of meeting in a private location (as per your request) and using general terms or alternate names for interviewees and restaurant organizations. Your agreement to volunteer as part of this study will be kept confidential and you have the right to cease your participation in the study at any time.

I have provided a place for your signature at the bottom of this letter for those of you who have agreed to participate in this study. Your signature will indicate that you wish to be a volunteer participant in this study and that you have read and agree to the above information. Each volunteer will receive an honorary $10 gift certificate to Empire Theatres as a thank you for taking time participate in this study.

Please feel free to contact me prior to or during the process of the study if you have any questions. I can be reached at (902) 457-6517 - daytime or [redacted] – evenings. My email address is paulette.cormier@msvu.ca. If during or after the study you have any concerns about the way in which the research was conducted, please contact the Chair of the University Ethics Committee at Mount Saint Vincent University, c/o the research and International Office at (902) 457-6350.

Thank you for considering my request to participate in this study.
Paulette Cormier-MacBurnie

Interview Consent Form

I have read and understood the information contained in the above letter and agree to participate in this research study concentrating on how kitchen employees learn through practice in restaurant organizations. I understand that this study is of minimal risk to me and that anything I do not wish to have included in the reporting process will not be included, as per my request.

Name (please print): ______________________________

Signature: ______________________________

Date: ______________________________

Audio Recording Consent Form

I have read and understood the information contained in the above letter and agree to have my voice recorded during the interview process. The information will be examined, and quotes used as part of the reporting process. I have been informed that I may request that the recorder be stopped at any time and any data that I do not wish to be included in the summary results will not be used, as per my request.

Name (please print): ______________________________

Signature: ______________________________

Date: ______________________________

Appendix II

Interview Schedule

1. What is your position title?
2. How long have you been working in this position?
3. Describe your position.
4. Do you have formal education that helps you do your job?
5. What types of formal training are available through the workplace? How do you use the knowledge you learned when you return to the kitchen?
6. How did you learn to do your job?
7. How do you learn to do new things or improve on the ways you currently do things?
8. Do you work closely with other people? If so, in what way?
9. Do you help others learn in the workplace? Does this help you learn?
10. Do others help you in the workplace? Do you learn from others in the workplace? How?
11. Do you think there is such a thing as "kitchen talk", that not all would understand without some experience working in a kitchen?
12. Do you use tools in the workplace such as specific types of equipment, forms, computer equipment? How does this contribute to your learning?
13. Are there external groups that influence your learning in the workplace?
14. Does all of your learning take place in the restaurant environment? If not, where else do you learn?