ABSTRACT

I’M LICENSED. WHAT DO I DO NOW?: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE LEARNING JOURNEYS OF NEWLY LICENSED REAL ESTATE AGENTS

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This qualitative study explored the learning journeys of eight newly licensed real estate agents in Illinois. It examined how these agents viewed the real estate industry, how they learned the business, and how they developed their professional identities.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted monthly with each participant for a six-month period during their first year in the business. The interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed, and coded using a three-phase approach. The initial phase included descriptive, in vivo process and values coding. The second phase used pattern coding and focused coding. The third phase brought the coded data together and created themes.

The emergent themes were knowledge acquisition, or learning the business, and professional identity formation. The theme of learning the business included motivation, preparedness or lack thereof, and learning strategies. Experiential learning was identified as the most commonly used informal learning strategy. Experiential learning activities included participants’ own experiences, and vicarious experiences—learning through and from the experience of others.
Identity formation brought in the participants’ impressions of real estate agents prior to entering the business, and followed the change and development they experienced as they progressed in their careers, especially in identifying the roles of real estate agents. Three main roles were uncovered: real estate agents as helpers, as purveyors of information, and as nurturers. The notion of success, as expressed by the participants, reflected their perceptions of these functions.

A career trajectory model for newly licensed agents was uncovered. It moved from a negative impression of real estate agents prior to the participants entering the business, the motivation for entering the business with the belief that “I can do better,” to a growing frustration. When the frustration hit, the participants assigned blame to external sources—the market, a manager, poor training. Resolutions for the frustration included a renewal of effort, changing offices or companies, and leaving the business. Means of lessening the frustration were extrapolated from the data and expressed in the implications for practice. Implications for research were also included.
I'M LICENSED. WHAT DO I DO NOW?: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE LEARNING JOURNEYS OF NEWLY LICENSED REAL ESTATE AGENTS

BY

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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF COUNSELING, ADULT AND HIGHER EDUCATION

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Amy Rose
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We’ve all heard that it takes a village to raise a child. I’ve learned it takes a community to create a dissertation. I have an extensive community to acknowledge and thank for their membership and participation.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my family for their support and understanding during this dissertation process: my sister-in-law Josie who had “the look” that reminded me that you need to finish what you start; my nieces and daughter-in-law who were wonderful cheerleaders and voices of strength and encouragement; my husband for his patience and endurance; my friends, especially Sue Miller, whose constant reference to “Dr. Brown” kept the goal alive and in sight. I’d also like to thank Mona—a friend, a colleague, a coach, and sounding board—for her faith and confidence.

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Last, but not least, I want to thank the participants—without them, there would have been no project, so, thank you all!
DEDICATION

To the Old Man who always thought I should, believed I could, and knew I would—even when I didn’t
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PREFACE

When we hear the phrase “real estate” we often think of the product, the buildings, the “bricks and sticks,” and the land. We conjure visions of cities, towns and neighborhoods, rolling countryside and farm fields, and shopping areas and factories. Sometimes we think of the market with all of its attendant activity. We think of value, ownership, mortgages and financing, leasing, and investments. We may even think of the business with its conglomerates, mom-and-pop shops, and franchise offices. We tend to associate real estate with brokerage where buyers and sellers, landlords and tenants come together to create transactions. We less often think of the real estate profession with its dual nature of cooperation and competition. Fewer of us yet would think of the agents themselves and, when we do, we typically think of those professionals experienced in brokerage bringing together buyers and sellers, and landlords and tenants, to create marketplace transactions.

Only a fraction of us would think of the beginners, the novices, the newly licensed agents when we think of real estate. It was this last group, “the newbies,” that was the focus of this study. These newly licensed agents entered a market after the bubble—with its unprecedented demand, easy credit, ample supply, and unsustainable increases in value—had burst. They entered a three-tiered market with its short sales, bank-owned properties, and non-distressed inventory. They have encountered decreasing values,
stringent credit requirements and tight money, an abundance of supply with low demand, and a generally depressed economy. Armed with this knowledge, they still chose real estate.

My interest in real estate had a rather dubious beginning. It was not my preferred career choice when I received my bachelor’s degree having majored in English and philosophy. Shortly after graduation I realized that I was not going to make a living writing poetry so I took a job in my father’s recently opened real estate office. He needed help and I had a real estate sales license, which I earned while I was still in college. “It will be better to fall back on than your college degree,” was what I was told quite often by my father. I began my career with my dad’s brand new company as their “office person.” My typing skills were atrocious then and they still are today. Since I had a license, I was able to do more than just office work. I could converse with clients about properties, write up sales contracts and listing agreements, and, in a pinch, show property to prospective purchasers. I remember thinking that I was only going to do this until I found something that really interested me. The excitement of every day being different and the challenge of change lured me into the business. As it turned out, real estate has been my first and only career.

Eventually I became the chief decision maker and was responsible for managing the company. Any decisions that I made had to be approved by a majority of the shareholders (i.e., my father). The real estate business in our area was seeing individually owned offices declining with the growth of multi-office corporations. We knew we needed to set ourselves apart and offer something that would differentiate us from our competition.
We came to the conclusion that technology and training would provide the avenues for our continued success. Since we were part of a franchise organization, we knew technology would take care of itself. The franchise provided up-to-date, “cutting edge” opportunities.

Training was more problematic. The franchise offered training and our licensees participated in the programs. Despite this training, we watched our new agents flounder and become frustrated. As we talked with other brokers, they, too, admitted their agents experienced the same floundering and frustration. These conversations convinced us that training was the key. So, we asked ourselves two questions: what do we know about training, and what kind of training would be the most effective. This led to my self-directed personal development project. I obtained a master’s degree in training and development. As we embarked upon developing a training program, we received an offer too good to be true and sold our business to a multi-office company. I went to work for this new company and realized that their new agents floundered and became frustrated despite the fact that the company offered franchise training, company training, and a mentor program.

I am a Realtor®, hold a current Illinois real estate managing broker license, and have extensive experience in the practice of residential brokerage. I have worked in the field as a salesperson, manager, and owner. I have been involved in the recruiting, retention, and training of sales associates. Since 2000, I have been teaching licensing classes—both pre-licensing and continuing education. It was my involvement with individuals contemplating a career in real estate, and a deep-seated discontent with real estate educational offerings—particularly the pre-licensing courses—that spurred my
interest in researching the development of newly licensed agents. It was the frustration of watching newly licensed agents flounder as they began their careers that served as the catalyst for this research project.
Knowledge and the acquisition of knowledge (learning) in the workplace and in the professions are integral to the domain of adult education. Both fields of study incorporate adult learning theory into specific contexts or arenas. Much of the literature focusing on the professions centers around the classical professions—medicine, law, ministry, and education. It is unlikely that one thinks of real estate agents when one thinks of professions. However, the literature surrounding professions mentions real estate as a profession as early as 1954 when it was mentioned in study by Caplow (cited in Volmer & Mills, 1966). Weinstein and Young (2002, 2004) used a trait approach to professionalization that definitively categorized real estate as a profession.

There is a preponderance of literature concerning professional education including the acquisition and development of professional knowledge. Typically, initial professional education is associated with higher education or lengthy educational processes. Daley (2002) suggested that pre-professional education introduces professionals to proper behavior within their practices. Daley’s (2001, 2002, 2004) studies reinforced and confirmed notions within the trait approach to professionalization. Daley’s research on learning in the professions was conducted from a constructivist perspective (2001, 2002, 2004).
Daley (2001) studied learning in four professions--social workers, lawyers, adult educators, and nurses--from the vantage point of continuing professional education. She also applied the construct of context to social workers, nurses, and lawyers in a later study (2002). Daley’s (2004) study of teacher development concluded that learning is made meaningful in practice by the nature of the work itself, through the experience encountered with clients, allegiance to the profession by identifying with the profession, the organizational culture in which the professional practices, and the degree of independence or autonomy the professional enjoys or experiences within the context of practice. Daley’s interpretation of constructivist learning involves a blending of the cognitive approach, a cultural approach, and a situated approach. She drew her interpretative constructivist approach from Fenwick’s (2000b) review of experiential learning. In her summary of constructivism, Fenwick concluded that the common thread between the variant constructivist views is individuals create understanding and meaning about what they do through reflection.

Fenwick (2000b) claimed that experience is part of all learning. This idea ties in with Daley’s concept that “the context in which professionals practice has a vital role in framing what professionals learn” (2002, p.79). The constructs of experience and context are part of a professional’s learning as framed in Lave and Wenger’s (1991) theory of situated learning in which learning is described as actional. Polanyi and Porsch (1975) made the claim that “all knowing is action” (p. 42). Wenger (1998) asserted that learning is accomplished through activity within a particular community. It is the interaction with other members of the community that creates learning, meaning, understanding, and
identity. As context becomes part of the equation, learning moves from being an isolated individual act to an action oriented social experience. Apprenticeships and mentoring strategies that are used within communities of practice are examples of learning in the social experience. Mentoring strategies are not always formal and are often learned by watching an expert and doing as the expert does (shadowing).

Reflection about what one does adds meaning and growth to what one does. It is the practice of reflection that moves experience from an event to a learning experience. Reflecting on or thinking about what one does (one’s experiences) allows expansion within practice and the ability to develop an innate sense or intuitive response to problems or predicaments encountered within one’s practice. This discussion of the tacit dimension of practice is based on Polanyi’s (1966) premise that “we can know more then we can tell” (p. 4) and is akin to Schön’s (1983) construct of artistry. The implication of reflection as it relates to professional practice is that reflection enables us to continually grapple with and solve increasingly complex problems. This problem solving ability links professional knowledge to expertise.

In the expertise literature, Bereiter and Scardamalia (1993) and Grenier (2006) have moved beyond the established research concerning the acquisition of expertise by focusing on the process of acquiring expertise or exhibiting exceptional performance. These researchers have found that expertise is fluid and is acquired by a deliberate effort or practice. Bereiter and Scardamalia (1993) alleged that most experts acquire their knowledge through experience. However, experience alone is not sufficient to acquire expertise. They suggested that experience can turn novices into experts or experienced
nonexperts. It is their contention that even novices can display expert like behavior. The difference between acquiring expertise or being experienced nonexperts is the process applied to the experience. It is the difference between stretching competencies to meet the task, situation, or problem, continually learning more and applying it to new and challenging situations or using a “best-fit” of what is already known. Bereiter and Scardamalia (1993) stressed that it is this process that makes the difference between an expert career and an ordinary career, the difference between experience as essential to the acquisition of expertise and experience as the continual completion of routine tasks. Grenier (2006) suggested that there is ebb and flow in expertise status depending upon context and changes within the context.

Much of the literature concerning professional identity centers around identifying what one does. As Baumgartner and Merriam (2000) told us, “Work is a central, defining characteristic of who we are as adults” (p. xi). Professional identity is a self-concept in which an individual identifies with the profession. It is strengthened over time and is developed on the job through experience and an understanding of the work involved (Henderson, Cook, Libby, & Zambrano, 2007). The study by Henderson, Cook, Libby, and Zambrano (2007) identified four dimensions of school counselor identity: a commitment to the services provided by counselors, an understanding of the role, the competencies needed, and a community of support including mentors. It appears that the four dimensions of professional identity revealed are also embedded within the concepts of professionalization, expertise, reflection, and situated learning.
Real Estate Studies

Real estate and real estate agents have been studied from several different perspectives. These mirror the literature concerning professions, albeit on a much smaller scale in terms of both breadth and depth. A few studies about the acquisition of knowledge in the professions looked at real estate agents. Weinstein (1998) explored learning how to learn theory by interviewing a small, purposive sample of highly successful real estate brokers. Manning, Weinstein, and Seal (2007) studied the preferred learning techniques and methods of 33 real estate company CEOs. Experienced real estate agents were studied by Smith (1997) in a project that examined change as an impetus for learning within the professionalization process. Professionalization in real estate and the role of women in the process was the topic of a historical study by Karmen (2000). The effects of statutory mandatory and voluntary continuing education on the practices of real estate agents were examined by Pajor (1985). The prediction of success for real estate agents by the use of biodata feedback (Streater, 2000) has also been studied. Sperrazza (2006) studied the relationship of time in the business to compensation and agent-client relationships. A study by Jessee (2007) explored new hire screening processes as a method to decrease early attrition of real estate sales agents. Johnson, Zumpano, and Anderson (2007), in a study of listing as a specialization to income, determined the duties of real estate sales agents both as listing agents and selling agents. They did not investigate how real estate licensees learned these duties or how to perform them.
A dissertation by Frohriep (2009) examined factors that contributed to an agent’s survival in the real estate profession. There were no studies found that examined the development or developmental processes and strategies of real estate agents. Nor were any studies found that focused on real estate practitioners who are newly licensed and in the initial phase of their careers.

Problem Statement

The development and learning processes of real estate agents and their development and learning processes are under-researched subjects. This gap in the literature offers a significant opportunity for contributing to the understanding of the developmental process of professionals in an industry with minimal educational requirements. First, there is a dearth of studies examining the novice or beginner’s phase of professionals’ careers. No studies were found that examined the initial career trajectories of real estate agents’ developmental processes and strategies. Second, most of the studies that were found examined professions with lengthy educational requirements or were studies about those embarking on a prolonged period of study for their chosen professions. There are studies that examine beginners or novices: accountants (Anderson-Gough, Grey, & Robson, 1998), first-year teachers (Brott & Kajs, 2001), first-year health students (Adams, Hean, Sturgis, & Clark, 2006), and school counselors (Henderson, et al, 2007).

This study seeks to indirectly ascertain information on socialization processes used by individuals to develop an affinity for or identification with a profession that has
minimal entry level educational requirements. There were no studies found that examined how real estate agents affiliate with their profession or develop a professional identity. Third, this study should provide information that will indicate the processes and strategies used and/or needed for individuals to become effective in their workplaces. This study should reveal insights how newly licensed real estate agents learn the business.

Real estate has minimum standards for entry into the profession. In Illinois, there is a pre-licensing educational requirement of 45 classroom hours. After completing the pre-licensing class, a potential real estate agent must also pass a 140-multiple-choice questions examination. No literature was found that examined what newly licensed real estate agents do to establish and foster their careers.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is threefold. First, it is to develop an understanding of newly licensed real estate agents. This study will examine the perceptions of new agents about the real estate industry, how new agents come to identify with their profession, and how new agents ascertain and develop the knowledge and skills needed to build their practices. Second, its purpose is to add to the theoretical understanding and literature base of professional development and workplace learning. Third, this study has the very practical purpose of using the data to develop a meaningful and practical curriculum for the real estate sales pre-licensing course. The ultimate aim is to influence policy and legislation to implement substantive changes in educational and testing requirements for real estate licensure that reflect the needs of the newly licensed practitioner.
The Research Questions

The main research question that guided this study was: With minimal educational entry requirements, how do newly licensed real estate agents develop their careers? This guiding question was supported by the following questions:

1. What reasons do newly licensed real estate agents report for selecting real estate as a career?
2. How do newly licensed real estate agents develop the knowledge and skills needed for practice?
3. How do newly licensed real estate agents perceive their roles as real estate agents?

Significance of the Study

Little is known about the developmental processes of newly licensed agents. This study provides three major implications for the research about professionals. First, it expands the research in how individuals develop their professional identities. This is noteworthy because of the minimal educational requirements required of real estate agents in Illinois. Since it is longitudinal in nature, it captures the participants’ initial impressions and changes that occur within their first year in the real estate business. Second, it offers an understanding of how professionals learn in the beginning stages of their careers. Third, it presents information that may be useful in designing and implementing effective and practical educational and training programs for newly licensed real estate agents.
Definitions

Clients—Illinois License Law distinguishes between customers and clients. Clients are those consumers who have fiduciary/agency relationships with their real estate agents. Customers are those consumers who are simply receiving services without agency representation. Client and customer are used interchangeably in this study without consideration of the legal nuances and differentiation in the level of representation.

CMA—This is an acronym for competitive or comparable market analysis. It is used by real estate agents when they are working with sellers to price their properties, and with buyers when formulating offers. It usually has three sections: homes that are currently on the market, homes that have sold, and homes that failed to sell (expired listings).

Customers—Customers are those consumers who are provided services by a real estate agent but are not represented by the agent. There is no fiduciary or agency relationship between the real estate agent and the customer. Even though Illinois License Law distinguishes between customers and clients, this study uses the terms interchangeably.

Expired listings—Expired listings are those homes that were marketed by a real estate agent and failed to sell during the term of the listing or marketing agreement.

Formal learning—For the purposes of this study formal learning was construed to be any required educational opportunity. There are two instances of formal learning that were required of the participants in this study: the state mandated 45-hour pre-licensing course and the Realtor® required new member orientation program.
**Fsbo**—For sale by owner (fsbo) is an abbreviation used by real estate agents when referring to unrepresented sellers. It is usually pronounced *fizzbo*.

**Informal learning**—*Informal learning* is defined as any learning opportunities that are self-directed activities and those learning opportunities that involve learning through experience or experiential learning.

**Newly licensed agents**—For the purpose of this study, newly licensed agents were defined as those licensees who were experiencing their first year in the business.

**Nonhuman resources**—This term was used by Tough (1971, 1979) to describe material resources including publications, videos, audio tapes, and various technological sources of information. Tough’s nonhuman resources will be referred to as material resources throughout this study.

**REALTORS®**—These are members of the National Association of REALTORS® and only those real estate agents or licensees who are members may be called by this nationally-registered trademark. For the purposes of this research, and within the trademark guidelines of the National Association of Realtors®, the capitalization rules of the trademark were not used and the trademark symbol was not used. However, the Realtor® was capitalized throughout the study.

**Overview of the Study**

This study is presented in seven chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the topic of learning and development in the professions with an emphasis on real estate. It provides a description of the problem, states the purpose and significance of the study, provides the
theoretical framework, iterates the research questions, and provides the researcher’s background. It also defines terms that are germane to the study. Chapter 2 is a review of the literature that is relevant to this study. Chapter 3 describes the research methodology. Chapter 4 introduces the participants and provides their motivations for selecting real estate and their company affiliations. It also provides a brief review of what they did to get started in the business as well as some of the frustrations that they encountered. Chapters 5 and 6 provide the findings of this study. Chapter 5 covers how the participants learned the business. It focuses on their formal (pre-licensing class and new member orientation programs) and their informal learning opportunities, which rely heavily on self-directed learning and experience or experiential learning. Chapter 6 presents how the participants developed their professional identities from their initial (pre-licensing) impressions of real estate agents to their developing sense of what the roles of a real estate agent are. It talks about their impressions of success and what they construe the work of real estate agents to be. Chapter 7 answers the research questions, presents general findings, and offers implications and suggestions for practice and future research.
CHAPTER 2
RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

Learning through work is often categorized as a form of informal learning (Billet, 2001; Eraut, 2004) and makes up the majority of learning that occurs at work (Leslie, Aring & Brand, 1998; Lohman, 2000). Informal learning recognizes not only “the social significance of learning from other people” (Eraut, 2004, p. 247), but it also relies on personal knowledge, which is “what individual persons bring to situations that enables them to think, interact, and perform” (Eraut, 2007, p. 406). Informal learning in the workplace occurs through a variety of strategies and in the context of social practice, i.e., situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Billet (2001) claimed that “learning is ongoing and unavoidable as we think and act” (p. 30). Le Clus and Volet (2008) said,

Learning in the workplace, from the perspective of informal learning, is meaningful, everyday learning and participation in work activities. It involves making sense of the daily learning that occurs in organizations and involves examining embedded knowledge and encouraging learners to be self-directed and reflect on their learning experiences. (p. 2)

Learning in the workplace occurs because of everyday participation in work activities. It is the making sense of these activities that creates meaningful learning in the workplace (Le Clus, 2011). It is through lived experiences that individuals attempt to make sense of the world in which they live and work. It is through a constructivist
perspective—interpreting tasks and activities by blending what individuals know with what they experience—that workers construct meaningful knowledge, by making sense of what is encountered (Fenwick, 2001). Consequently, learning may occur in many different ways. Workplace learning and constructivist theory are deeply intertwined like the words from an old song, “you can’t have one without the other.”

Constructivist theory is the source of many workplace strategies and techniques. Constructivist theory “rests on the notion that there is an innate human drive to make sense of the world” (Kerka, 1997, p. 2). Constructivism holds that individuals create new knowledge by “integrating new information and experiences into what they have previously come to understand” (p. 2). This study uses constructivist theory as a source for workplace learning strategies and the role experience plays in workplace learning. “Indeed, aspects of constructivism, especially the social construction of knowledge, are central to self-directed learning, transformational learning, experiential learning, reflective practice, situated cognition, and communities of practice” (Merriam & Bierema, 2014, p. 37). It examines experience as a source of identity in the workplace. It looks at the individual’s efforts to make sense of the workplace through self-directed learning activities, experiential learning, reflective practice, situated cognition, and communities of practice.

Constructivism

“Constructivist theory rests on the assumption that knowledge is constructed by learners as they attempt to make sense of their experiences” (Driscoll, 2005, p. 387). It
works on the basic premise that knowledge is created by linking new information or experiences with prior or past experiences (Bruner, 1990; Novak & Gowin, 1984).

Constructivism is not a single theory; it is a perspective that has multiple roots that draws from various theories (Driscoll, 2005; Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Some of the theorists that constructivism draws from are adult educators Lindeman (1989), Dewey (1938), Piaget (1969), and Vygotsky (1978). Even though Piaget and Vygotsky developed their educational philosophies by studying children, their emphasis on experience influenced the constructivist perspective (Driscoll, 2005; Merriam & Bierema, 2014) and is applicable to adult education and workplace learning.

Constructivist perspectives differ somewhat in whether learning (the making of meaning) is an individual activity or whether it is a social activity. As Cobb (1994) stated, “considerable debate focuses on whether mind is located in the head or in the individual-in-social-action, and whether development is cognitive self-organization or enculturation into established practices” (p. 13). Piaget’s (1969) constructivist orientation is that meaning making is personal and, thus, is individually oriented. Meaning making is dependent upon an individual’s existing schema adapting to or modifying current schema. Driver, Asoko, Leach, Mortimer, & Scott (1994) reinforced the Vygostkian social constructivist perspective:

Knowledge and understandings, including scientific understandings, are constructed when individuals engage socially in talk and activity about shared problems or tasks. Making meaning is thus a dialogic process involving persons-in-conversation, and learning is seen as the process by which individuals are introduced to a culture by more skilled members. (Driver et al., 1994, p. 7)
Cobb (1994) contended the individual/personal and social orientations are complementary perspectives.

**Piaget**

Piaget distinguished three types of knowledge: physical knowledge, logical and mathematical knowledge, and social knowledge. It is social knowledge that has the greatest influence on constructivist theory especially in the workplace. “Social knowledge is culture-specific and can be learned only from other people within one’s cultural group” (Driscoll, 2005, p. 193, bold and italics in the original). Social knowledge, then, may be likened to situated cognition and communities of practice. Social knowledge is learned from interacting with other people and highlights the accumulation of knowledge through acting together with other individuals.

Piaget (1969, 1954/1999) identified three developmental processes: assimilation, accommodation, and equilibration. Assimilation is fitting new experiences into existing schema. It is taking the new information and using it within the framework of our experience. When we are unable to integrate the experience or information into existing schema, the schema is adapted to integrate or accommodate the new event. Assimilation is fitting the event into our world view; accommodation is modifying our world view so the new event becomes part of our new schema or view. Assimilation and accommodation are interdependent processes. Equilibration is the term that encompasses the process of both assimilation and accommodation.
The main notion of Piaget that carries into workplace learning is that individuals create meaning and understanding from interacting with their environments. When this interaction occurs, one either incorporates the new experience into an existing framework or one adjusts his or her existing framework to incorporate the new experience.

Assimilation and accommodation are the equivalent of building knowledge by hooking new facts and information to what one already knows. In other words, one creates meaning and understanding from one’s prior and current experiences (Pratt, 2002). This building of meaning is found in Dewey’s (1997) idea of the learning process where a person reacts to an experience, learns from it, and expands one’s knowledge based on the continuity of experiences.

**Vygotsky**

The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is at the heart of Vygotsky’s (1978) developmental theory. The ZPD has been “referred to as the theoretical underpinnings of scaffolding” (Verenikina, 2003, p. 1), despite the fact that Vygotsky did not use the term scaffolding (Stone, 1998). The ZPD is the gap between what one can do (developed capabilities) and what one cannot do yet (undeveloped capabilities). Vygotsky (1978) defined the ZPD as: “the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (pp. 88-89). It is in the ZPD that one develops capabilities with appropriate assistance or guidance. The ZPD shrinks as one learns to do more because the gap between what one
can do and what one cannot do becomes smaller especially in relation to specific tasks or learning goals as one is able to do more without guidance. Vygotsky contended that it is through the interaction of others, particularly one who has experienced or mastered a skill, that growth or skill acquisition occurs. The activity that occurs in the ZPD may be considered scaffolding. Scaffolding is made up of the actions that a master or expert takes to enable a beginner or novice to perform at a higher level (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976).

**Scaffolding**

Scaffolding is a support system that allows a learner to “move forward and continue to build new competencies” (Berk & Winsler, 1995, p. 26). It “comprises providing learners with opportunities to practise (sic) independently those tasks for which they are ready while monitoring their performance” (Billett, 2001, p.148).

Scaffolding not only includes the expert-novice relationship but the sequencing of tasks that move from the simple to the complex (Pratt, 2002). Scaffolding as a workplace learning strategy has been used effectively by instructors in developing pre-service teachers (Kindle & Schmidt, 2013) and by Nielsen (2008) in his study of apprentice bakers. Kindle and Schmidt identified three types of scaffolding. These were: modeling, the instructor acting as an expert peer rather than an authority, and a transfer of responsibility, which may be likened to Vygotsky’s ZPD. Fading is an important part of scaffolding. Fading is the “gradual removal of support until learners can independently perform the task proficiently” (Billett, 2001, p. 149).
Nielsen’s (2008) study on apprentice bakers showed scaffold instruction accomplished three things. It provided the apprentice bakers with increasing responsibilities, it supported their identities as bakers, and it provided them with an understanding of the entire process. The idea of scaffolding, as evidenced by Nielsen’s study, is akin to cognitive apprenticeships where modeling and coaching are significant strategies for learning. Scaffolding, with its reliance and guidance from an expert, opens the door to the workplace strategy of mentoring.

An essential element of learning in the workplace through scaffolding and cognitive apprenticeships is the authenticity of the learning environment. In other words, learning is situated in the context of the experience. The learning is deeper and more effective when the context is real (actually occurring in the workplace) or very closely resembles or authenticates the workplace (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989). It is the workplace context that fulfills the constructivist notion that learners acquire knowledge in information-rich settings (Kirschner, 1992).

Foley and Kaiser (2013), in discussing learning transfer, expanded the idea of scaffolding to include support in various forms: written, audio, visual, and tactile resources. It may be providing the proper environment, doing demonstrations, offering step-by-step guidance, or creating group or community activities where individuals learn from each other. Foley and Kaiser also emphasized the idea of authenticity is scaffolding resources, “The key to the effectiveness of the resource is relevance” (p. 10). This expanded concept of scaffolding reflects the self-directed formats and planners as constructed by Tough (1971, 1979).
Scaffolding, which is based on Vygotsky’s ideas, introduces the workplace concepts of mentoring, coaching, modeling, and learning in contexts which is oftentimes known as situated cognition.

**Mentoring**

Mentoring has its roots in Greek mythology when Zeus asks Athena to watch over his son, Telemachus. Athena takes on the form of Mentor so she can fulfill her assignment to guide and coach Telemachus. It appears that from the role’s inception, a mentor is a wise advisor or guide. Mentoring is often described as a relationship in which an individual “provides guidance, support, knowledge, and opportunity” for an agreed upon period of time to an individual seeking guidance (Burlew, 1991, p. 214). Mentoring may be especially beneficial to new entrants into a profession (McMahon, 2001) because mentors “help people identify their learning needs, find self-directed learning opportunities, and support the learning process” (Fenwick, 2003, p. 147).

Cheetham and Chivers (2001) observed that “Modern day mentors can perform a number of functions—coach, counsellor, role model, sounding board, adviser, confidant, etc.” (p. 259). Boud and Garrick (1999) claimed that mentoring can be effective as a guided learning strategy or scaffold for the new or beginning worker and as an on-going practice throughout one’s career.

In a study exploring mentoring pre-service teachers, Boreen and Niday (2000) discovered that mentoring can help newcomers to a profession feel a part of the profession through the interaction novices have with experienced professionals. They noted that
exemplary mentoring may be done by modeling, illustrating, affirming, questioning, qualifying, and reflecting (Boreen & Niday, 2000). Billet (2001), in an earlier study of mentors or learning guides, noted similar strategies: modeling, coaching, questioning, developing diagrams and models, and creating analogies. A key benefit of the expert as mentor is to “make what is tacit accessible to novices” (Billet, 1994, p. 9) to provide an understanding of why and how things are done in the actual or authentic environment of the workplace itself.

Formal and informal mentoring are two specific forms of mentoring (Bynum, 2015). Formal mentoring programs are endorsed by the business organization that offers them. Formal mentoring processes are designed to have experienced persons help less experienced individuals develop their knowledge and skills (Klinge, 2015). These tend to be very structured; the protégé is typically assigned to a specific mentor, which creates a formal relationship (Bynum, 2015).

The flaws in formal mentoring programs include a mismatch of mentor and protégé (mentee), mentor time constraints, and mismatch of the expectations of the relationship (Patton et al., 2005; Fenwick, 2001). Mentors may be reluctant to take on this role because mentoring may be viewed as an “intensification of work roles” (Billet, 2003, p. 106), oftentimes, without additional compensation. Other factors inhibiting mentoring are lack of organizational and/or managerial support, lack of opportunities for collaboration with other mentors, and lack of acknowledgement of their roles (Billet, 2003).

Informal mentoring relationships occur by happenstance. They have less structure and occur spontaneously (Herrbach, Mignonac, & Richebé, 2011). Because they occur
spontaneously, informal mentoring relationships oftentimes involve peer mentoring. Peer mentoring is advantageous for the protégé since “A peer mentor can assist the protégé with more significant and current issues related to the workplace without fear of judgment or disappointment than with a traditionally assigned mentor” (Bynum, 2015, p. 70). Informal mentoring is not recognized by the corporate structure and, thus, it is self-directed (Cox, 2005). Protégés seek mentors that they think will provide the most effective learning and develop opportunities. The best informal mentoring relationships are reciprocal and collaborative (Klinge, 2015).

As noted by Zachary (2000, 2002) and Fenwick (2003), mentoring helps individuals to find self-directed learning opportunities. By extension, self-directed learning projects may also be discovered through the use of various informal learning tactics including scaffolding and its related strategies.

Coaching

Cheetham and Chivers (2001) stated, “Coaching is understood as: one to one learning support tailored to the needs of an individual” (p. 257, italics in the original). Coaching is a form of guided learning that moves a beginner towards expertise in workplace activities. “In coaching, strategies such as hints, feedback, and clues, as well as demonstrations and modeling ‘tricks of the trade’ can be used to assist the development of the required workplace procedures” (Billett, 2001, p. 147). Coaching involves commentary that lets the learner/worker know how they are doing or by providing the
learner or beginner with an understanding or insight that would not necessarily be learned by just being able to efficiently complete a task (Billett, 2001).

**Modeling**

“Modeling is the process whereby experts perform a task with learners observing and building a mental model of the demonstrated task and the requirements for performance” (Billett, 2001, p. 145). Modeling allows the beginner to see a task in its entirety from beginning to end. Modeling demonstrations, with experienced persons articulating their thoughts, “ease the learning of knowledge that is not accessible by visual means alone” (Billett, 2001, p. 147). Modeling can be done intentionally one-on-one between an expert or experienced person and a beginner or it may be done informally as the beginner observes what transpires in the workplace (Billett, 2001). Modeling is a form of learning through observing. Bandura (1977, 1986) created a model of learning by observation that has four steps: attention, retention, production, and motivation.

**Self-directed Learning (SDL)**

“I think that self-directed learning is the best way to learn” (Knowles, 1975, p. 10). Self-directed learning is most often associated with Knowles (1975) through his model of andragogy. There are six assumptions in his model; four were in the original model (Knowles, 1975) and two were added in subsequent models (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998; Merriam & Bierema, 2014). The assumptions are: a. self-concept. As one matures one becomes less dependent and moves to becoming self-directed; b. Adults
have an increasing reservoir of experience that contributes to their learning and development; c. Readiness to learn. Individuals become ready to learn when they experience or perceive a need to know something usually to cope with a real-life task or problem; d. Orientation to learning. “Learners see education as a process of developing increased competence to achieve their full potential in life” (Knowles, 1975, p.44); e. motivation. Adults are driven by internal motivators or pressures more than external motivations; f. The need to know. Adults want to know why they need to know something. Oftentimes the need is predicated upon discovering a gap in where they are and where they want to be (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998).

The gap may be understood from two findings of Queeny and Smutz (1990) in a project that developed a self-assessment system for professionals: a. What professionals need to learn and what they want to learn are not always the same. b. Professionals are not necessarily interested in the learning needs of their professions but are focused on their personal learning needs. In other words, they want to learn what they perceive to be important for their professional development and success. This sentiment is expressed by Dačiulytė and Pinchuk (2010) in their study of employees’ attitudes towards self-directed learning. They concluded that self-directed learning is a continuous learning process that allows individuals to continually update workplace skills, develop new skills, and realize learning is important for seeking better results at work.

Self-directed learning can be seen as self-teaching and as autodidaxy, which is self-autonomy (Candy, 1991). Self-directed learning gives the learner control over what is
learned and how it is learned. It provides the adult learner with ownership of the learning particularly within the context it is needed.

Tough (1979) suggested that most adults have participated in a learning project based on self-directed learning. He said that “most learning projects seek established knowledge, which is gained directly or indirectly from other people who already possess it” (Tough, 1979, p. 35). There are a handful of reasons why people embark on self-directed learning projects: a. Preparing for an occupation and then keeping up. b. Learning specific tasks and problems on the job. c. Improving some broad area of competence. d. Learning for home or personal responsibilities. e. Learning for leisure, and, f. Exhibiting curiosity about a particular subject.

Typical deterrents to learning projects are lack of awareness that help is needed (i.e., “I don’t know what I don’t know”), uncertainty about steps need to be taken, uncertainty about how or where to get help (i.e., “Who do I ask about that or where do I find what I need?”), inability to reach the resource person (i.e., “My mentor is not available, not returning my calls”), and difficulty during contact with the resource (lack of communication) (Tough, 1979).

Basically, self-directed learning is learning “in which learners have the fundamental responsibility for their own educational experiences” (Park, 2008, p. 1). Straka (1999) developed a two-shell model of motivated self-directed learning, which described self-directed learning as

a process in which a person approaches a learning subject, i.e., a perceived part of his/her environmental conditions, with an interest under contentual (sic) and
procedural perspectives, applies strategies of resource management, sequencing, and acquisition, controls their application meta-cognitively and motivationally, as well as evaluates the achieved learning result by diagnosing and attributing it. (p. 10)

Ellinger (2004) succinctly ascribed the process to four steps: ascertaining learning needs (“What do I need or want to learn”), preparing goals (“What is my plan? How will I accomplish what I want to learn?”), establishing resources (“What learning tools will I use?”), and assessing the learning outcomes (“Did I learn what I set out to learn?”).

In essence, self-directed learning is ideal for the workplace because it gives one the opportunity to learn what they want or need to know in a timely fashion as determined by the individual. Self-directed learning is essential for those who are independent contractors and responsible for developing new skills and improving their current skills. “Up-skilling and lifelong learning become the new buzz words … for individuals who are self-employed or managing their own businesses, lifelong learning becomes essential if they are to be successful” (Roodhouse, 2010, p. 18).

Experience and Experiential Learning

Experience has a profound effect on our lives. Our experiences shape who we are and how we perceive our roles. It affects what we learn and how we learn. Fenwick (2003) described different aspects of experience. There are direct embodied experiences, vicarious experiences, simulated experiences, recalled experiences, collaborative experiences, and introspective experience. Direct embodied experiences are ones we encounter directly. Vicarious experience is learning through the experience of others.
Simulated experiences are planned and designed to replicate a direct experience in a contrived or created environment. Role playing is an example of simulated experience. Recalled experience is when an experience surfaces from the memory bank and affects what one is currently experiencing. Collaborative experience is gained through a community of experience when individuals share through joint action and conversation in creating meaning. This form of experience is social in nature and is evidenced in situated cognition and communities of practice.

Experience permeates adult learning and adult education literature. Constructivist theorists “share the common assumption that learning is how people make sense of their experience–learning is the construction of meaning from experience” (Merriam & Bierema, 2014, p. 36). Early adult educators Lindeman (1989) and Dewey (1938) posited that experience is integral to learning. Knowles (1980) recognized the importance of experience for adult learners.

Lindeman

Lindeman (1989) is called the father of modern adult education (Quigley, 2000). He held four assumptions about adult education. First is the belief that “education is life” (p. 4) or, as Fenwick (2003) stated, “learning is everyday experiences” (p. 7). The second assumption is that education is a process revolving around non-vocational ideals. “Its purpose is to put meaning into the whole of life” (p. 5). Third is the idea that “adult education will be via the route of situations” (p. 6, italics in the original). The fourth
supposition is that “the resource of highest value in adult education is the learner’s experience” (p. 6, italics in the original).

Lindeman’s (1989) assumptions about adult education provide the seeds of constructivism: creating meaning from experiences, and the notion of learning by doing.

**Dewey**

Dewey (1938) posited that “all genuine education comes about through experience” (p. 13). Further, he held that all education is a social and interactive process whereby individuals learn from their experiences. Dewey contended that not every experience is necessarily a learning event. Two ingredients are necessary for an experience to be considered a learning event. There must be continuity and interaction. In other words, individuals need to relate or connect the experience to what the person already knows, and learners must actively collaborate with and within the environment so that seemingly disparate experiences or events coalesce into a unified experience. Experience is not a series of isolated events but a coherent whole. Communities of practice are evidenced in Dewey’s social nature of learning.

**Experiential Learning Models**

“The term experiential learning is often used both to distinguish the flow of ongoing meaning-making in our lives from theoretical knowledge and to distinguish nondirected ‘informal’ life experiences from ‘formal’ education” (Fenwick, 2003, p. 1, italics in the original). Kolb (1984) suggested that experiential learning is the process that
links personal development, work, and education. This section focuses on three models of experiential learning: Kolb’s (1984), Jarvis’s (1987), and Davies’s (2008).

**Kolb’s Model**

Kolb’s (1984) defined learning as “*the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience*” (p.38, italics in the original). He conceived experiential learning as having four modes: concrete experience, observations and reflections, formation of abstract concepts and generalizations, and active experimentation. The model shows that one has an experience, reflects on the experience, which generates conclusions as one learns from the experience, and lastly, one tries what one has learned from the experience. The model is depicted as a continuous cycle that begins with a concrete experience and moves through the four modes. For learning to occur, an individual must have abilities in each of these modes (Kolb, 1984). It may be perceived as having the experience, then asking “what,” “so what,” and “now what” (Peace Corps, 2004).

**Criticism of Kolb’s Model**

Fenwick’s (2003) critique of Kolb’s model focused on its lack of context. Kolb’s model does not address the learner’s background or environment. Jarvis (1987, 2006) thought Kolb’s model was too simplistic and omitted several things including:

- The person, so that he fails to note the way that the person is changed;
- The bodily sensations of experience;
- The influence of the social situation and, therefore, the social construction of experience;
- The process of reason and, therefore, planning;
- The possibility that we may not always universalize (sic) our experience;
- Emotional and practical learning. (Jarvis, 2006, pp. 10-11)

Jarvis (1987) also suggested that even though Kolb’s model is portrayed as cyclical and sequential one does not always follow the cycle. One may revisit a step before moving forward in the cycle. In other words, there is a back-and-forth motion that is not depicted in the model.

Davies’s (2008) criticism of Kolb’s (1984) model suggests that not all experiences follow the sequential or cyclical pattern proposed in Kolb’s model. Davies proposed that oftentimes one must return from abstract conceptualization to the concrete experience because one cannot garner satisfactory conclusions that one would want to test or use after the initial reflection. He suggested that in some instances, learning from experience is less a well-defined pattern than it is a back-and-forth pattern. It may be likened to the difference between a systematic step-by-step process and a systemic process.

Jarvis’s Model

Jarvis’s model is considered a holistic model of learning (Illeris, 2007) and was developed because Jarvis “became profoundly dissatisfied with the many approaches to learning, many of which were psychological and based on work with animals or children” (Jarvis, 2006, p. 8). He thought Kolb’s model was too simplistic but it was the stimulus for the research he conducted in developing his own model. He had 200 subjects use Kolb’s
model as the starting point to describe four different learning incidents that they had experienced. The subjects were asked to reconstruct Kolb’s model to fit their learning incidents. Jarvis collected the subjects’ models and created his learning process model.

As Jarvis (2006) developed his model, he defined learning as

*The combination of processes whereby the whole person – body (genetic, physical and biological) and mind (knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs and senses): experiences a social situation, the perceived content of which is then transformed cognitively, emotively or practically (or through any combination) and integrated into the person’s biography resulting in a changed (or more experienced) person.* (p. 13, italics in the original)

Jarvis’s model is based on his premise that all experience occurs within a social situation. “Learning is an interactive phenomenon, not an isolated internal process” (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 285). Learning does not occur in “splendid isolation” (Jarvis, 1987). It is a non-sequential, flexible model. An individual enters a situation where the experience or episode may or may not produce learning. The model shows nine routes or processes a person may take from an experience. These processes are categorized as non-learning responses, non-reflective learning responses, and reflective learning responses. Jarvis, like Dewey, believed that not every experience is a learning event. The non-learning responses occur when an individual finds nothing new in the experience (presumption), does not take the time to think about or reflect on the experience (non-consideration), or does not accept the conclusions that were learned (rejection) (Jarvis, 1987).

The non-reflective responses are preconscious, practice, and memorization. A preconscious response “occurs to every person as a result of having experiences in daily living that are not really thought about but merely experienced” (Jarvis, 1987, p. 31). Preconscious learning responses may be considered tacit learning or incidental learning. “Tacit knowledge typically resides in the context, outside of a person’s main focus of attention, and is thus a fertile ground for informal or incidental learning” (Marsick & Watkins, 1990, p. 23), while incidental learning “is learning which occurs as a byproduct of something else” (Marsick & Watkins, 1990, p. 33). Preconscious learning is when “A person unconsciously internalizes something” (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 284).
Practice is modeling or conscious imitation of a skill until it is acquired (Jarvis, 1987). Memorization is when “learners are expected to acquire the information with which they have been presented and learn it, so they can reproduce it at a later stage” (Jarvis, 1987, p. 33).

The reflective responses are contemplation, reflective practice, and experimental learning. Contemplation is “merely to consider it and make an intellectual decision about it” (Jarvis, 1987, p. 34). Reflective practice is essentially problem solving (Jarvis, 1987; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Experimental learning is acquisition of new knowledge through trying things in practice.

Essentially, Jarvis’s model shows that learning is “the transformation of experience into knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Jarvis, 1987, p. 8). Learners have nine responses or routes that can be taken with each event or experience that they encounter.

**Davies’s Model**

Experience is at the center of Davies’s (2008) model and is depicted as data gathering. It combines elements of the Kolb (1984) model and the Jarvis (1987, 1999) model and is more comprehensive than either of those models. Davies claimed that experience has two common characteristics regardless of how one defines experience. Experiences are active and they are personal. There are two other features of experiences that are meaningful and contribute to learning—length and complexity.

The model displays 12 elements, all of which play a part in making sense of an experience. Davies placed all of the elements in cloud-like shapes because “it is generally more helpful to think of the elements as changeable, open to interpretation and
reinterpretation, rather than fixed in nature” (Davies, 2008, p. 21). The exception to the cloud shape is the element reflection and insight, which is represented by a prism.

By using the simile of the prism my intention is to suggest that a mass of data, gathered from any, possibly all, of the above five data sources, may be separated out, in the same way as a prism splits white light into its seven components, into discrete streams of lessons from an experience. (Davies, 2008, p. 31-32)

There are five elements that are sources or potential sources of information. (They are labeled E, F, G, H, and J on the model.) These include our own observations. Even when we are not directly involved in an experience, episode or event, we can hear, see, or feel something that becomes part of our experience indirectly. Observations of fellow participants may be elicited through respectful interaction which is “a willingness both to speak and to listen” (Davies, 2008, p. 98). It often involves asking open-ended questions and obviously involves two or more equal partners—group interaction. Observations of informed non-participants are those individuals in our networks or communities of practice. Davies stated that there are two qualities that informed non-participants need: experience and acceptability. Formal knowledge “is information which already exists in the public domain, available, at least in theory, to everyone” (Davies, 2008, p. 107). It is essentially material resources and may be likened to Tough’s (1979) “non-human resources.” Formal knowledge may also be derived from people by relying on subject matter experts and their technical knowledge and expertise. Our own experience is a fundamental data gathering source. “There can be no doubt that we learn most from our
own experiences, the things we did, that happened to us, that we saw, heard, felt, and so on” (Davies, 2008, p. 93).

The next group of clustered elements includes expectations, emotions, and opportunity.

*Expectations* are what we were thinking about *before* the experience; *emotions* are triggered *by* the experience, but they are both states of mind and capable of being described at a moment in time. *Opportunity*, by contrast, is a period of time, possible quite short, but for more complex experiences quite long. (Davies, 2008, p. 21, italics in the original).

Davies (2008) contended that previous experience, formal knowledge, and others’ views are the principal sources of one’s expectations. Learning occurs when expectations based on prior experience are confounded or disrupted. The emotions involved in an experience make the event and the learning that occurs memorable. Opportunities are categorized as self-compelled, directed, or discretionary. Discretionary opportunities are equivalent to Schön’s (1983) “reflection-in-action” or deliberate reflection.

An individual’s learning orientation is not static; it has a developing nature (Davies, 2008):

The essential point here is that, as individuals, we are capable of changing and developing throughout the whole of our lives as we interact with objects and other people, their ideas, and what they have done or made, and that this change and development applies to our learning orientation. This, in turn, influences how, and what, we learn from experience. (p.62)

Davies determined that there were four subelements in one’s learning orientation: one’s personality, one’s ability, one’s learned behavior, and one’s memory. Personality and
identity are often interchangeable terms (Davies, 2008). “Personality, in its various aspects, influences our predisposition towards learning from experience” (p. 65). Ability “tends to influence what and how much we learn” (p. 65). One’s ability (the combination of intelligence and development) may be diminished through natural or ageing processes or through disuse. Ability may be enhanced through deliberate practice. Learned behaviors are the techniques and lessons that one learns from an experience. Davies (2008) described learned behaviors:

Essentially, they are review procedures, ways of looking back on an event, seeking to note what happened and drawing out the various things that made them happen, and checking that the lessons learned were reliable. They contribute to the overall processes of reflection, and are potentially very valuable contributors to learning because they focus so closely on particular experiences. (p. 73)

Without memory, learning would be useless (Davies, 2008). “Unless we are able to retain the essentials of an experience in our mind for as long as necessary, which may be months or even years, we will be unable to learn its lessons” (p. 26).

The last cluster of elements in the Davies (2008) model is reflection, insight, credibility checking, and experience bank. Reflection is described as an incubation period or thinking about something that may lead to an insight or an “aha moment.” Oftentimes the products or outcomes of reflection are knowledge, understanding, judgment, and skills. Knowledge often answers the questions what, where, who, when, and how (Davies, 2008). Understanding answers the questions why and how and usually augments learning (Davies, 2008). Judgment increases both knowledge and understanding since judgments assume knowledge of basic facts of an event or situation and an understanding of the dynamics of
the event. Skills are developed through understanding and judgment (Davies, 2008). The products or outcomes of reflection are intertwined and are inter-reliant. Credibility checking is validating what one learns from an experience. “Credibility checking means taking steps to ensure that the conclusions or lessons drawn from an experience are justified in terms of the various data available” (p. 146).

An experience bank is simply the accumulation or repository of our experiences and the conclusions drawn from those experiences whether they make sense or not. The experience bank embraces facts, such as hard data, impressions and beliefs, as well as methods and procedures for doing things. At the end of a rich learning experience, any of all of these may be increased in our experience bank, and available, assuming that memory does not let us down, for using in their own right or for helping to make sense of another experience. (Davies, 2008, p. 155)

All three of the models discussed in this chapter rely heavily on reflection. The next section looks at reflection and focuses on Schön’s (1983) concepts of reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action, and Boud, Keogh, & Walker’s (1985) reflection process.

Reflection and Reflective Practice

Reflection is difficult to define because of its many connotations (Moon, 1999, 2004). Jordi (2011) claimed that “reflection is common to a range of learning theories and therefore carries various meanings and differing significance” (p. 181). One reflects on something to consider it in greater detail. Reflection often has a useful purpose (Dewey, 1997), “although conclusions to complicated issues can just ‘pop up’ without our being
This notion of reflection suggests that intuition or insight and reflection may overlap or as Davies’s model suggested that insight and reflection are separate but strands of the same process. A third understanding of reflection “is that it involves complicated mental processing of issues for which there is no obvious solution” (Moon, 1999, p. 4). Moon (2004) expanded her definition of common-sense reflection:

Reflection is a form of mental processing –like a form of thinking –that we may use to fulfill purpose or to achieve some anticipated outcome or we may simply be “reflective” and then an outcome can be unexpected. Reflection is applied to relatively complicated, ill-structured ideas for which there is not an obvious solution and is largely based on the further processing of knowledge and understanding that we already possess. (p. 82, italics in the original)

This common sense definition of reflection ties together prior experiences with the current experience or situation. It is similar to Schön’s (1983) construct of reflective process and the reflection process created by Boud, Keogh, and Walker (1985).

Schön (1983) introduced two concepts of reflection: reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Reflection-in-action occurs while working on a task when:

the practitioner allows himself to experience surprise, puzzlement, or confusion in a situation, which he finds uncertain or unique. He reflects on the phenomenon before him, and on the prior understandings, which have been implicit in his behavior. He carries out an experiment, which serves to generate both a new understanding of the phenomenon and a change in the situation. (Schön, 1983, p. 68)

When one is working on a project or is involved in a work-related task and things are not working or they do not seem right is when one exercises reflection-in-action. Reflection-
on-action is thinking about and reflecting on the event after it occurs. It is the deliberate review of one’s actions (Munby, 1989). To Schön (1983), reflection assists practitioners in making sense of the messy reality in which they operate or work.

For Boud, Keogh, and Walker (1985), reflection is an activity in which individuals “recapture their experience, think about it, mull it over and evaluate it” (p. 19).

Accordingly, reflection has three aspects: returning to the experience, attending to or connecting feelings, and evaluating the experience (Boud et al., 1985). The affective nature of reflection is a necessary part of learning from the experience. Positive feelings may help one continue on despite what may appear as overwhelming challenges in a given situation. One’s negative emotions, which create barriers to learning, must be “discharged or transformed in a way that enables us to regain our flexibility and creativity in responding to the current situation” (Boud et al., 1985, p. 29). This model is somewhat like Schön’s (1983) notion of reflection-on-action in its emphasis on returning to the experience and is reminiscent of Kolb’s model of experiential learning. According to Boud et al. (1985), “Reflection is a form of response of the learner to the experience” (p. 18).
Schön’s (1983) idea of reflective practice and Boud et al.’s (1985) interpretation of reflection suggest that reflection and, thus, learning, is a deeply personal and individual process. Both constructs fail to take into account the social nature of learning particularly as it occurs in the workplace. In fact, Kotzee (2012) pointed out one of the criticisms of reflective practice “is that reflective practice it too individualistic in its conception of learning and that it omits the ‘social dimension’ of learning” (pp. 5-6).
Work-based learning is viewed from two perspectives—learning at the individual level and learning at the collective or community level. Raelin’s (1997, 2008) model of work-based learning reconciled the two perspectives. Raelin’s model at the individual level is a mirror of Kolb’s (1984) model with the addition of understanding tacit and explicit knowledge coupled with theory and practice. According to Raelin (1997),

The learning types produced in the first matrix of the model of work-based learning do not so much characterize styles as processes, which individuals may deploy to learn effectively, efficiently, and critically within work … all four [learning types] should be used to engender the most learning in the shortest amount of time. (p. 565)

![Table 4.1. A Model of Work-Based Learning—Individual Level](image)


The second phase of Raelin’s (1997, 2008) model views the processes “of learning within work in the company of others” (1977, p. 568). “Work-based learning will benefit most from an applied science, which deliberately introduces its methods into the practice field and which solicits the contributions of practitioners” (1997, p. 569). It is a blending of theory and practice. Action learning is essential since the workplace is the site of
learning; it is the site of real problems for which practitioners seek solutions. Communities of practice are situations where people come together to construct understanding and create a shared understanding (Brown & Duguid, 1991). “The notion of a community of practice returns knowledge back into its context. As a model of work-based learning, it suggests that learning is built out of materials of the local situation and that it is collective” (p. 570). The knowledge used in a community of practice is in a specific context and is typically practical in nature (Raelin, 1997, 2008). Action science, as expressed in Raelin’s model, is making mental models explicit through questioning and examining one’s images and assumptions in order to make sense of one’s practice.


The final step in Raelin’s model (1997, 2008) is a combination of both learning at the individual level and the collective level. Raelin (1997) specifically stated, “whether learning by oneself or collectively with others, each of the eight types of learning needs to be brought into consideration if learners are to achieve proficiency and criticalness of their
“Professionals learn a significant amount through their everyday practice” (Cook, 2009, p. e608). This is particularly applicable to novice or first-year professionals since they lack practical experience (Roberson & Roberson, 2009) since “the workplace offers learning outcomes that cannot be obtained in formal courses” (Sheehan, Wilkinson, & Bowie, 2012, p. 937). It is the authenticity of the workplace and actual workplace experiences that allow one to gain knowledge of practice (Billet, 2001; Lave & Wenger,
In any given situation, knowledge or learning is based on what is relevant or worth knowing (Chaiklin & Lave, 1993). The emphasis on learning in and from the workplace contributes to the constructs of situated cognition and communities of practice.

In the perspective of situated cognition, “knowing is interminably inventive and entwined with doing” (Fenwick, 2000a, p.253). The context of the activity “is an integral part of what is learned” (Brown et al., 1989, p. 32). The context may also be construed as the culture in which the experience or problem is embedded (Rogoff, 1984). According to situated cognition, the experience or activity must occur within the setting, which, in turn, creates authentic activity. “Authentic activities, then, are most simply defined as the ordinary practices of the culture” (Brown et al., 1989, p. 34).

Situated learning emphasizes the social nature of learning—the interaction of an individual within a community of practice (Wenger, 2009). Wenger claimed that “We all belong to communities of practice” (2009, p. 212) and that they “are an integral part of our daily lives” (p. 212). Participation is an essential element of our belonging. Our membership in a community of practice implies “participation in an activity system about which participants share understandings concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their communities” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 98). It is the concept of legitimate peripheral participation that blends situated learning within communities of practice. “Legitimate peripheral participation provides a way to speak about the relations between newcomers and old-timers, and about activities, identities, artifacts, and communities of knowledge and practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29). It points out that “learners inevitably participate in communities of practitioners and that
mastery of knowledge and skill requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the sociocultural practices of a community” (p. 29). Experience, engagement, and participation are integral parts of learning in the workplace.

Learning through work may be considered to be learning “as just doing it” (Billet, 2001). Information technology (IT) workers rated learning through work as the most fruitful learning (Ha, 2008). The methods and resources that the IT workers used included:

a. colleagues, vendors, and friends;

b. indirect participation;

c. experimentation;

and
d. mistakes and failures. Eraut (2004) proposed four activities through which people learn:

- **Participation in group activities** includes team working for a common outcome and groups set up for a special purpose such as audit, development or review of policy and/or practice, and response to external changes.

- **Working alongside others** allows people to observe and listen to others at work and to participate in activities and, hence, to learn some new practices and new perspectives, to become aware of different kinds of knowledge and expertise, and to gain some sense of other people’s tacit knowledge.

- **Tackling challenging tasks** requires on-the-job-learning and, if well-supported and successful, leads to increased motivation and confidence.

- **Working with clients** also entails learning (a) about the client, (b) from any novel aspects of each client’s problem or request and, (c) from any new ideas that arises from their joint consultation (pp. 266-267).
It is through these activities that Sheehan et al. (2012) found learning in the first year of practice occurred within three themes: concrete tasks, project management, and identity formation.

Job Shadowing

Job shadowing is an experiential activity where learning occurs by observing others or working alongside others (Eraut, 2004; McCarthy & McCarthy, 2006). Paris and Mason (1995) defined job shadowing as:

Job shadowing is a work experience option where students learn about a job by walking through the work day as a shadow to a competent worker. The job shadowing work experience is a temporary, unpaid exposure to the workplace in an occupational area of interest to the student. Students witness first-hand the work environment, employability, and occupational skills in practice, the value of professional training, and potential career options. Job shadowing is designed to increase career awareness, help model student behavior through examples, and reinforce in the student the link between classroom learning and work requirements. Almost any workplace is a potential job shadowing site. Job shadowing is limited in that it allows students to observe only direct work experience; responsibility and skills are not acquired. (p. 47)

Studies have shown that shadowing is useful in pre-career activities (Cease-Cook, Fowler, & Test, 2015). Used this way, it may reduce the time spent getting to know the work and workplace. Shadowing may be done formally or informally. Informal shadowing is visiting a job site and spending time in the workplace observing the work—what it is and how it is done. It is observation only.

Formal job shadowing is based on practical experience and is explicit in its goals and objectives (Turner, White, & Poth, 2012). It is intended to play a role in the
preparation of the participant for entering a particular specialty or role. It is typically the student or novice who observes the experienced individual or expert. Jones, Willis, McArdle, and O’Neill (2006) concluded that shadowing provided familiarity with the work environment, oriented the participants to a particular role, and provided learning content. Shadowing may be an expert or more experienced person watching the inexperienced person doing the job, which provides learning “just basically practicing for the job with someone there to stand over you and make sure you’re doing everything correctly” (p. 292).

Professional Learning

Professional learning may be construed as occurring along a continuum on which time and experience increases a professional’s level of competence. Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) developed a five-stage process of skill acquisition that highlights a continuum of professional learning. The five stages are novice, advanced beginner, competent, proficient, and expert. The Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) model shows a progression or movement through various stages in the quest for expertise.

During Stage 1, the Novice Stage, the learning is context free and is based upon learning the rules. It is “information processing” or “rule guided knowing” (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1986, p. 21) rather than experienced based know how. In Stage 2, the Advanced Beginner Stage, experience enters the process. The learner encounters situational elements through practical experience. As experience increases, the learner or professional enters Stage 3, Competence. During this stage, the learner becomes aware of standards and
routine procedures and sees their actions as part of a larger picture or as behavior with a goal in mind. It is a problem-soliving phase even though the learner may not be aware of solving problems: “Clearly we are not conscious of solving problems, that is of selecting goals and combining elements by rule to reach them, during much of our life’s activity” (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986, p. 27, italics in the original).

“The two highest levels of skill are characterized by a rapid, fluid, involved behavior” (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986, p. 27) and are Stage 4 and Stage 5 in this typology of skill acquisition. The performer or learner in Stage 4, Proficiency, “will be deeply involved in his task and will be experiencing it from some specific perspective because of recent events” (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986, p. 28). Intuitive behavior becomes part of the performers’ actions and decisions. Intuition, or know how, is “the understanding that occurs upon seeing similarities with previous experiences” (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986, p. 28). “The proficient performer, while intuitively organizing and understanding his task, will still find himself thinking analytically about what to do” (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986, p. 29). Stage 5 is Expertise. “An expert generally knows what to do based on mature and practiced understanding” (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986, p. 30). In other words, an expert has become so involved and experienced in what he does, it becomes part of him. The expert knows intuitively what to do.

Novices or Early Career Practitioners

“A key feature of being a newcomer is that of not knowing what is going on around you or what is precisely expected of you” (Eraut, 2009, p. 2). It typically is a lengthy
process to getting to know your work and your workplace (Eraut, 2009). The processes mentioned by Eraut, which are akin to many of the strategies identified in experiential learning theory, may significantly shorten a newcomer’s learning curve.

“The majority of this learning through working involves learning from other people” (Eraut, 2009, p. 17). Eraut (2007, 2009) identified two main processes: working processes with learning as a by-product and learning processes. Both of these processes included relatively time consuming activities: working in groups, working alongside others, working with clients, shadowing, and being supervised, coached, and mentored.

From these main processes, Eraut (2007, 2009) identified short activities that could be part of either process. These short activities included asking questions, observing, getting information, locating resource people, reflecting, learning from mistakes, and giving or receiving feedback.

“Most workplace learning occurs on the job” (Eraut, 2007, p. 249). Workplace learning is generally a form of informal learning that is a mixture personal experience and learning from others (Eraut, 2007).

Context is important in understanding professional learning (Daley, 2002; Eraut, 2007). It provides the framework for self-identity and the social identity of the world in which professionals work (Barley & Van Maanen, 1984). Professionals who tend to view themselves as members of an occupational community are those:

Who consider themselves to be engaged in the same sort of work; who identify (more or less positively) with their work; who share a set of values, norms, and perspectives that apply to, but extend beyond, work related matters. (Barley & Van Maanen, 1984, p. 295)
It is the interaction with colleagues within this community that aids learning—especially for those who have recently entered the profession.

Expertise

Expertise “refers to the characteristics, skills, and knowledge that distinguish experts from novices and less experienced people” (Anders Ericsson, 2006, p. 3). Kennedy (1987) identified four definitions of expertise: expertise as a technical skill, expertise as the application of theory or general principles, expertise as critical analysis, and expertise as deliberate action. Expertise as a technical skill is based upon the specific skills needed in a profession. These skills must be identified, are transmittable, and must be used appropriately in practice. The basic premise of expertise as the application of theory or general principles is “that professionals need to solve problems and make decisions in ambiguous situations…. Expertise is expanded to include not just applying skills, but recognizing situations in which it is appropriate to do so” (Kennedy, 1987, p. 138). Critical analysis as expertise “prescribes a paradigm for examining and interpreting situations” (Kennedy, 1987, p. 143). Expertise as deliberate action assumes there is a relationship between analysis and action. Hence, “expertise evolves and develops with experience, but that experience can only contribute to expertise if practitioners are capable of learning from it” (Kennedy, 1987, p. 148).

Expertise is developed through deliberate, well-structured practice (Horn & Masunaga, 2006). Deliberate practice is intentional, focused, and monitored. It is also goal oriented. It involves “task analysis, goal setting, strategy choice, self-monitoring,
self-evaluations, and adaptations” (Zimmerman, 2006). Immediate feedback is an essential element of deliberate practice by continually and intentionally striving to improve one’s current level of performance (Horn & Masunaga, 2006). “Deliberate practice involves two types of learning: improving the skills you already have and extending the reach and range of your skills” (Anders Ericsson, Prietula, & Cokely, 2007, p. 119). The amount of time spent in deliberate, well-structured practice is important, too.

“Real expertise must pass three tests. First it must lead to performance that is consistently superior to that of the expert’s peers. Second, real expertise produces concrete results…. Finally true expertise can be replicated and measured” (Anders Ericsson, et al., 2007, p. 117). Expertise in the workplace, then, would be judged by those who interact with the performer (worker) including coworkers, customers, and clients; the consistency of work performance in terms of outputs and satisfactory interactions; and continual advancement and improvement of work functions and work activities or tasks by gauging what is happening currently and determining where productivity should be. Assessment of work activities and their results, should result in replicatable and predictable results (Clancey, 2006).

Identity

What does it mean to be who you are? An identity is the set of meanings that define who one is when one is an occupant of a particular role in society, a member of a particular group, or claims particular characteristics that identify him or her as a unique person. (Burke & Stets, 2009, p.3)

Identity, then, is personal and societal.
“Identity is ultimately a representation or mental conception that we ascribe to ourselves and to others” (Fenwick, 2008, p. 22). Adults garner experience by participating in life and the various roles of life. “Experience thus is integral to an adult’s identity, or self-concept” (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Knowles (1980) stated, “Adults derive their self-identity from their experience” (p. 50). Our identity is socially constructed through social interactions and expectations (Kegan, 1994). Individuals occupy various roles or social positions. The identification with these roles is premised upon “identification of” the role and “identification with” the role by putting one’s self into the role or adding self-meaning to the role (Smith & Taylor, 2010). Oftentimes, a hierarchy of roles is established by an individual, for instance, my role as a real estate agent is more important than my role as a club member but not as important as my role as a mother. This ranking of roles may be dependent on the degree of importance the role has to the individual. These roles or multiple identities overlap even though they represent a particular aspect of a person. They do not exist independently nor can they be understood individually. They are all parts of a congruent whole (Jones & McEwen, 2000; Williams, 2013).

Jones and McEwen (2000) created a model depicting the multiple dimensions of identity. The core and the context are its two main components. Personal attributes, personal characteristics, and personal identity comprise the core. “This center, or core identity, is experienced as a personal identity, … an ‘inner identity’” (Jones & McEwen, 2000, p. 408). External dimensions of identity comprise the context. These dimensions includes family background, sociocultural conditions, current experiences, and career decisions and life planning. Identity is the intersection of these external dimensions that
“demonstrate that no one dimension may be understood singularly; it can be understood only in relation to other dimensions” (Jones & McEwen, 2000, p. 410). Burke and Stets (2009) suggested that role-based identity and social identity are fused to form a collective identity.

There are disadvantages to multiple identities as well as benefits. A person will always select the role or identity that is most important to him, which is an indication of the person’s commitment to the identity (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Identity salience is demonstrated by the amount of time a person spends in those activities associated with the role or identity (Serpe, 1987; Stryker & Burke, 2000). “Commitment, in turn, is shaped by the extensiveness of social connections or role partners one has in relation to an identity and the intensiveness or depth of those relationships with role partners” (Colbeck, 2008). Negative impact of multiple identities is identified as stress or reduced commitment to a particular role (Marks, 1977). Marks (1977) suggested that a person who has high commitment to more than one role may experience increased energy and resilience.

It is this investment into the role that allows for identity construction (Reitzes, 2003). There are five processes that contribute to the investment in the role or that add meaning to a role. The first is role satisfaction. The second is role commitment. The third is role salience when an individual might ask, “How willing am I to participate in the role and/or be acknowledged as being in the role.” The fourth is the importance of the role to the individual or role centrality. The fifth is how one sees oneself in the role or identity meaning.
People’s sense of their own knowledge in work and the knowledge values by the group to which they see themselves belonging form a critical element of their sense of identity. Workers figure out how to position themselves in an organization, how to perform identities that are acceptable to their immediate peers but also allow them freedom and some autonomy and control. In work environments of rapid change where people must transform their practices, people often learn to “shapeshift;” they literally learn to perform different selves and knowledges in different environments, while learning to establish some coherent identity to anchor themselves, or even market themselves. (Fenwick, 2008, p. 22)

Roles are often established by external sources and are validated by other’s expectations and behaviors (Stryker & Burke, 2000).

According to Burke & Stets (2009), “an identity is composed of four basic components: an input, an identity standard, a comparator, and an output. Each of these components is a process dealing with meanings within the environment and within the self” (p. 62, italics in the original). The four components are likened to the control system of a thermostat. “Just as a thermostat operates to control the temperature it ‘perceives,’ an identity controls the meanings it perceives” (pp. 62-63).

Mockler (2011), in her study of teachers, suggested that “the concept of ‘teacher professional identity’ is used to refer to the way teachers, both individually and collectively, view and understand themselves as teachers” (p. 2). The meaning of teacher identity expressed by Mockler supports the concept of an identity standard in the model developed by Burke & Stets (2009) that “meaning is what is contained in the identity standard” (p. 64, italics in the original).

Mockler (2011) contended that “professional identity is a career-long project” (p. 2), which corresponds to Lave & Wenger’s (1991) ideas of situated learning (context...
matters) and legitimate peripheral participation where one is a beginner or on the periphery or edge to full participation:

Viewing learning as legitimate peripheral participation means that learning is not merely a condition for membership, but is itself an evolving form of membership. We conceive of identities as long-term, living relationships between persons and their place and participation in communities of practice. This identity, knowing, and social membership entail one another. (p. 53)

“Identity is the pivotal linking social structure with individual action” (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995, p. 256).

We need work, and as adults we find identity and are identified by the work we do. If this is true we must be very careful about what we choose to do for a living, for what we do is what we’ll become. (Gini, 1998, p. 707)

Social interactions and context contribute to a person’s career identity (Ibarra, 1999). Ibarra suggested that social interactions in the workplace shape identity by others’ validation of behaviors and by providing improvement feedback.

Identity formation in the workplace is made up of role development, teamwork and relationships with other professionals. It also includes dealing with difficult situations, enhancing communication, accepting errors, realizing one’s own limits, and learning to learn from and in the workplace (Sheehan et al., 2012).

Summary

This chapter looked at workplace learning through a constructivist lens. It provided an examination of the connection between various constructivist theories and workplace
techniques and strategies. It looked at the roles of experience and reflection in workplace learning. It examined the individual nature of learning and learning as a social activity. It stressed the importance of context in workplace learning and the role of participating in a community of practice. It presented a model of workplace learning that integrated the individual and collective levels of work-based learning. It also presented the theoretical framework for this study, which was drawn from the literature on experiential learning, workplace learning, and identity. The chapter ended with a discussion of identity formation and development within the workplace.

The next chapter presents the methodology used in this study. It includes the context of the study, its design, and a discussion of both the data collection methods and the data analysis process.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter describes the rationale for using a basic interpretative qualitative approach based on the purpose of this study. It iterates the purpose of the study, the research questions, and the researcher’s experiences and biases. It describes the real estate milieu at the time of the research since context is critical in qualitative research. It includes the criteria used for participant selection, a brief introduction to the participants, a detailed description of the data collection process, and it introduces the analytic process.

The purpose of this study is threefold. First, it is to develop an understanding of newly licensed real estate agents. This study examined the perceptions of new agents about the real estate industry, how new agents come to identify with their profession, and how new agents ascertain and develop the knowledge and skills needed to build their practices. Second, its purpose is to add to the theoretical understanding and literature bases of professional development and workplace learning. Third, this study has a very practical purpose. It is to use the data to develop a meaningful and practical curriculum for the real estate sales pre-licensing course. The ultimate aim is to influence policy and legislation to implement substantive changes in educational and testing requirements for real estate licensure that reflect the needs of the newly licensed practitioner.
The main research question that guided this study was:

With minimal educational entry requirements, how do newly licensed real estate agents develop their careers?

This guiding question was supported by the following questions:

1. What reasons do newly licensed real estate agents report for selecting real estate as a career?
2. How do newly licensed real estate agents develop the knowledge and skills needed for practice?
3. How do newly licensed real estate agents perceive their roles as real estate agents?

Context

The participants in this study are independent contractors or statutory non-employees as described within the safe harbors of the Internal Revenue Service. This means that the participants received no compensation in the way of wages or salary. Their incomes were completely dependent upon their personal production. Compensation was earned only when a closing occurred. They were responsible for expenses, which included dues, fees, and miscellaneous business expenses.

Being a Realtor® meant that they were in business for themselves yet operated under a sponsoring broker. The nature of the real estate business provided a unique dichotomy. Within their own offices, their colleagues were also their competitors since they all vied for business within the same marketplace. Agents affiliated with other
companies were their competitors yet they were colleagues because of the cooperative nature of the real estate business.

Design

Since the purpose of this study was to understand how newly licensed real estate agents develop the knowledge and skills that are needed to perform as real estate professionals, a basic or interpretative qualitative method was used. “In its most basic terms, qualitative research is a form of *systematic empirical inquiry into meaning*” (Shank, 2002 italics in the original). It is interpretive and constructivist in nature. It occurs in the natural setting, is emergent, and typically uses various methods for gathering data (Creswell, 2003).

Qualitative research is used to discover meaning and deep understanding of phenomena—to provide *thick description* (Geertz, 1973) or to be *richly descriptive* (Merriam, 2009). The nature of qualitative research is in understanding how people make sense, understanding, and meaning from their experiences (Merriam, 2009).

According to Merriam (2009), the four characteristics of qualitative research are: the focus is on process, understanding, and meaning; the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis; the process is inductive; and the product is richly descriptive. “All qualitative research is interested in how meaning is constructed, how people make sense of their lives and their worlds” (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 39). This study meets these characteristics of qualitative research. First, it focused on understanding what newly licensed real estate agents do in the beginning stages of their
careers. Second, the researcher was the primary instrument of data collection and analysis; I conducted six monthly interviews with eight newly licensed agents. The analysis process began with the interviews as I determined what to ask the participants and transformed the verbal data into text through a transcription process. Third, the process was inductive because it began with specific or particular incidents and data that led to general patterns or themes. This inductive process may be compared to creating an outline in reverse. Generally speaking, when an outline is fashioned, the main headings or topics are created and then the subtopics and details are added. During the inductive process, the data provides the details and the challenge is to discover the topics, patterns, or themes. Fourth, the product is richly descriptive since the participants provided the essence of what they do and how they do it in their own words.

The major data generating sources for a qualitative research study are interviews, observations, and documents (Merriam and Associates, 2002; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012). This study relied heavily on interviews, specifically, monthly interviews with each participant for a period of six months. The interviews were conducted over a 17-month period from July of 2008 through November of 2009. Follow-up interviews for clarification and member checks were concluded by June, 2011. The observations performed in this study were of the participants’ workplaces, not their interactions or performances in those workplaces. Documentation review included artifacts provided by the participants. The documents included the materials used at the Realtor® orientation classes attended by the participants, the national franchise training materials, and various marketing items provided by the participants. The written and printed documentation
provided by the participants was reviewed and used to augment an understanding of what the participants were saying.

Data Collection

Prior to beginning this research project, it was approved by Northern Illinois University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) (Appendix A). The title of the research project changed from the time it was submitted for IRB approval and the time it was completed. The subjects, procedures, and protocols remained the same from the time of IRB approval until the completion of the research.

Sample Selection

Within research, there are two main forms of sampling, probability sampling and non-probability sampling (Merriam, 2009). Because this study was designed as a basic, qualitative, interpretive study, a purposeful, non-probabilistic sampling strategy was used. The participants were chosen purposefully (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990, 2002).

The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term purposeful sampling. (Patton, 2002, p. 230, italics in the original)

The first step in purposeful sampling is establishing the criteria that will be used to select the study’s participants (Merriam, 2009). Since the purpose of this study was to understand how newly licensed real estate agents develop the knowledge and skills that are
needed to perform as real estate professionals and to understand what do they do, specific parameters were established for including participants. The following criteria were used to identify research participants:

1. The participant needed to have an Illinois real estate license.

2. The individual could not have been licensed or active in the real estate business for longer than 120 days prior to the first interview. For the purpose of this study, newly licensed agents are defined as those licensees who are experiencing their first year in the business. To ensure that participants were in their first year in the business during the six-month interview process, 120 days was set as the maximum length of time that one could be licensed and still be a participant. This time frame allowed for delays or postponements of any interviews.

3. The newly licensed agent must be a Realtor®. Realtors® are members of the National Association of Realtors® (NAR) and only those real estate agents or licensees who are members may be called by this nationally registered trademark. The participants needed to be Realtors® because the Realtor® new member orientation requirement provided a source for recruiting participants. The new member orientation program was a form of formal education required for membership in NAR.

4. The participants’ main business arenas had to be the residential market. Residential real estate was used as a criterion, as opposed to commercial or investment real estate, so the participants’ experiences would be in the same market segment.

5. The participants must be independent contractors or statutory non-employees. This requires the licensee to be paid based upon the satisfactory conclusion of transactions that
they initiated on a commission only basis. It precludes salaries, wages, draws against compensation, any tax withholding, and benefits; it requires licensees to be responsible for paying their own taxes and expenses. This standard was applied because this status is predominant in the residential brokerage business and it put the participants on a level or even playing field of compensation.

Participants were recruited through pre-licensing classes, Realtor® orientation programs, and business contacts and relationships that I had within the real estate community. Letters were sent to two general managers explaining the research study and soliciting their endorsement of the project for use with their office managers. Letters were sent to individual office managers asking for their assistance in identifying participants (Appendix B). All letters were followed up with either a phone call or personal contact. I presented the research project at several Realtor® orientation programs and spoke directly with attendees who expressed an interest in participating. At the time, I was teaching pre-licensing classes and discussed the research project with interested students. I started the research with 12 participants and completed the study with eight; four individuals did not stay with the research (three left the real estate business and one opted out of the study due to personal time constraints).

The following steps were taken to assure anonymity: Each participant was assigned a pseudonym; the real estate companies and locations were given fictitious names, the names of all colleagues and managers mentioned by the participants were disguised by giving these individuals false names, the names of training programs were
altered, and, lastly, aliases were given to the Realtor® organizations in which the participants had memberships.

**Interviews**

“The research interview is a form of conversation” (Kvale, 1996, p. 19). Unlike a conversation between friends, an interview is a conversation that has been set up by the interviewer for the purpose of collecting data on a specific topic (Alvesson, 2011). Its main purpose is to “obtain a special kind of information” (Merriam, 2009, p. 88). In the case of this study, the purpose of the interviews was to uncover and understand how newly licensed real estate agents develop their business.

Because I wanted to know what the participants did in the beginning stage of their careers, I modeled my interviews on Seidman’s (2006) three interview series. Seidman suggested that the first interview should be an historic interview that uncovers the participants pasts and the paths they took leading them to real estate. The first interview with all the participants in this study discussed their past histories—what they did prior to becoming a Realtor® and how they came to decide upon real estate as a career choice.

The second stage of Seidman’s (2006) approach is to “concentrate on the concrete details of the participants’ present lived experiences” (p. 18). I expanded this stage since I was conducting six monthly interviews with each participant. Interviews two through five were conducted to discover what the participants were actually doing as real estate agents. This longitudinal approach had two main benefits: timeliness and development. Timeliness was a benefit since the participants were discussing what was currently
happening in their real estate careers. They did not need to recall events and occurrences from the distant past. The monthly interviews, which occurred during their first year in the business, highlighted the changes the participants experienced as they developed their careers. Time and change are the goals of longitudinal inquiry (Saldaña, 2003).

The final stage of Seidman’s (2006) interview sequence is reflective. In the final interview the participants were each asked to take a backward glance at their careers to date and talk about what they would do differently and what advice they would give to someone entering the real estate business.

Structure of Interviews

Interviews are structured, semistructured, or unstructured (Merriam, 2009). Structured interviews are an “oral form of a written survey” (p. 90) in which the questions and the order of the questions are predetermined (Merriam, 2009). Semistructured interviews are more flexible than structured interviews. The questions are generally open-ended and there is no particular order to the questions nor do the questions have any exact wording (Merriam, 2009). Unstructured interviews are exploratory and have no list or set of predetermined questions (Merriam, 2009). This study used a blend of semistructured and unstructured interview formats. The first and the last interviews were semistructured because their purpose was predetermined but there was no predetermined order of questions that occurred during these interviews. The middle interviews (second through fifth) were a blend of unstructured and semistructured interview formats.
Prior to each subsequent interview, I reviewed the immediate prior interview to determine if there were any areas that I wanted to explore further. If not, the interview began with a general question of “what’s been going on since the last time we met” or a derivative of this exploratory question. These middle interviews were semistructured because there were some questions that I wanted to ask each participant. The original interview plan was to ask each participant the same questions during the same interview (Appendix C). In other words, each participant would be asked the same questions or have the same topic delved into during the same number interview. I realized that if I structured the interviews in this fashion I would be limiting my understanding of the process of what a new or beginning real estate agent was doing to develop their career. However, this did not prevent me from ascertaining information about certain topics from each participant.

All of the interviews were conducted in person, face-to-face, and were recorded; notes were made during most of the interviews. Prior to the first interview, I reviewed the nature of the research with the participant stressing confidentiality and the volunteer nature of their involvement. The participants signed a participation and confidentiality agreement before each interview (Appendix D).

Location of Interviews

Alvesson (2011) suggested that the physical location of the interview may matter. Most of the interviews were conducted in the participants’ offices in private conference rooms. The setting was typically chosen by the participants. There were two participants, Connie and Gertrude, who felt uncomfortable conducting the interviews at their offices.
Connie’s first interview was held at her office and subsequent interviews were conducted at an off-site, private meeting room. Gertrude expressed concerns about being overheard in the conference room at her office; four of her interviews were held at an offsite location. I chose the offsite meeting location for Connie and Gertrude. The change in location assured Connie and Gertrude confidentiality in their interviews. Both admitted that they felt “much more comfortable” talking at the offsite location. Annie’s interviews were conducted at her office. After two interviews, Annie decided that the “up-front” conference room did not provide sufficient privacy. Her remaining interviews were conducted in a small, private meeting room in a rarely used back section of her office.

Data Analysis

Upon the completion of the first interviews, I began the process of a verbatim transcription of each interview. I soon realized that I would not be able to transcribe the interviews on a timely basis and hired two people to assist me in transcribing the interviews. Data are altered during the transcription process (Boeije, 2010) and, as such, transcriptions are “interpretative constructions” (Kvale, 1996, p. 165). Transcriptions transform the data from one medium to another and are the beginning of data interpretation and analysis. Since the transcripts were being completed by more than one person, I re-listened to each interview making changes and edits as I followed along with the transcription. I used this editing process to ensure a consistency in the transcripts. I oftentimes referred to notes I made during the interviews and hoped that my recollection of
the interviews aided in transcripts that were accurate despite being devoid of intonation and body language.

Coding

I began coding the transcripts after all the transcripts had been completed and edited. Coding is described as the process of categorizing segments of data and is “the first step in moving beyond concrete statements in the data to making analytic interpretations” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 43). I coded all of the transcripts manually in a three-phase process, which was similar to the process described by Creswell (2003) as open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

The first phase or initial coding incorporated descriptive coding, in vivo coding, process coding, and values coding. Descriptive coding “summarizes in a word or a short phrase—most often a noun—the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 70). In vivo coding is the “actual language found in the qualitative data” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 74) and reflects the participants’ world views (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I highlighted phrases or passages that struck me as pertinent to capturing the participants’ voices. Process coding identifies action in the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, Saldaña, 2009). Process coding was appropriate for this study because it examined the development process of newly licensed agents. Values coding was done as part of the initial coding process because one of the research questions asked was: How do newly licensed real estate agents develop the knowledge and skills needed for practice? The values identified
were attitude, skills, and knowledge. In summary, the initial coding process used four coding methods: descriptive, in vivo, process, and value coding.

The second round of coding or second cycle coding is a method for reanalyzing first cycle coding and piecing categories together (Saldaña, 2009). Pattern coding and focused coding were used during this phase. Pattern coding was used to group the initial codes “into a smaller number of sets, themes, or constructs” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 69). Focused coding was used “to sift through large amounts of data” to “synthesize and explain larger segments of data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 57).

The third and final phase of coding was to bring the coded data together in the creation of themes. The emergent themes were preparedness, identity formation or the participants’ perceptions of themselves as real estate agents, the participants’ perceptions of the business, and knowledge acquisition or learning the business.

Issues of Credibility and Dependability

Determining the proper or acceptable terminology that should be applied to describe the trustworthiness of the data in a qualitative study is a somewhat contentious issue. Merriam (2001) used the terms validity and reliability whereas Guba and Lincoln (1981) claimed that the trustworthiness of the data should be established by examining the characteristics of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

To ensure credibility, I spent quite a bit of time at each participant’s workplace and had prolonged interviews with the participants. I reviewed training materials and marketing materials as provided by the participants during the course of the interviews.
These materials highlighted or substantiated the topic that was discussed in a particular interview. I engaged in peer examination or debriefing. I discussed my findings with academic colleagues and business associates. Two committee members reviewed the coding categories; discussions verified the rationale for the various coding categories that were selected. I also performed member checks by having the participants review the transcripts to ensure accuracy. I discussed preliminary findings with the participants to be sure the portrayal of the data was accurate.

Transferability, according to Guba and Lincoln (1981), is the understanding that the research is context bound. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), transferability is the responsibility of the reader and not the responsibility of the researcher. It is up to the reader of the research to determine if the findings can be transferred to another setting. They suggested several techniques to aid transferability including thick description and peer debriefing. Both of these techniques were used in this study. I collected an overwhelming amount of descriptive data to make certain that I (and anyone reading the research report) had an understanding of the research milieu. Peer reviews were conducted with my advisor and with a fellow doctoral student on a regular basis.

Dependability refers to the stability of the data (Guba & Lincoln, 1981) and may be akin to internal validity. Merriam (2001) suggested there are several strategies that increase internal validity. These include member checks, peer examination (or peer debriefing), and data gathered over a period of time. As mentioned above, these strategies were in place during this research study. Knowing the researcher’s biases is another strategy for confirming dependability (Merriam, 2001).
In qualitative research, the “researchers themselves are an important part of the research process, either in terms of their own personal presence as researchers, or in terms of their experiences in the field and the reflexivity they bring to the role” (Kvale, 2008, p. xi). I have been in the real estate industry for over 30 years in various roles; I have been an office coordinator, sales associate, office manager, general manager, and shareholder in a real estate company. I currently hold an Illinois managing broker license and licenses that allow me to teach both pre-licensing courses and continuing education courses in Illinois.

Biases and subjectivity cannot be eliminated in a qualitative study (Maxwell, 1996, 2013). One cannot be in or around a business for any extended period of time without developing perspectives and opinions. My experience in the industry, particularly in the education and training arenas, led to the conclusion that new licensees are inadequately prepared for the actual practice of real estate. This personal conclusion was the catalyst for this study. It was a bias that I brought to the research. I was intensely aware that my experience could, and did, influence this research.

All of the participants were told about my background and experience. As the study progressed and interviews were conducted, I became keenly aware of the stumbling block of interjecting personal perspectives into the process and made an effort to remain nonjudgmental concerning the revelation of the participants’ practices and procedures. My experience provided an understanding of the real estate business and enabled me to ask some interview questions that someone who had never been in the business would not have the knowledge to ask.
Summary

This chapter explained the rationale for using a basic interpretative qualitative study and presented the methodology used to analyze the data. It gave details about the research design and the data analysis process. It addressed issues of credibility and trustworthiness including the researcher’s experience in the real estate business.

The following chapter will present detailed descriptions of the research participants’ basic demographic information, backgrounds, office selections, how they got started, and their frustrations.
CHAPTER 4
THE PARTICIPANTS

Introduction

This chapter introduces the participants and presents their basic demographic information, their backgrounds, and motivation for entering the real estate business. It portrays the initial career path of each participant including how they selected their workplaces and the steps they took to get started in the business. It presents the career trajectories of each participant during the time of the study from their initial excitement through their waning enthusiasm as they confronted the realities of their external and internal environments. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym that was used throughout the project.

Introduction to the Participants

A total of eight participants completed the research project. There was one male and seven females. Seven of the participants worked at companies that were affiliated with national franchises and one participant worked at non-franchised, single office company. Of the participants who worked with franchise affiliated organizations, five were with multi-office companies and two worked for single-office franchise operations. Four different national franchises were represented among the participants. All participants belonged to the Realtor® organization on the national, state, and local level and all were
members of a multiple listing service through their local Realtor® organization. All of the participants were over 30 years of age. All but one of the participants classified themselves as White; one classified herself as Hispanic. Real estate was not the first career choice of any of the participants. They all had the status of independent contractors for their real estate activities.

**Annie**

**Basic Demographic Information**

Annie is married and has a grown step-daughter and a school-age son. She is in her early 40s. Annie has been a stay-at-home mom for the past 11 years during which time she volunteered at her son’s school. She is a high school graduate. Annie has an Illinois real estate sales license and during the time of the interviews was studying for a Wisconsin real estate sales license. Annie selected a single office real estate company for her initial affiliation. By the time Annie activated her real estate license, her office of choice had sold to a larger company. Consequently, Annie began her real estate career as part of a multi-office franchise organization.

**Background**

Prior to starting her family, Annie worked in sales.

I was a sales rep for an envelope company. I’ve always been in the office supply business until I stayed home and then I worked for a sales company for a very short
time because I got pregnant. I stayed home for 10 years to raise my son and this is my first job back since then.

Once Annie became a stay-at-home mom, she, her husband, and her sister started a side business flipping houses.

My husband was a carpenter for 20-some years, had an injury and got out of the business. My sister wanted to stay home because she had a late-in-life baby and couldn’t afford to do that (stay at home) so we decided to start a business with them. It began as “doing side jobs” and turned into an investment venture flipping houses. And when we first started, it was easy to find something. It was easy to sell something and it worked out real well. But that was short lived and now we’ve decided to get out of it. It was a skill we had. It was a way to make extra money. It was a way for [my sister] to stay home and for us to do it on our own time frame.

Annie and her partners withdrew from the house flipping business as the market turned and it became increasingly difficult to turn property quickly.

Annie’s volunteer work at her son’s school included doing the accounting for the food program. It worked well because “I was able to have his (her son’s) hours and have his schedule off.”

Motivation for Getting into Real Estate

Annie’s reasons for getting into real estate were to augment her flipping business, earn extra money, provide better service than she experienced, and to augment her own personal development and growth. She determined that as an agent, she would receive the commission, which would increase profit or offset expenses, and she would have quicker and easier access to inventory, particularly properties that were just coming on the market.
As the real estate market began its decline, Annie got out of the business of flipping houses but had concluded that real estate “was an absolutely perfect fit” for her and that she was going to stay in the business as an agent.

For years, Annie catered to her somewhat “chauvinist” husband who did nothing at home because “it was my job” and “I had dinner on the table and kept the house spotless” because “I take pride in whatever I do. I work hard at whatever I do. But I think I’ll be happier feeling viable and having a profession.” Annie was “excited about the potential.” She viewed it as a means to make extra money, set up a college fund for her son, and provide her with an avenue for personal development and growth. She expected her real estate career to be “self-rewarding.” In other words, Annie believed that a job well done and client satisfaction will be gratifying even when there is no direct monetary compensation. She told about the listing she had, “I haven’t had a showing on one of my listings in a couple months. I feel like I’m really letting them down. I went over there the other day and they’re like, ‘Oh, we’re going to renew with you. We think you’re great. You do so much for us.’”

Office Selection

Annie interviewed at only one office on the recommendation of her attorney’s administrative assistant Rachel. When Annie was flipping houses, she complained to Rachel about the problems she was having with her Realtor®, and that she was thinking about getting a real estate license herself. Rachel told her that the attorney’s sister worked at a real estate company nearby and Annie should go over there and speak to the office
manager. Rachel also told Annie that the clients she referred there had “nothing but good things to say.” Annie met with Debbie, the office manager, and “hit it off with her right away.” Annie never considered working anywhere else and signed up once she passed her state exam.

Annie selected the local community college as the provider for her pre-license education on the recommendation of her future manager. The company Annie planned to work for did not offer pre-licensing courses. Annie planned on obtaining a Wisconsin real estate license after she was licensed in Illinois.

From the time of Annie’s first interview to her activating her license, the single-office company Annie had selected underwent a radical change. It was sold and merged with a multi-office franchise organization. Annie admitted that there were some changes she did not like but these were, in her opinion, offset by affiliation with a nationally recognized franchise name.

Getting Started

Annie’s real estate career began with her involvement with an intense training program that was recommended by her manager who did not have time for training because of the office transition. The training program’s mainstay was learning scripts and dialogues, prospecting, and setting minimum production standards. Annie was ready to quit after the first class because she thought it was “overwhelming and too advanced.”

Annie stayed the course and her business activity flourished.
Because of this course, I had no idea it’s a slow market right now. I’m going crazy with showings; you know I have three showings tonight. I potentially have five listings and three of them came from one person. I’m getting the CMAs together for that. One lady’s coming from out of town so I’m preparing for that and in addition to doing all of this and setting up my fsbo kit that I want to leave with them. I’m doing that all myself. I’m writing the follow-up letters for thanks for sitting down with me, anything else I can do, let me know type of thing, I’m doing that. That’s not in the course; those are just common sense things that I’m figuring to do how I want to run my business.

By the end of the class, Annie realized that she could not continue to maintain such a frantic pace and satisfy her personal priorities.

Frustration

Annie’s excitement about the real estate business waned and frustration entered. The strain and pressure of personal situations, her sense of deficiency in knowledge, and lack of production and income were factors in Annie’s frustration.

Annie had to leave town due to a death in the family and Annie and her husband had to deal with her daughter’s personal crisis. As Annie pointed out:

this was the wrong year personally for me to do this. But, it, I didn’t know that when I started. If I could have waited one more year the things we’ve had to deal with this year will never have to be dealt with again.

Annie participated in an advanced, intense training program. Despite the production requirements of this course, Annie was disappointed in her results.

I wanted six closed transactions my first year. And that’s not going to happen. It may happen. But we’re coming into September and based on what has been happening, unless something turns around, it’s not going to happen. I’m not going
to work any less to anticipate that conclusion. I just realize it takes more work to get one transaction than I thought it did.

The reality of the business also contributed to Annie’s stress. The fees and the amount of work required were unanticipated factors in her perception of the business.

I expected it to be a lot less work for a lot more money. I really did. I do a lot of free work. I tell you if I didn’t love it, I wouldn’t do it because it’s not worth it. I’m counting on it being worth it down the road, but I’m not sure if I didn’t love it I’d have the motivation to keep doing it right now. And I’m finding out a lot about these fees. I had to pay for advertising, magnets, seminars, you know, so by the time you’re done you’re going, “Really? What did I make for all those hours and phone calls and weekends and nights?” But I’m calling it school right now and you have to pay to go to college so hopefully at the end of college you can start a job with a paycheck. So I’m hoping that this is just my tuition that I’m paying, and my dues I’m paying, that at the end of there will be a financial payout. And I, and I don’t see how that’s not what it will be because I’m learning slowly. I’m learning a bunch.

Even though Annie is learning “a bunch,” she acknowledges that “the hard part, the frustration lies with what I don’t know, that’s where I get frustrated.”

Connie

Basic Demographic Information

Connie is the mother of two grown children, a daughter and a son. She is a retiree in her mid 60s. Connie had a highly successful sales career prior to entering real estate. She also was instrumental in managing and selling a family-owned business. Connie has her high school diploma and completed two years of college. She selected a single office
franchise real estate company for her initial affiliation. Connie’s initial license was an Illinois Real Estate Broker license.

**Background**

Connie had 35 years of corporate sales experience prior to entering real estate. She started with a company in customer service. Her boss suggested that she apply for a position that had opened in the sales department. She felt secure in accepting the position and “hit the ground running” selling paper tape telex machines. It was door-to-door selling in a corporate environment. She made the highly prestigious Sales Club within less than a year. By the time Connie left this company, she was selling PC software and other related services. The training at this company was extensive and intense. The training “was very professional and I remember a lot of it to this day.”

Connie was offered a position by one of her customers and took the position selling office supplies. She was given three large corporate accounts, which put her on track for substantial income, but she felt a lack of challenge. Her general manager approached her about heading up a new business line–computer supplies. Connie refused the position and left the company.

She then went to work for a company that had just opened a new division–a facsimile division. Shortly after Connie took the position, the company sold the facsimile division. The purchasing company offered Connie a position and she stayed for a while. Connie left because she did not care for the new company’s cultural environment, which did not afford women the same opportunities as it did to the men.
Connie’s next job was with a company that manufactured, packaged, and sold media material. She was assigned the largest educational publisher in the world as her client, “So I was very excited about that.” Her job included generating new clients and turning around some failing accounts. She originally applied for a customer service position and by the time she retired because of stress, Connie was bringing in close to 70% of their business. Prior to her last position, Connie ran and negotiated the sale of the family trucking business.

Motivation for Getting into Real Estate

Connie had actually considered real estate as a career earlier. At that time, she needed to make some “serious money” and was advised by several brokers that income potential for the first few years would not meet her expectations. She pursued other career options and put real estate on the “back burner.”

Once Connie retired, she went into the real estate business because “I could be my own boss” and “there would be a great challenge for me.” She also had a “horrifying experience” in the past with a real estate transaction and thought that she could do a better job. Connie had made money in the past with her real estate investments and thought, “why not do this?” She acknowledged that she “loves the business, loves beautiful homes, and I love, love, love to search for properties. It’s just my passion.”
Office Selection

Connie interviewed with several real estate companies when she realized that she needed practical real estate know-how. She consulted with her real estate instructor about what to do. He recommended that she investigate Acme Realty offices since his company had just affiliated with them. Connie admitted that there were quite a few Acme Realty offices in the general area and interviewed at the one closest to her home. She originally thought, “I’ll just get a job as a front desk person or something just to get a feel for what it’s like in a real estate office.”

Getting Started

Connie did her pre-license education at a proprietary real estate licensing school that offered a blended program. It was basically a home study course that was augmented by a series of workshops. The school was affiliated with a multi-office franchise organization. Connie by-passed the sales license and completed the requirements for a broker license. Her plan was to self-sponsor her license and work as a sole proprietor. As she embarked on this course of action, Connie realized that “I don’t know what I’m doing and I really need to learn.” She interviewed with a real estate office near her home. She met with the broker-owner and “just instantly loved the way she works. I respect her and think she’s awesome.” So Connie signed up.

About a month later, Connie had second thoughts. She told her broker-owner that “I’m going to have rethink this whole thing.” She questioned her ability to put in “150% at
my age.” Connie was very concerned that she would disappoint herself. She expressed unease about dealing directly with individuals “because I never worked with individuals. I’ve always worked with corporations. Now to work with an individual is a very big leap.” Connie once again became a self-sponsored broker.

Connie’s lack of knowledge and love of a challenge caused her to re-enter the real estate business as an agent for the close-to-home real estate office. Since she returned, her experience working with buyers and holding open houses led Connie to discover “that it’s a warm thing. You can work with people and it’s not difficult at all.”

Frustration

Connie’s frustration with the business was grounded in three factors: the office environment, the lack of training, and a conflict with her manager.

I think the office environment is a frustrating environment. But I even see in our office the bumping heads and putting another person down and stuff like that between the agents and that gossip thing. I think that’s frustrating. If I was young and this was my new career, it would be frustrating because what good does that all do and it really doesn’t accomplish anything and it sets you back.

Connie was disappointed in the lack of feedback, encouragement, and motivation provided by her office manager. She went as far as suggesting that “she gets somebody in there that knows how to motivate people and keep things happy and upbeat in there so that people aren’t just going down, down, down.”

Connie felt that the lack of training had boiled down to her manager’s reliance on the company’s on-line training. She suspected that her manager “felt that I didn’t need any
help because of my extensive sales background.” Connie admitted that part of the lack of training was her fault. “I didn’t ask for help,” she stated quite frankly. “It’s hard to come to her (the manager) for help because you don’t know if you’re asking her something she doesn’t know or just doesn’t want to help you. That’s what I’ve discovered.”

The conflict between Connie and her manager was caused by a difference of opinion towards a basic approach to generating business. Connie believed that technology was the route to take but her manager “wants to train me old school.” Connie agreed that social networking was the way to go but through internet networking not what to her was the old fashioned way of direct personal contact with people by joining clubs, groups, and social organizations. “I don’t network with organizations. I don’t play golf.”

Connie and her manager reached an agreement concerning business generation. Connie agreed to use “some of the old-fashioned methods” while concentrating on generating business through the use of technology and social media. Her manager had a technology background and consented to provide assistance and advice to Connie.

**Gertrude**

**Basic Demographic Information**

Gertrude is in her early 60s, married, and has adult children and several grandchildren. Prior to entering real estate Gertrude had several jobs or career paths. She is a high school graduate. Gertrude selected a multi-office franchise company for her initial affiliation. She changed offices during the course of this research project.
Background

Gertrude describes her “past life”–her life before real estate–“as a mother; that’s pretty much where I started out, a mother of four and pretty much raised kids and just didn’t do much of anything else.” She did part-time waitressing for many years and was determined to “never do that again.” This determination eventually led her to real estate. Gertrude owned a four-unit building in a metropolitan area and was a property owner and landlord. She decided to leave the city for life in a less stressful environment and moved to a less populous suburban area when her kids were very young.

Gertrude obtained an insurance license in 1997. She said that she “seemed to know quite a bit about the insurance part of it and people were coming to me and asking about insurance.” The manager of a large insurance company approached her and she decided to get the license. Once she was licensed, Gertrude contracted with other independent insurance companies about their products, too.

In 2000, Gertrude was approached to be a loan officer for a small brokerage firm. She eventually became licensed as a loan officer to comply with the 2005 lending requirements. Gertrude’s interest in real estate while working on its periphery through insurance and lending prompted her to start a real estate investment club in 2002. She wanted to have a source for sharing experiences and helping people with similar interests.
Motivation for Getting into Real Estate

“I’ve always enjoyed real estate” and “wanted to do more” were sentiments that led Gertrude to pursue a real estate license. Gertrude views real estate as helping people. “I’ve always wanted to be more into the real estate side of helping people. I’ve always enjoyed going out and looking and checking properties and helping other people find them even without being a real estate agent.” As long as she was doing it anyway, it seemed to her to “just make sense” to get a real estate license and earn some money. Gertrude thought it would complement her insurance and loan businesses even though her ultimate goal was to ease out of those businesses and do “just real estate.”

In addition to helping people, Gertrude feels that there “is just something about the real estate itself” that holds great appeal for her, “just looking at the different properties and seeing different properties. Just looking at the property and the buildings and seeing the designs.”

Gertrude is not entirely altruistic and did not get into the business solely to help people. She wants to earn a good income; she’d like to be in the $100,000 bracket within five years. But for starters, she’d be content with paying all her “expenses and having a little left over.”

Office Selection

Office selection was an easy decision for Gertrude. After checking Premier Realty and several other companies online, Gertrude selected Premier because “I thought they
offered a lot of different training. I didn’t see that with the others.” She was familiar with the office because it was the location for her pre-licensing class. Gertrude also factored commuting and access into her selection. It was a “slam dunk” since she’s only “five minutes away.”

Gertrude opted not to interview with any other companies even though she spoke “for a few minutes” with the manager from Summit Realty who had contacted her by phone. She mentioned that she received lots of mailings from companies “once they found out I got my license.” Gertrude never pursued those contacts.

Getting Started

Gertrude took her pre-licensing class at Premier Realty and decided to affiliate with them. Gertrude received conflicting advice about working with family and friends.

It’s kind of funny when they tell you the people that you should go after first are your family and friends and then they tell you in sales training that some of the most difficult people you’re going to work with are family and friends.

Nonetheless, to generate business Gertrude pursued her past loan clients and insurance clients. She wavered when it came to contacting her real estate investor club members as a source or business. She worried that it would appear to be too self-serving and unfair to other members.

Gertrude applied her experience as a loan officer and insurance agent to get started in the business. She knew she had to,
Get back to basics. You have to get out there more. You need to talk more. You need to get your cards out there. You need to try to do a lot more networking and everything. You have to try to remind your family and friends, some you might not want to work with, but you try to see if they have referrals.

**Frustration**

Gertrude’s frustration stemmed from the managerial attitude and office environment, her lack of knowing what to do, and her perception of empty promises concerning guidance and training. Gertrude saw the office was having factions or closed groups:

I just had this feeling that there was a clique. Usually in a large office there’s a clique. There was sort of a clique going on in there and what I felt is it was more favorable for the male than it was for the female in there to a certain extent.

This was highlighted by Gertrude’s experience at the office meeting where she and another new agent were introduced:

I noticed that it seemed like they were a little bit more welcoming to the male. The manager talked about getting to know him, spent time asking him how things were going. I thought they knew him forever and here he was brand new just like I was. They introduced him at the beginning of the meeting and me at the end of the meeting. It was like, “Oh yeah, Gertrude is new too,” and nothing else.

Gertrude summed up her perception of the office attitude by saying, “I always felt like an afterthought. I think being new you’re just not sure what you’re supposed to be doing, to get it going, and that’s frustrating.”
Gertrude was assigned a mentor who was supposed to show her the ropes and help her get started. She claimed that her mentor was not really available, that he was too busy. According to Gertrude, she called him for various things and “I wasn’t getting my answers. I was calling for questions, but I wasn’t getting replies back.” It was then Gertrude called the office manager and requested a meeting. The initial meeting went well but, according to Gertrude, the promised training sessions never materialized.

As time went on Gertrude’s frustration grew and she became increasingly discouraged and uncomfortable with her decision to affiliate with Premier Realty.

I was feeling sort of uncomfortable and a little aggravated when I went into the office because I wasn’t showed different things. I have not worked in an office where the phones, I mean they’re simple, but like I mentioned before I wasn’t shown how they worked. Another thing is floor time—no one ever told me what I’m supposed to be doing really. I only knew it because of with being in the insurance and the loans. But I wasn’t sure how to work the telephones, wasn’t sure how to work the printers, or like I had mentioned at one time about brochures, and I had to ask her when she was showing us how to make your own folders and that and I asked where do we get the folders? Do we have to go buy them? And she said, “No, they’re in the storage room.” I said, “Okay.” I didn’t know that either. So it’s just a bunch of different little things that weren’t done and that I think should be told to somebody brand new. Walk them around. Don’t just say, “This room’s the storage room; this room’s the meeting room.” Show them everything that’s there. I’m not a pushy person so maybe needed to be pushy, aggressive or whatever.

Gertrude’s frustration became so stressful that she left Premier Realty and affiliated with another real estate brokerage company.
Basic Demographic Information

John got married during the course of this research project. He is in his middle 30s. Prior to real estate, John was involved in various aspects of municipal work starting as a seasonal worker and finishing as a department head. John is a high school graduate. John chose a multi-office franchise real estate organization for his initial affiliation.

Background

John’s involvement in real estate stems from his municipal background “from spending just under 20 years working for municipalities.”

When I first started in municipality work, public works, I loved it. I dealt with the public on a daily basis. It was the best thing in the world. I had a huge back yard, the entire town, and we went from area to area and did work, loved it. It was like having a big back yard. I evolved in the department. I got more into the administration end of it, more into management and it wasn’t as fun anymore. Usually when I had to interact with residents, it was for control damage. Something went wrong. Someone has got to go out there and calm everybody down in a rational basis and bring everybody back together.

When John left his municipal job, he was offered several opportunities by engineering companies that wanted him to focus on “their end of the business that dealt with municipalities.” He turned them down because he thought, “I’d be right back in the same arena just looking at it from another viewpoint.” John knew that he “didn’t want to be there anymore.” As he states, “I was done. My heart wasn’t in it.”
Motivation for Getting into Real Estate

John had always told himself, “that by the time I was 40, I was leaving the municipal world and starting my own business.” He was never really sure “what my own business would be.” He considered real estate to be “about as close as I can get right now.” Real estate provided a safety net for John’s entrepreneurial proclivities, “you’re an independent contractor but you have the support and guidance of an existing company and a network of other independent people” while affording him the adventure and challenge he craved. John believes that real estate has the income potential even though his first year in the business, “I’m looking to enjoy it more than I’m looking to make a buck.”

Office Selection

John started his real estate career at the Creekside office of a multi-office franchise organization. The Creekside location is where John took his pre-licensing course. He opted to be licensed at this location because of a growing relationship with his course instructor who was also acting as John’s mentor. When John’s instructor and mentor retired, John stayed with the company but transferred to their office in Middleton, which was closer to his home. He never entertained the notion of interviewing other companies. He enjoyed working in the Creekside office and presumed that things would be the same or very comparable in the company’s Middleton office.
Getting Started

While John was taking the pre-licensing class his instructor offered everyone the opportunity to mingle at the office and participate in certain real estate activities. John took advantage of these opportunities and had a bit of a jump start for getting a sense of the business. John really admired his instructor/mentor and marveled at his “wealth of knowledge” about the real estate industry, the inventory, and the community. John wanted to emulate his mentor’s success and longevity.

Frustration

“In real estate there is no schedule and that’s the hardest part about it.” The lack of structure and scheduling daily activities was frustrating to John. He was accustomed to a daily routine established by an office protocol and his boss during his municipal work. The transition was difficult because John was not “really aware yet” of what was essential to his performance as an effective real estate agent.

Another of John’s frustrations was what he referred to as “dead ends.” Because he did not know what to do or ask, he lost some customers. He blamed his lack of knowledge for these “dead ends.” He was also concerned about not knowing how to do the paperwork required for a listing or a sale and wondered if that was the reason an offer he had written dwindled. He wished it had not “because I would have liked to have gotten a little pay stub, the happiness there.” He stated, “My biggest frustration has been chasing those dead ends and not knowing up front that they were going to be dead ends. I should have seen
that coming. I should have asked a few more questions before we went out there and got that far.”

John realized the real estate market was slow and decided that “I’ll take this time and learn how to do it.” His main concern “was certainly not to spin a dollar my first day out. My main concern was to learn the business, to learn all the facets of the business.” Despite his perception of the market, John expected to have had a closing or “at least something in the hopper by now. It doesn’t look promising,” signaled John’s growing discontent with the lack of production and income. John’s frustrations were the difficulty in transitioning from a structured workplace to the “relaxed, open atmosphere” of the real estate business, and his lack of knowledge, productivity, and income.

Josie

Basic Demographic Information

Josie is married and has a young daughter. She is in her middle 30s. Josie ran a day care business and did bookkeeping. She is multilingual speaking English, Spanish, and Portuguese. She classifies herself as Hispanic. She worked in the accounting/bookkeeping department of a company for years prior to entering real estate. Josie is a high school graduate, has an associate’s degree, and has some additional college courses. She selected a multi-office franchise real estate company for her initial affiliation.
Background

Josie did various things prior to starting in real estate but “mostly focused on accounting.” She had a home day care center for a while because she had been laid off while she was pregnant. She went to school and got an associate’s degree in child development. It was a venture that worked well because “I was able to be home with my own daughter.” She maintained her home day care business until her daughter was old enough to go to pre-school with full-time day care. Josie returned to accounting when her daughter started pre-school. She was a payroll specialist for a temporary agency and she did bookkeeping for several small businesses.

Motivation for Getting into Real Estate

There are several factors that influenced Josie to pursue a career in real estate: a long-time interest, a bad experience when buying her personal residence, the freedom of her own schedule, time for her daughter, and the potential and opportunity.

I’ve wanted to get into real estate for a very long time. It just fascinates me, just the idea, just going through the process myself, you know, looking through all these houses and the patience that my Realtor® had with me looking at hundreds of houses. And I feel that I wasn’t fully walked through the process of being a first-time homeowner and showing the ropes and the things that I needed to do on my part. And I wanted to make the process smoother for other people. So that’s what really fascinated me and just the idea of just being able to go see a lot of different houses, get different ideas, you know. I just like the freedom of it, of doing my own schedule. I have a little girl and I have to also make time for her. A full-time job from 8 to 5 or whatever it is, it’s hard to do that.
Josie wants to make money in the real estate business as an agent and as an investor. “I want to be able to pay for my daughter’s college and not depend on a scholarship that she may or may not get. I want to be able to give my daughter a better life.” And, she said, “there’s a lot of money to be made but it’s not something that’s going to happen overnight.” Ultimately, though, Josie wants to serve others. She and her husband have a dream of funding a children’s home—an orphanage-like entity—that they hope to fund through her successful real estate career.

Office Selection

Because of her interest in real estate and her entrepreneurial leanings, Josie belonged to several real estate investment clubs. As she attended meetings and networked, she met several real estate agents. One in particular, Tom, was a very active investor as well as an agent for a multi-office operation. Tom was building a personal team within his company. His area of specialization was property management and investor clients. He began to advise, coach, and mentor Josie in building a successful investment portfolio.

Josie interviewed with the company that sponsored the school where she took her pre-licensure class and a couple of other companies but opted to work as member of Tom’s team “especially since I got the invitation and he works mostly with investors, which is more what we’re interested in doing. He just kind of pushed me.” Josie found his business activity and his energy very compelling.
Getting Started

Despite her long-time interest in real estate, Josie’s entrance into the business had a dubious beginning. She took the pre-licensing class three times before she actually took the state exam. The first class was very large and Josie did not feel as though she was adequately prepared to take the state exam. After some time, she registered for an online course that she did not like at all. There was no interaction and it was very difficult to ask questions online. The third class was a small class and very interactive and had constant review. She passed the state exam and affiliated with a team in a multi-office franchise organization. Josie liked working with a team because “working with a team, they help me more and show me things more hands on; working with a team, they’re here all the time.”

Josie got heavily involved in the property management end of the business because of her team affiliation. She also did residential brokerage with an emphasis on investors. Josie’s business started up quickly because she was caught in the team’s whirlwind activity. She believed in self-promotion and marketing, “I am doing everything possible I can to put my name out there.”

Frustration

Josie’s initial frustration was the difficulty she experienced transitioning from being an employee in the corporate world to being an independent contractor in the real estate industry.
It’s a new business for me and I’m used to coming from the corporate world where I already had my job responsibility set for me. I already knew when I came in what I had to do because it was expected of me. It’s like, now I really don’t have anyone watching over my shoulder now. And I have the free time and the independence, which is what I want and what I was shooting for, but it’s the transition part that—it’s difficult. I’ve had my mental state; I have to change it from being, … from being an employee to being self-employed.

Josie was spending the majority of her time in the leasing end of the business and was not satisfied with this segment of the business:

I’m also a leasing agent so a lot of my time is spent showing apartments or houses for rent. I started getting focused just on that and then I sat down at home one day and I was just thinking, you know, trying to put my thoughts together, and I’m like, you know, I am going a direction I don’t want to go. I don’t want be just a leasing agent.

Lack of income frustrated Josie, “I thought I would be making a decent amount of money by now and I’m not!” She was taken aback with how much she had to spend, “I knew there was gonna (sic) be some expense because starting a new business there’s always expenses. I’m in shock how many expenses there are.”

Josie admitted that the money issue was upsetting but it was not nearly as disturbing as the lack of knowledge.

I mean, I think my frustration is more that I am not, I mean, the money helps; that’s why you usually come into this business, to make more money, but I think it’s just the frustration of not knowing what to do. It’s just not knowing how to do my job! That’s the frustrating part. You know, the money will come. I know for sure it will come.
The office atmosphere grated on Josie and became a source of irritation. She went from being on “cloud 9” to saying, “I don’t like it here,” in the time frame from the first interview to the fourth interview, which was a period of about five months. Josie was annoyed by the gossip in the office and the continual interruptions:

There’s times also that I’m focusing and I’m getting some stuff done and they pull you from there just to do other things, to do other research. They just pull me from concentrating on what my goals are, away from that. That’s why I feel more focused working from home and I can concentrate more on what I’ve got to do, and I’m not involved in the gossip, you know, “he did this” and “she did that.”

In summary, Josie’s frustrations stemmed from the difficulty she experienced in transitioning from the corporate world to real estate, the lack of income coupled with the amount of expenses, not knowing what to do, and the office environment

Katie

Basic Demographic Information

Katie is married and has two grown children. She is in her early 50s. She and her husband own and operate a successful home decorating company. Katie is a high school graduate. She associated with a multi-office franchise real estate company.
Background

Katie and her husband owned a painting and decorating company for over 17 years. She has bought and sold “I don’t know how many properties” through her sister who was a Realtor®. In fact, she still owns some investment properties.

Motivation for Getting into Real Estate

Katie enjoyed real estate investing. Earning the commission on personal investments was a key issue in Katie’s decision to enter real estate. “I finally decided that it was time that I paid myself instead of someone else.” Besides that, Katie was bored with the painting business and felt “like I was done with that and wanted an out.” Real estate provided the out and “seemed like the most reasonable thing for me to do because I’m self-employed and don’t think I can go work for someone else.” Flexibility of schedule was also important to Katie who wanted “to be able to do things on my own time and my own schedule.” Katie’s reasons for getting into the real estate business included making money, enjoying flexibility of schedule, being her own boss, and serving as an alternative to her painting business.

Office Selection

Katie had no proclivity towards a particular real estate office since she took her pre-licensing class online. “And that’s the very reason why I didn’t take a class through an office. I did not want to feel obligated to that office.” Katie shopped around for an office;
she had five interviews. Katie interviewed with two companies based on her sister’s recommendations. One company simply “didn’t rub me right.” Another company expected her to travel to its corporate headquarters, which was about 60 miles away for training.

As Katie interviewed companies and offices, she decided to go with the company that “would cost me the least amount of money and have the most tools.” The third company Katie interviewed with was a desk fee company and that did not fit with her criteria of “the least dollar amount.” The fourth interview was at an office that was part of a multi-office organization. Katie had done business with the office manager and was familiar with the company and the office. She thought it would be worthwhile to check it out from the viewpoint of a potential agent.

Her last interview was at an office for the same company. Serendipity led to her affiliation with that particular company’s Riverfront office. She was driving and saw the office. After a quick phone consultation with her sister the real estate agent, Katie called the office and arranged to meet the office manager “in 15 minutes.” She was already sold on the company and was curious about differences between offices. The Riverfront office manager had a lot of technical knowledge which appealed to Katie since “I’m very into computers,” plus the location was closer to her home. The manager’s technical knowledge and the location of the office sealed the deal for Katie.
Getting Started

Katie jumped into the business, “I like to hit the ground running.” Katie put her love of computers and tendency “to think outside the box” into action. She found a potential Seller on Craig’s list and worked it into a three way deal with the help of an experienced agent. “That first deal was phenomenal to pull off and it’ll be tough to top.” Despite the success of this first transaction, Katie planned on a two year curve to have a profitable business.

Frustration

Katie’s frustration stemmed from being new, things “taking a long time” to come together, the lack of results, and people’s perception of the business.

Katie worried that someone will discover that she was new in the business because she believed that people “just won’t give you a chance because I’m not very experienced and the woman who’s been doing it twenty years is more experienced and will do a better job.” So Katie did not tell her clients that she was new to the business, “no one knows that I am new; I do not tell.” Katie came to this conclusion after losing a piece of business to a more experienced agent.

Katie went after listings because she believed, “you don’t list, you don’t exist.” But she was “getting really aggravated with the listing thing and not getting them.” She attributed this lack of listing results to her brutal honesty, “I tell them what I think, not
what they want to hear.” So, “it’s like I said, I’m very, very busy even though nothing’s happening.”

Katie was frustrated by the lack of the public’s understanding of how the real estate industry works. She came to this conclusion after working with several buyers.

People do not respect Realtors®. They absolutely do not. And they will jump to another Realtor® after they’ve wasted your time. And I have had to reprimand a couple of people about this and said do not call or bother me if you are going to do this because I won’t be loyal to you and neither will that next agent when she finds out what you are doing. So I have no trouble calling them on it. This is not a retail store here. Nothing irks me more than not respecting someone’s time.

Mona

Basic Demographic Information

Mona is married and has a young daughter. She is in her early 40s. Prior to real estate Mona worked in sales for a commercial printer and for a direct sale, home party company. Mona is a high school graduate and has some college education in the fine arts. She affiliated with an independent (non-franchise) single office real estate company.

Background

Mona was a graphic artist for 12 years. She worked for several different commercial printers and did freelance work. She also worked in the marketing department of a large satellite distribution company that was located in the southern part of the country. At this time, Mona and her husband are relocated back to the Midwest. Her first
job upon returning to the Midwest was a very unpleasant experience. She had a position as a project manager at a commercial printing company. The increasing work load and stress caused her to assess her career choice. Mona took some time off and decided to switch courses and move beyond commercial printing. Mona got involved with a direct sale company on a part-time basis. It was a company that sold food products doing demonstrations in customers’ homes.

Mona decided that she wanted a low-key position, noticed an ad in the paper for a real estate company looking for someone with computer knowledge and some graphics experience. She interviewed for the position and “it just felt like a fit.” When Mona took the position, she had no intention of working in real estate.

Motivation for Getting into Real Estate

As Mona worked in the office and took on responsibilities beyond front desk work, she decided to take her involvement in real estate further. She decided to get a license. Her father was influential in her decision to get a license; he was a commercial real estate broker for 30 to 40 years. He kept telling her to get her license and she said that she constantly heard him saying, “Get a license. The money is in real estate. You need to sell.” Her boss and subsequent mentor Dan also encouraged her to get her real estate license.

Mona also admitted that she did it for her young daughter, to show her that you can do whatever you want to do, and to have the extra income to provide her family with extras and a very comfortable life. Mona came to the conclusion that when she became
successful in real estate brokerage she would have more time for her daughter and be able to “do just one job.”

Office Selection

Mona had a very easy decision. She was already working in a real estate office, was familiar with the people and procedures, and knew that “if I were going to start off anywhere fresh, I would want to be here.” Since she knew where she was going to work, she opted to take her pre-licensing class at the local community college. She never gave any consideration to taking the course at a proprietary school because most of these classes were offered at real estate offices.

Getting Started

Even though Mona activated her real estate license and joined the Realtor® organization, she was reluctant to start in the business. She needed the income from her office position, and wanted to talk to her boss (who was vacationing) about how to approach real estate sales before she did anything. Because Mona was unsure about how she wanted to handle things, she procrastinated in speaking to Dan. She vacillated between starting part-time with her own business, becoming someone’s licensed assistant, or being a team member.

Because of personal financial issues resulting from an accident, Mona decided to postpone working as a full-time real estate agent. She examined the market and determined “that there is too much inventory out there and not a lot of buyers right now.
That’s why I’m not jumping in with both feet.” For the first few months, Mona worked only with family and friends as clients.

**Frustration**

The two main sources of Mona’s frustration were her inability to shake her role as administrative assistant from her colleagues’ minds and the lack of business. Mona believed agents in the office were having difficulty accepting her role as a Realtor®:

> I think they see me as the administrative assistant and that’s all they see me as. Except for a few others, and the few others that I know see me differently or know that I can do differently are the ones who are coming to me and helping me and the others are ignoring that fact that I’m a licensed agent.

Mona maintained a part-time status as an administrative assistant because she needed the income and benefits as she built her business. This contributed to her frustration because, “I keep getting pulled back; every time I take a couple of steps forward to get what I, to go towards my goal, I get pulled back to do other people’s stuff.”

Mona became involved with two of her company’s working groups: the foreclosure group and the expired and for sale by owner group. The function of these groups was to generate business by building inventory. Despite her continual efforts Mona conceded, “I’m not having any luck on actual listings.” She found the lack of results frustrating and consoled herself with the notion “that the market is slow right now.” Mona worried that she would need to put her real estate activity on the “back burner” and return to being an administrative assistant on a full-time basis.
Sally

Basic Demographic Information

Sally is in her middle 50s, married, and has no children. Prior to entering real estate, she had been a human resource specialist. She holds a master’s degree in industrial relations. Sally initially joined a single-office franchise company that was bought by a multi-office franchise during the course of this research study. Without changing locations, she experienced a company switch.

Background

Sally was transferred four times during her career as a human resource specialist. She ended her career as the benefits manager for her company, which meant,

I was in charge of the health and welfare benefits for the entire company for 9,000 people. I was in charge of getting the vendors, building the plans, making any plan changes, all of that. It was very, very high pressure.

Motivation for Getting into Real Estate

Sally always had an interest in real estate, which stemmed from doing research during her four job transfers as a human resource specialist. She enjoyed researching the market and did it “just for kicks. It was fun for me.” Her company had a workforce reduction and Sally was one of the people who lost her job. She took this as a chance to step back and reflect, “Here’s an opportunity for me to decide what I really want to do.”
She figured that she “probably has another 10 good years in me and I want to do something that I’m going to have fun doing.”

Sally admitted that she would not have quit her job to go into real estate, but “took the loss of my job as an opportunity to look in another direction and this is where I decided to go.” Sally wanted a job where, “I could really write my own ticket, where I’m more independent, where I have more control.” The time flexibility, income potential, and ability to “look into the different aspects of it” appealed to Sally. After consulting with her husband, she decided to study for her real estate license.

Office Selection

Sally completed her pre-licensing requirement through a home study program. “I basically spent five weeks studying and taking quizzes and then I went and took the state exam.” Sally contacted Diana, the “best agent we ever worked with,” for advice and guidance about entering the business. Diana recommended Karen who was the owner and manager at Summit Realty. Diana claimed that Summit Realty and Karen provided the “best training that any of the offices offer, especially for new agents.” Sally made an appointment to meet with Karen, “hit it off,” and decided to begin her career at Summit Realty.

Getting Started

Sally realized that, “this is probably one of the worst times to get into real estate because of the way the market is.” She acknowledged that “it was probably going to be
difficult to break into the business” since she had no family in the area to rely on as her initial source of business referrals.

Sally realized that she had to “get my name out there.” Her initial marketing efforts were in her neighborhood. She sent letters to 28 of her neighbors and personalized them. She thought that she would “get more of a response” by personalizing the letters. Every letter contained the fact that Sally lived in the neighborhood. As an example, one of the letters Sally sent was to a neighbor whose house had been on the market and was now off the market. Sally’s letter asked if the neighbor would like to discuss current market conditions and marketing strategies for selling the home with her. It worked; Sally got her first appointment with a potential seller.

Frustration

Sally’s frustration had three main causes: transition from a highly structured corporate position to the independent real estate arena, a deficiency in knowing what to do day-to-day, and the lack of activity and income. One of the lures of the real estate business was the time flexibility and Sally was having a difficult time adjusting to creating her own schedule and the realization that she did not need to be at the office every day. Sally was aware that she “had a nine to five mentality” and the “corporate expectation of being there every day.” The transition from a highly structured environment to “one that is not organized, loose” was a challenge for Sally. “My previous positions have all been more structured. While I worked independently, I wasn’t working for myself, which is a lot
different. The fact that I don’t have the structure is something that I struggle with.” Sally added,

> It’s a real shift for me to think, ‘you are in control. If you need to work, you work. If you don’t think you need to work, if you don’t have anything to do, go cut the grass. You’re okay. It’s fine. You’re not doing anything wrong.’ So, yeah, it’s a big change for me.

Sally questioned her expectations of the business. “It’s harder than I thought it might be and I was pretty realistic coming into this.” She did not know what to do day-to-day especially to generate business:

> I have certain things that I always do. I get up and I check the multiple listings and I look to see what’s come on the market and what’s sold and you know all that kind of stuff but you can only do that for so long. I thought I’d be doing something, maybe not selling houses, but showing people houses, something, anything, that I’d be doing something. Maybe that’s where my mistake was.

Despite knowing that the market was slow, Sally was frustrated by the lack of activity.

> I’m the type of person that (sic) I need to be doing something. For me, there’s not enough to do because I don’t have a business and I don’t have any clients. So it’s difficult for me in that respect. There’s just not enough activity.

Sally thought that she would have generated business and income within six months of entering the business.
Because of Sally’s frustration with lack of structure, activity, and income, she admitted that she was looking for a job in “her field and if something comes along, I’m taking it. I’ll jump ship.” Despite her frustration, Sally declared,

I feel like this was something that I wanted to do and I’m glad that I’m at least giving it a try. And if it doesn’t work, it doesn’t work, and that’s life. I can say at least I gave it a shot because I’ve always had an interest in real estate and this is a learning experience for me. So we’ll see what happens.”

Choices, Challenges, and Changes

This chapter presented information about the participants including their basic demographic information, their backgrounds, their motivation for entering the real estate industry, how they selected their office workplaces, what they did to get started, and their frustrations.

The participants were very excited about their real estate careers as they entered the business. As reality set in, the excitement turned to frustration. The frustration appeared to be caused by a disconnect between their expectations and what was actually happening. The frustration led the participants to examine and reflect upon what was occurring in their fledgling careers. Blame was assigned and always to an external source: lack of training, inadequacy of their managers and mentors, and the market itself. The participants failed to acknowledge that they may have contributed to the perceived lack of business and productivity. Once the participants assigned blame, they determined a course of action or resolution to the problem.
The concepts of experience and doing the work perceived as necessary by the participants in their roles as real estate agents, begs the question, “How did they learn what to do?” The following chapter examines how the participants acquired their real estate knowledge.
CHAPTER 5
LEARNING THE BUSINESS

Introduction

This chapter identifies the two types of learning used by the participants: formal learning and informal learning. The first classification is formal learning, which, for the purposes of this study, is defined as any highly-structured educational opportunity. There are two instances of formal learning that were required of the participants in this study: the state mandated pre-licensing course and the Realtor® required new member orientation program. Both forms of these formal education requirements are discussed in the context of the attitudes and perceptions of the participants concerning their adequacy as preparation for a career in real estate. At the time of this study, an individual had a choice between two types of initial Illinois real estate licenses: a real estate sales license or a real estate broker license. This chapter provides a description of the requirements for obtaining the Illinois real estate sales license and the Illinois real estate broker license. Only one of the participants in this study chose the real estate broker license as the initial license; the others entered the business with real estate sales licenses.

The second category is informal learning. This chapter discusses the two main categories of informal learning that were identified in this study: self-directed learning activities and experiential learning activities. The self-directed learning activities were
activities the participants identified as helpful to their personal development within the real estate business and as useful to developing their business. These activities included the use of material resources, training programs, self-teaching, self-selected classes and seminars, and company meetings. Experiential learning was considered to be the learning that occurred through the participants own experiences (learning by doing) or through the experience of others either by observation or interaction. In essence, this chapter focuses on the formal and informal learning methods used by the participants in developing their real estate businesses.

**Formal Learning Opportunities**

There are two formal education opportunities for newly licensed Realtors®. The first is a pre-licensing course that is mandated by the state of Illinois, the second is a required orientation program required by local Realtor® associations.

**Licensing Requirements and the Pre-Licensing Course**

The basic qualification requirements for a real estate salesperson’s license in Illinois are: (a) a person must be 21 years of age, (b) have a high school diploma or its equivalent, (c) successfully complete a 45-hour basic real estate transaction course (successful completion includes passing a minimum 150 question test with a score of 75% or better), (d) pass an independently administered state exam with a minimum score of 75%.
The mandatory 45-classroom-hour basic real estate transaction course has its curriculum defined in the Real Estate License Act of 2000 (2000) (225 ILCS 454) and within the Administrative Code Chapter VIII, Subchapter b, Section 1450.1105 (c) (1):

Real Estate Transactions shall include a minimum of 45 class hours. The course shall include instruction in real estate law, types of interest and ownership in real estate, home ownership, legal descriptions, titles, liens, taxes, encumbrances, listing, advertising, appraisal, finance, closings, and professional code of ethics. (p. 160)

This course is an overview of basic real estate principles, laws, and theories. It may be construed as an introduction to the real estate practitioners’ knowledge base. Every real estate pre-licensing class in Illinois must be licensed and taught by licensed instructors through licensed real estate schools. Separate approval and licenses are required for classroom courses, and internet and home study offerings.

An individual who passes the licensing exam is not licensed and able to practice until a sponsoring broker activates the license. Once the license is activated or sponsored, the newly licensed agent may begin to practice real estate.

The real estate broker license in Illinois requires an additional 75 hours of formal classroom education. These hours are comprised of five additional courses of 15 hours per class. The classes are appraisal, finance, advanced real estate principles, contracts and conveyances, and broker administration. The successful completion of each course is evidenced by the passing of a final exam. The final qualifying step is passing the state exam. At this time, the newly minted broker may self-sponsor or affiliate with a company.
Relying on examinations for both course work and licensing sets a standard of perceived minimum competence, which is one of the purposes of real estate licensure in Illinois. The Real Estate License Act of 2000 (2000) (225 ILCS 454) states, “The intent of the General Assembly in enacting this statute is to evaluate the competency of persons engaged in the real estate business and to regulate this business for the protection of the public” (Section 1-5, Legislative Intent, p. 7). However, as Eraut (1994) pointed out, “most examinations guaranteed only that knowledge that they were able to test; and this seldom extended to practical competence” (p. 7).

The formal nature of the pre-licensing course with its structured curriculum provides the individual learner or participant with what Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) referred to as received knowledge and is akin to declarative knowledge. In other words, the learners were provided with information that they were expected to suck in as facts without personalizing or interacting with the presented data. Illeris (2011) referred to this content learning as cumulative learning. As one thinks about presented information in light of situated cognition (Vygotsky, 1978), one becomes acutely aware of the lack of ability to add meaning to the knowledge since the classroom is an artificial environment seemingly unrelated to the reality of practice (MacKenzie, 1992).

The participants in this study who obtained the sales license as their initial license found this course to be informational but not very practical. When Annie was asked about the pre-licensing class, she remarked:

There’s just so much more than what that class has in it, I mean the class is a lot of legal aspects, a lot of, you know, there’s a lot of, … there’s just so much, a lot more
information that you need to acquire and you still don’t know. I mean if someone were to get into the business I would tell them to make sure that you ask for some type of training otherwise you’re not going to know, you’re not going to know what to do. And I don’t know if other companies offer some type of training thing, a course, but basics, you know, ask about the basics, how to get online here at the computer; I had no idea how to do paperwork and procedures.

Katie responded in a similar fashion:

It lacks a little bit. There’s a lot of things (sic)–I’m very hands on so during a course was, you know, nice to read through, but when I actually was faced with the paper and the question and what do I do now, I mean, I walked out of that course and I couldn’t even write a contract. So, I basically winged it for a couple of weeks until I figured this all out. So, those sort of things, it was missing other than that basic knowledge things. There was a ton (sic) of things in there that like any course that you have to take that you will probably never use…. But for the most part it gave me the basics and then I had to jump from there.

Gertrude suggested:

It teaches you a lot about the whole industry. But the class is, per se, to get your license, I don’t think it goes into depth or teaches what real life things are going to happen. Some things might come up in the conversation, real like in the classroom, you know. But you might not be taking notes on exactly what happened. The classroom is fantastic and it brings up all these different things. I think some of the things you might not use. Like certain things, I don’t know, like surveys and acreage. Appraisals usually are done by the surveyor and the appraiser. You need to know certain things. But all this square footage and other stuff, I don’t think that class really teaches you a lot about real life scenarios. It would be good if you could put a little extra in there, but they are already doing a lot now. If they had a specific class for beginners, I think that would be great.

Gertrude went on to add that she thought the pre-licensing class was basically test prep and had no real applicability to working with buyers and sellers and is not sufficient:
Mostly because there’s so much that you’re bombarded with, there’s so much information, you’re nervous as holy heck that you’re going to have to go take the test, you’re already trying to wrack your brain to remember all these things and which one are they going to ask, are they gonna (sic) ask square footage, are they going to ask acreage, are they going to all this stuff that you’re not going to use too much right away, um, you know, so it’s good and I did look back at the book a couple times and that, but at that time I don’t think a lot of us, some of us, sink it in to where you, when you first become an agent, on what you really have to do. I think an after class would be good for like I said about going over the contracts you know, besides your friends and families, who do you hit up.

Gertrude mentioned the pre-licensing class in a subsequent interview:

Well, it’s something that’s going to be good because it’s going to help you pass the test. And really to me, I think I mean, you are so wound up, trying to make sure you’re remembering everything to pass this test, and to me it seems like you’re struggling to make sure you remember it and you go there and take the test, and you go, awww, it’s over with, well now some of that floats away. So you have to make sure that you, it, I don’t think it’s got a lot to do with training you for beginning in the business. It’s just, I mean there’s a lot of knowledge you need to know but it’s not really giving you anything for beginning in the business itself I don’t think.

Josie also found the course informational but not practical:

I think, I mean, the class is very good. It’s good information that a lot of it you need to know. But you don’t use it. No one shows you how to list a house, how to find these houses to list, how to find buyers, how to market yourself, how to get your name out there.

Josie believed that the lack of practical application in the pre-licensing class has serious consequences:

It doesn’t prepare you at all for the business and it’s a shame that the course is as short as it is when there’s so much to learn. There’s so much to know about the business that they don’t teach in class. It’s frustrating for people who decide to
make a change to go from corporate world, or being a house wife, or whatever it may be, to get a completely career change, get into real estate, and then you’re set up for failure. I don’t think it’s right.

The inadequacy of the Illinois pre-licensing education as preparation for participating in the business was certainly reflected in the comments of the participants. It seemed that the pre-licensing course provided information that was construed as a knowledge base or declarative information but not as the practical or procedural knowledge that was necessary to perform the “hot action” required in the workplace (Beckett, 2001).

**New Member Orientation Program (NMO)**

The National Association of Realtors® advocates and supports the professional development of it associates. “Professional development of members is a central function of professional associations” (Knox & Fleming, 2010, p. 132). The Realtor® organization adheres to this tenet by requiring its new members to attend a required orientation program within six months of joining the association. The NMO is offered by the local Realtor® branch of the national and state associations and may determine the duration and curriculum of the NMO.

All participants in this study attended the NMO offered by their local association. Josie was the only participant who attended the Waters Edge NMO; Annie, Connie, Gertrude, John, Katie, Mona, and Sally went to the Riverside NMO. The Waters Edge Association’s NMO was a three-day event while the Riverside Association had just cut
back its NMO to a one-day program. Despite the disparity in length, both NMOs shared several common topics: introduction to the Realtor® organization and its three levels of membership, the Realtor® Code of Ethics (COE), Realtor® safety, and an in-depth presentation of each association’s commonly used real estate sales contract, and fair housing rules and regulations. The Waters Edge program dedicated an entire segment to fair housing while Riverside presented fair housing with much less detail by placing it within its COE segment.

Josie found the NMO that she attended “offered a different perspective on things” than the pre-licensing class. She went on to explain that “the examples that they used made more sense” now that she was in the business. She paid particular attention to the fair housing segment since the presenter gave “real examples of what you can say and what you shouldn’t say.” These examples helped Josie understand the concepts of fair housing that were presented in her pre-licensing class.

Both NMOs had a segment on the standard form real estate sales contract that is customarily used in their respective areas. Several participants found this segment of the NMO helpful. Gertrude, John, and Katie attended the Riverside NMO. Katie remarked, “I liked it because we went through the contract, well, not line-by-line, but section-by-section. When we were done, I had a sample that I could refer to.” John and Gertrude also found the segment on contract preparation to be very helpful and concurred with Katie that it was very helpful. Josie had high praise for the Waters Edge NMO contract segment. She particularly enjoyed it since,
I’m a hands-on learner. And, they gave us a sample contract. They gave us a story and everything. And we had to fill it all out, and that was great practice because it’s one thing for somebody to tell you what to do, and another thing to try to figure out where stuff goes. And I think that was more of a learning experience, figuring out where it goes, than just copying from something else.

The purpose of NMO is to familiarize individuals with the organization, its purpose, function, culture, standards, and ethics. It is often the “one chance to give incoming members a sense of what it means to be a Realtor®” (McCrea, 2006). The NMO is typically the first networking opportunity for new members; it provides a chance for new Realtors® to mingle with others who are starting their careers and with seasoned agents who serve as instructors and presenters. At its best, it provides practical information and a sense of belonging. At its worst, it is a long, overwhelming meeting that puts attendees on information overload (Dunn, 2009).

The participants were introduced to the Realtor® COE and Pathways to Professionalism (PoP). The COE sets out standards of behavior for Realtor® members; PoP establishes a list of guidelines for courtesy and civility for Realtors®. These segments familiarized the participants with the “higher standards” of practice required of Realtors® and presented the professional standards process required for disputes between Realtors®. Mona remarked, “It’s good to know what’s acceptable and what’s not. There’s a lot to know.” Sally thought the professional standards process of settling disputes “internally through the organization was a good way to do things since our dirty laundry won’t be made public.”

The participants’ attitudes toward NMO were best summed up by Josie:
Wow! There’s a lot of stuff you can’t do or say when you’re doing business. It’s good to know. I wish it had stuff about what to do, you know, like here’s how to create business; here’s what to say to buyers; here’s how you get your name out there.

In other words, the participants found the course more helpful than the pre-licensing class but asserted that it lacked the “here’s what to do to be successful” piece.

The perceptions of the participants confirmed the assertions of Billet (2001) and Rogoff (1995) that knowledge gained through formal education does not meet the needs of the individual in the workplace. There appeared to be several reasons for this inadequacy. First, much of the knowledge is theoretical and presented in a perfect world environment, whereas Schön (1983) pointed out, professionals work in an environment “characterized by uncertainty, disorder, and indeterminacy” (p. 16). Second, the learners are not able to use the knowledge immediately. Third, there is often a disconnect between the knowledge obtained in the formal education setting and the personal experience of the learner. And, last, the formal education experience, even though it provided ample information, failed to impart the necessary skills needed to perform as a Realtor®. It is the difference between content knowledge—“knowledge why” (Jarvis, 1999, p. 16)—and process knowledge—“knowledge how” (p. 16).

In essence, the participants did not learn the practical, the how to do the business during these formal educational offerings; they acquired the theoretical body of knowledge of the real estate business, which is often the role of professional education (Bilodeau, 2004). They considered these courses to be insufficient preparation for functioning in their roles as Realtors®. The disparity between formal education and the world of work
generates a distinct contrast between the theoretical aspects of the business and the actual practice within the business (Eraut, 2000; Melia, 1987).

Informal Learning Opportunities

Informal learning activities contributed the lion’s share of the knowledge acquired by the participants of this study. These informal learning opportunities included self-directed activities and experiential learning.

Self-directed Learning Activities

Self-directed learning activities are determined by the individual in an effort to achieve a goal (Candy, 1991; Knowles, 1975; Piskurich, 1993; Tough, 1971, 1979). Basically, self-directed learning activities are those that are selected by the individual learner to foster individual, professional, or workplace development. In the case of the participants, it was to learn the tasks and competencies needed to function as real estate agents. The participants used various formats in their endeavors to learn the business including printed documentation and technology-based information, web-based instruction, company training programs, seminars and classes, office/company meetings, and group learning programs that included instructor-led initiatives and self-teaching. Even though the learning activities were self-selected by the participants, there were always planners involved. Planners are defined by Tough (1971, 1979) as the “person (or group or object) that does most of the detailed planning in the learning project” (p. 77). Tough (1979) listed four types of planners along with a catch all category--“mixed”--which has “no
dominant type of planner” (p. 86). The four types of planners are: (a) the learner, (b) a group or its leader-instructor, (c) one person in a one-to-one situation, and (d) a nonhuman resource.

The unstructured, independent contractor nature of the real estate business seemed to contribute to the participants’ heavy reliance on themselves as primary planners. They were the primary planners in selecting their learning formats. In the instances of company training programs, seminars and classes, office/company meetings, and group learning programs, the curriculum or subject matter was determined by another type of planner than the learner himself. However, participation was always determined by the research participants.

Connie summed up the use of material resources when she talked about getting information from both print and web-based sources:

I do a lot of reading, a lot of reading and obviously the material that we get from Realtor®, the Realtor® magazine, and a lot of the material that we get from NAR, and all of them, there’s tons. I mean, you can’t even read it all when you get it. If you drill down 50,000 pages, there is still more to read in those things. I can never fully get through them; I actually have to pick the stuff I want to read because it keeps, linking, linking, linking. It is fascinating though and you can get a lot [of information].

Gertrude, too, admits, “I’ve learned with reading a lot different things online—newsletters-about negotiating and all kinds of different stuff. That’s how I’ve learned a lot.”

Tough (1971, 1979) suggested that “nonhuman resources” (material resources) can be an essential part of self-directed learning. Material resources can provide the necessary just-in-time training that is often needed in the workplace (Illeris, 2011). Connie
exemplifies the use of material resources coupled with just-in-time training when she spoke about her use of her company’s basic training notebook:

I started to go through it and I was obviously trying to work and study at the same time. So I stopped a quarter of the way through and I started picking things that applied to me at the moment. For example, in my earlier open houses I referred to it right away, actually, it was shortly after the first open house, which wasn’t that successful for me. I thought, “well, what am I not doing?” So I referred to that book and I went through it all. It did help me on the next one because I did the preparation work for the next open house. Bingo! More activity!

Connie’s comment augments Clardy’s (2000) findings that one often implements a self-directed learning project when there is a disparity or imbalance between the skills and knowledge one has with the skills and knowledge one needs to have. When Connie realized that what she was doing at open houses was not working, she turned to the company’s training manual to augment her knowledge and skills. Connie established a comprehensive marketing campaign for her open houses. In addition to the traditional open house advertising of signs and newspaper advertising, she created a more encompassing marketing strategy that included social media and direct marketing to potential buyers and real estate agents. Connie also determined that she would only hold open houses for properties that were reasonably priced.

Material resources were also used by the participants to reinforce learning, provide a source of motivation, and to provide continual learning. For example, Annie keeps training CDs in her car’s audio system. When asked about listening to CDs, she remarked:

I do. I do and my husband makes fun of me all the time. We have a CD changer so it will go from CD 1 to CD 2 to CD 3 and it’s my learning stuff. He will be like
“You haven’t taken this out?” And I said, “Just because class stops doesn’t mean learning stops.” I still listen to them. I really do. It reiterates and reinforces. It’s almost peaceful.

Josie listens to her CDs for information and inspiration.

Harv Ecker, he did “The Millionaire Mind.” That one I really, really love. I’ve listened to it so many times. There’s three CDs (sic). I highly recommend it. And one that I listen to, he’s actually an investor, his name is Gregg Pinielle. He’s very good and he, I actually receive a CD on a monthly basis from him. He’s just very philosophical. His way of life is, “I want to live with a purpose.” I just love hearing that. That is like “don’t waste your time on people who are wasting your time.” You know, “Live with a purpose.” Make every second count. And I’m like “That’s what I want to be.” I don’t want to waste my life. I don’t want to waste my time. I want to do things that mean something, that, if it can help somebody, I want to do that. I want to lend a hand if I can. I have that flexibility to do that now.

These material resources provide the content and subject matter that the participants have selected to learn. The participants have the intention of using the knowledge or skills imparted through the self-selected nonhuman learning resource (Tough, 1971, 1979).

When it came to web-based instruction, the participants seemed to have the same perception that Katie articulated.

I took ones online that I just went through myself so as far as that goes, they were okay. The online classes where you can talk to the instructor and everybody else, those were great! Those had role playing and once you get used to doing that, it was good. Those answered a lot of the questions I didn’t get from the original course ‘cause I could ask someone as the question came up. A lot of the times you do these courses and the question comes up and you can’t ask the question immediately and then you lose it.
Web-based training that had interaction between individuals especially when being guided or led by an instructor were deemed to be more enjoyable and valuable than those asynchronous web-based offerings. From this perception, one could extrapolate that feedback is necessary for effective learning.

Feedback from others is a form of feedback that Csikszentmihalyi (2003) claimed novices need. The interaction between an experienced person and a novice provides feedback that informs and facilitates understanding of what to do and how to do it. Asking questions and receiving answers from others about how one is doing (feedback) allows one to “become receptive to alternative ways of reasoning and behaving” (Raelin, 2008, p. 127).

The participants reported that even though they used various resources, they were primarily responsible for deciding what and how they learned something. Annie exemplified the use of self-teaching for what she determined she needed to know. Annie decided that inventory knowledge and access to that knowledge was important. The tool for retrieving inventory and marketplace information was the multiple listing service (MLS) so “I’ve learned the MLS--how to do searches, how to send listings through self-teaching. I just played around and figured it out. I’m sure I don’t know everything but I think I’m pretty comfortable in working with that.” Annie noticed that a lot of properties in the MLS were flagged as short sales–properties that were not worth as much as what the sellers owed on them. “I know little to nothing about short sales so I schooled myself quickly on that so when I have a buyer who wants to write an offer on one, I’ll know what
to do.” When asked directly how she schooled herself on short sales, she responded by saying that she:

Asked a lot of questions to experienced agents in her office. I asked a lot of questions, of multiple agents. Susie, she has been busy so she wasn’t always able to help me. So, then, Charlie helped me a lot. Carla helped me. You know, whoever I could grab and ask questions to, I did. I had an idea what questions to ask about that, so I understood the concept of it. I just didn’t have all the specifics.

Several of the participants remarked about the lack of “real” training programs within their companies. Company training seemed to be casual—“if you need something, ask.” Annie was frustrated with her company’s approach to training. Her office manager kept telling her “she was too busy” and that:

She had two other people in mind she wanted to train me they were going to start with prospecting and go from there. She was just going to have me go with a bunch of different people because she just doesn’t have the time to do it. But everything was at such a slow pace; no one was in a hurry, no one was in a hurry to teach me.

As far as Annie was concerned, her company had “no real training program.” Annie’s manager remarked to Annie that “I don’t think you need it (training) as much as some other people.” Annie added, “Not that I’m patting myself on the back, but I think sometimes she’s wrong. I do need it. I do grasp things but if I don’t know what to grasp, I can’t.” Other agents in her office who were aware of the manager’s preoccupation with other issues were willing to help,

I had a ton of offers if you have any questions, let me know from a ton of different agents, but like we were saying earlier, if you didn’t know the questions, you
couldn’t ask. I definitely felt confident that if I had a question, I could call these people and I would but I would be sitting in the middle of my desk still not, not knowing what to do.

Connie relied on her company’s basic training program:

We had our Rapid Beginnings book that Acme puts out. It’s a big thick binder this big really big like a four or six inch binder. It’s actually a training program and it goes over prospecting, open houses, you know.

But she soon felt overwhelmed and “stopped like a quarter of the way through and I started picking things that applied to me at the moment.” She felt that she needed a plan, a methodical approach to training rather than the approach of: “Here’s the book. Ask if you need anything.”

Gertrude told about her company’s web-based training program—Express Advantage. She explained that for her “it was a little bit tough, being online. I think, with me, I could have used a little bit more interaction or going with somebody.” She expanded on the Express Advantage program:

They do have different sheets on office call-ins and different little scripts that you can go by and get your mind in gear for what to say and what to answer, you know. So the Express Advantage was good for that. It’s very good to refer back to. It was on line but they have all these different modules and stuff that you can watch these videos and movies, and pdf files and I printed everything out. That was a lot of paper. It was a stack like this. (Uses hands to show a 4-6 inch stack.) But I have that to now go back and look through it all.
Gertrude had two difficulties with the Express Advantage training. The first was that it was, “Generic, so then she was saying you have to make sure you’re looking up yourself for your own state.” The second was, 

I don’t think it was as good being on the computer. I think it would be better if you were doing it in person, one-on-one, because you’re going through it late at night, you’re busy during the day and you have to hurry up and get to that computer and you’re listening but you’re not doing it as well. You’re not actually doing it.

Josie admitted that her company did not have a formal company training program. She believed that “you always need training. There is no doubt about that. You always need training.” Her initial training was provided by her team leader, 

I sat with him. He took me on a few rounds just to see how he does things. He took me to four rental properties that day and he showed me how it was. And then he had a couple of listings, a couple of showings. I went with him. I rode with him for the first couple of days. And he was like, “Ask as many questions as you need to. I don’t expect you to have a deal by the end of the week. You take your time. Take advantage of this time that you are not busy to learn because once you are busy, you don’t have time to learn. You have to know it.” So I mean just that, with that assistance, I feel like he is working with me for me to learn. He wants me to succeed because I am part of this team. If I succeed, we all succeed practically.

Katie’s company training was a series of on-line sessions and videos that she thought were insufficient because they:

Lacked the real life details. When you’re first starting, you don’t remember that you need to know this and that and later on you’re like, “Oh darn. How do I go about the actual showing of the house, scheduling the house?” The training that you get with the course they give you does the videos with you showing the house. But what happens when you’re ready to sit down with that paperwork? In those training videos, it’s here’s your paperwork. It’s all ready. Here you go, just sign.
And you don’t know what you just filled out. So, yes, I think it should be a step-by-step.…

Mona’s training program was, “I was told whenever I have a question about anything to just come and ask.” Mona remarked that it was a “good thing she had prior sales experience and training, and experience working in a real estate office” because she had some idea what to do. “Otherwise,” she added, “how would anyone know what to ask?”

Sally took the interactive online training offered by her company’s franchise. She remarked that it was “like taking a class. We listened to an instructor, had discussions, and could even ask questions.” At the end of each session, there was an assignment. According to Sally, “there was no follow-up, no accountability. No one knew if you did the assignment or not.” Sally found the generic aspect of the course questionable. To her, the lack of specific state rules and regulations were problematic,

Different areas do things differently and when someone, say from Illinois, asked a question about something specific, the instructor would give an answer and then remark that this may not pertain to your area. What good is the information if I can’t use it or would be breaking a law if I did what was suggested?

Sally commented that there were really two good aspects of the course: “my company paid for it and as long as I completed it; I didn’t get charged,” and “I have a huge notebook full of all kinds of stuff I can use for reference.”
The participants seemed to think that training was necessary and that it needed a practical hands-on approach. The company training programs that they experienced were informational but inadequate preparation for practicing real estate.

The participants attended various classes and seminars. Some of these classes and seminars were recommended to them and others were selected by the participants based on their perceived needs. The seminars and classes selected by the participants appeared to have practical applications. Annie attended seminars on how to use the MLS, “what you can try to do in this market to drum up business,” and a “a ton of seminars on how to sell in this market.” Connie attended seminars on web generation, lead generation, presentations, and internet strategies. Gertrude took classes on finance, negotiation, contracts, and business development including prospecting, marketing, and e-mail marketing. She also took a course about lockboxes, which explained how to use them and their safety and liability issues. Sally attended a program that dealt with distressed properties. These self-directed and self-selected programs certainly fulfilled the purpose of self-directed learning in terms of obtaining practical and personal knowledge that directly affected the participants’ businesses.

For the most part, the participants found office meetings to be practical and informative. Annie remarked,

I attend the office meetings because it’s always about something that has to do with your company or you know something that personally affects you. I learned about the 203K loan you know so I go to all those little things. Our meetings are every Tuesday and there’s usually something that you learn. There was mold. There’s, you know, there’s always something that you can take away.
Connie echoes the sentiment that there is always something useful to take away from office meetings. “We usually do or learn something practical like the rubber band search on the MLS. I learned that right away and I love it. I use it all of the time.”

Gertrude said that:

We’re having meetings now in the morning on different subjects. So that’ll be good. We’ll be doing that every Monday. We’re going to cover things like contracts, negotiating, and how to do things in the office, procedures and stuff. Stuff you can use.

Mona’s company meetings are used for updates and happenings in both her company and the marketplace. Mona missed a month of weekly meetings:

And I’m lost without them. I’m so lost without them. I don’t know what’s going on. I don’t know what’s going on or what’s coming in or what’s going out or what’s changed. It helps you know. You hear the language and you know what’s being said and how people are handling certain situations or whatever the case may be. So, yeah, I’m missing out on that right now. Hearing that talk kind of helps things sink in.

Sally attended all of her company meetings because they covered “things that have to do with my business—market conditions, finance programs, inventory updates.” She explained the aspect of these meetings that she particularly enjoyed “was mingling with other agents, the experienced ones, and listening to them talk about what they were doing to drum up business.” She added that “these meetings added a real life component” to her learning and training.

The participants viewed office meetings as critical learning opportunities because of the useful information that is imparted. Incidental learning also occurred at these
meetings. The participants gained “unintentional” knowledge by listening to conversations between colleagues concerning particular transactions, the state of the market, and the real estate business in general. In other words, the participants learned something above and beyond the formal topics that were presented. They were learning as a “by-product of some other activity” (Marsick & Watkins, 1990, p. 12).

Annie enrolled in a training program that was recommended by her company. The program was not affiliated with her company; it was a program prepared and presented by a third-party vendor. She was the only participant who enrolled in an intensive group training program that was instructor led. It met weekly for seven weeks, was highly structured, and had stringent attendance and performance standards. Annie commented on the regimented nature of the program: “You get a book. You get a shirt—a uniform. Everyone wears the same thing that way the clothing isn’t distracting.” Accountability was built into the program:

Three strikes and you’re out. It’s a huge—you show up five minutes late and it’s a strike. I invested a lot of money in it and if you don’t do what you need to do—you have to make so many prospecting calls, go to so many fsbos, and if you don’t do it, another strike.

Annie explained that the class was really designed for experienced agents who wanted to “kick their business to the next level.” Annie went on to say:

I’m scared to death of some of the things I think I am going to have to do because I’ve never done anything before. But I guess I’m jumping in with both feet. That’s what you do when you’re serious about something, and I’m serious.
Despite the fact that Annie often did not know what the terminology meant, and that she had no business sphere of past clients, she forged ahead since:

This class came along just when I needed to be trained, so I think that’s a good thing. I would do it again knowing everything I know now. I would have liked a little more under my belt before I did it. I mean because the next closest to me was an agent who was in the business two years already.

Annie credits the course with “jump starting” her business and for her early success.

It’s given me more activity than people who have been here five years. If I hadn’t taken this course, I’d probably be a third of where I am and I think I’m being generous, maybe a quarter. Truly, because everything was at such a slow pace; no one was in a hurry to teach me. It was a good, no, it was a great experience.

She continued by saying, “that class gave me was a great foundation. I’ve used something from that class on every single appointment, every single phone call I’ve made.”

The participants developed networks of trusted advisors within their workplaces. These trusted advisors were agents who the participants deemed as experts or were successful in the business. Mona relied on several different agents as sources for needed information. She selected them for their particular ability in a given area:

I’m learning the business from the people that (sic) know the business. There are actually a couple of agents that (sic) are helping me and guiding me in different areas. I have one who is helping me if I ever have the opportunity to show a house or do a contract or whatever. I have one helping me on the marketing end of it and then one helping me on cold calling.
Success and knowledge were not the only criteria used in determining which agents or colleagues were relied upon for advice and information. Accessibility and trust were other factors that determined who provided guidance to the participants. Katie relies heavily upon her sister who is an experienced agent in a different state:

My sister has been awesome. Because when I have needed an instant answer and have called someone, they haven’t picked up their phone. And that’s not working for me. Because I need an answer like right now. So I resort to calling my sister, so which is just like calling another agent but I know she’ll answer her phone.

Annie said:

There’s a couple of agents (sic) here I would feel comfortable enough to call because I wouldn’t presume to be comfortable enough to submit an offer or present it or anything without someone looking it over and telling me what to do.

Sally and John both relied on their office managers as resources for direction and guidance. John’s first meeting with his office manager was a company required goal setting session. “Each agent was given a goal form and had to make an appointment with the manager to review it.” John said that after this goal session, “both of us realized I was at a loss about what to do.” John and the manager agreed that weekly meetings “would probably be beneficial.” John remarked that he “had to make the arrangements to meet so he could get on track. If I didn’t call Sophie and force a day and time, we wouldn’t have met.” After a while, the meetings “fizzled out.” John admitted that he did get some good ideas from the few meetings that occurred. He, too, was told, “If you have any questions or problems, just ask.” He felt as though he could call on his manager at any time for
assistance. John had great respect for his office manager’s expertise and reputation in the business. Sally relied on her office manager for direction, too. She was comfortable relying on Karen because “they really hit it off and she came highly recommended as a trainer.”

Sally was concerned about the marketplace conditions “namely the amount of short sales and foreclosures.” Karen had several short sale sessions with Sally and helped her develop an “almost step-by-step program for finding them, and helping them.” At the completion of these sessions, Sally felt “as though I had a really good handle on short sales–marketing them, what to do for sellers, and how to advise buyers.” She remarked that she “was comfortable asking Karen anything” and got the impression that “Karen was always willing to take time to help. It never seemed like I was bothering her or imposing on her time.”

These trusted advisors were in reality informal mentors. They were drawn together because of common concerns and desirability (Daloz, 1986, 1999). They were not formally matched through a company mentoring program. They seemed to gravitate towards each other based on intangible attributes. Informal mentoring relationships “are dependent on the relationship developed between the mentor and the protégé” (Hansman, 2000, p. 494). In the case of Katie, there was a familial relationship (her sister) as well as the common ground of residential real estate brokerage. Katie is relying on the real estate experience of her sister to provide her (Katie) with reliable information and insights. Annie and Mona relied on experienced agents for advice and guidance. John and Sally
looked to their office managers for direction because of the experience and reputations of their managers. Sally remarked, “might as well learn from the best.”

The participants’ reliance on coworkers and perceived experts confirmed Billett’s (2001) assertion that, “the contribution of direct assistance and support (guidance) by more experienced coworkers provides a significant basis for learning” (p. 77).

Several of the participants were affiliated with companies that offered formal mentoring programs. These were programs that assigned a mentor (an experienced agent) to a newly licensed agent. Hansman (2000) and Peterson (2010) suggested that as effective as formal mentoring programs may be, there are potential problems inherent within these programs. The participants whose companies used formal mentoring programs experienced these shortfalls.

Gertrude and Katie identified two disconnects between mentor and protégé as availability of the mentor and a miscommunication concerning the role of the mentor. In other words, the mentors had one idea of their roles and the protégés had different expectations. Katie sounded somewhat resigned to the lack of availability of her mentor. “She answers my questions and we’ll go over things when I need them. Obviously she’s busy so it’s a little tough to get time with her.” But as Katie told us earlier, she relies on her sister for guidance when she cannot reach her mentor. Katie did not have high expectations of her mentor. She said that her mentor’s role “was just to be available to ask questions because that’s basically what they’re for. To help me get through some things. I don’t expect her to hold my hand.”
Gertrude had different expectations for her mentor and was disappointed with her mentor. She struggled with her mentor’s availability. “He said to call anytime but to look at the schedule for when he’s in the office and talk to him then. Talk to him when he’s in the office.”

Gertrude thought that her mentor should tell her: “How to find leads, which in my opinion is the top thing, how to find leads.” She went on to add that:

He should let me go out there with him and let me experience what he’s experiencing with the buyers and the sellers, at least a couple times, sit down and go over the exact contract, the exact package that you need to have, the paperwork.

Gertrude expressed a concern about how her mentor was assigned. She thought that the manager should have asked her questions to ensure compatibility with a mentor.

Are you more hands on? Do you want to have to go out with somebody to follow them around? Or if you don’t like doing that, then do you want to just do it in the office? Maybe adding that in there, would you like to be able to go out on an appointment with somebody instead of just sitting here and you showing me on your laptop what you’re doing. And, I think that question would be more helpful for the person trying to choose a mentor for you, of asking that.

Gertrude’s experience with her mentor reflected the concerns Hansman (2000) stated as problematic with assigned mentoring associations being somewhat superficial because of the difficulty in communication and the lack feeling at ease with each other because of the forced relationship.
The participants’ comments about using what they learned, and wanting “hands on” experience, summons the next aspect of informal learning—experiential learning or learning from experience.

**Experiential Learning Activities**

Learning through experience is a broad category since the experience may be direct or indirect, personal or vicarious, through doing or through observation. It typically involves interaction, feedback, and/or reflection. Learning through experience transforms the learning into an active process (Hansen, 2000). In accordance with Davies’s (2008) model of informal learning, the participants described acquiring learning from their own experiences, from fellow participants (colleagues), and from “informed, non-participants,” those who have had similar experiences.

“Many of us believe that our skills and concepts, and certainly the development of our practical knowledge, the know-how that we use in our daily activities and work, are best learned through ‘doing’” (Fenwick, 2003, p. 1). Learning by doing created engagement in the workplace, allowed the participants to learn or gain new practical knowledge, and reinforced what they had already learned (Billett, 2001). The participants in this study vocalized this same sentiment. Josie articulated it in a very direct and straightforward way: “It’s a learning experience and that’s the best way to learn, dig in and do it.” She elaborated on learning by doing:

Training is wonderful, but I learn by doing, not just sitting in front of a computer taking a course online. I learn by doing and I think that is the best experience,
actually doing it. You can read from a book. Would you remember what you read? Maybe 40% of it, if that. (laughs) Maybe I am being conservative there. I don’t know, just the hands on experience, that’s the best experience. But, you know I’m just more hands on. I can’t just sit back and see everybody do what they do and do a little bit here and a little bit there. I have to go, you know, head first and do it.

Annie, too, was very direct about learning through participation in actual workplace activities, “there’s no training step-by-step. You learn by doing.” It suggests that learning by doing includes what Kolb (1984) described as a “concrete experience.” Annie’s statement also reflects a lack of linear, sequential, or hierarchical training in the real estate industry.

Many professions, vocations, and occupations utilize step-by-step training or learning. Billett (2011) described his working experience in the clothing industry as “a model of occupational development that was very well organized” (p. 18) and seemingly sequential in skill development. It was through this “pathway of experiences in the workplace” (p. 19) that allowed him to understand the entire garment-making process. The learning experiences or training described by the participants in this study lack a pre-set curriculum. Rather, the participants engaged in what Billet described as an “experienced curriculum” (p. 20). An experienced curriculum is “what students experience and construct (i.e., learn) from what has been organized and enacted” (p. 20) often by the students themselves within the workplace—a personalized curriculum or “learning as I go.”

Several participants expressed “learning as I go” as an element of learning by doing. “Learning as I go” evokes two concepts: just in time learning and the need for practical knowledge. The unpredictability and ambiguity of what one needs to know to
practice are justifications for just in time learning. Just in time learning is precisely what it implies—an individual learns what is needed at the time that it needs to be used or put into practice. Just in time learning generally has two sources. The first is material resources (e.g., books, audio programs, technology-based sources), and the second is the human resource (e.g., colleagues, mentors, experienced co-workers). The participants typically relied upon human sources as they needed help or information when consumed with the hot action of practice.

Practice is not always clear cut; it is not a one size fits all, and it can be rather murky. As Mona said, “There’s always going to be something new or different coming up. Not every transaction is the same so, I figure you’re just constantly learning and relying on others.” Annie was actually schooled in the idea of waiting to ask about particular activities in practice until the situation arose. She was told:

When you get a sale, we’ll go through what you need to know for that; same thing for when you get a listing or work with buyers, step-by-step, ask the questions. We will give you the answers for that type of thing.

Training in the real estate business, in this instance, seemed to be an as needed model as opposed to the learning curriculum suggested by Billett (2011).

This section examined how the participants learned what is necessary to function as real estate agents. The next section discusses what the participants deemed necessary to know and to be able to do to function as real estate agents.
Knowledge and Skills

Learning is “embedded in everyday practices, action, and conversation” (Fenwick, 2008, p. 19). As the participants engaged within their communities of practice, they concluded that there were certain things they needed to know and do if they were to become fully functioning members of their communities. The participants determined that they needed to have both declarative (factual) knowledge and procedural (performance) knowledge if they were to move beyond the periphery of their chosen careers.

The knowledge topics most often cited by the participants were office procedures, paperwork, contract and listing protocol, the market including inventory and conditions, and marketing and prospecting. All of the participants thought that organization, especially planning and scheduling, was an essential skill.

Initially, the participants wanted to know about the office and basic office procedures—how things worked and where things where. Annie remarked that “no one even showed me where the restrooms were.” Gertrude said that “it would have been nice to know how everything worked, like the phone system and copy machine.” John was surprised to discover that there was a closet that housed “signs, brochures, folders, and stuff for doing business.”

All of the participants thought that knowing the paperwork was critical to doing business. The participants wanted to know what paperwork they needed and how to fill it out. They thought it was equally important to know what to do with the paperwork once it was completed. Gertrude remarked, “It would have been nice to have been told about the
prepared packets full of what I needed to take to a seller’s. They even had contract packets.” She went on to say that she discovered these “by accident” when she was in the office talking to an agent who had just gotten a new listing. She asked the agent:

If she could show me what she was doing so I could see the paperwork. The agent told her that she’d be happy to show me stuff. I should just go get a listing folder and she’d go over it with me. A listing folder? [I] Had no idea they had these already made up in the office. She showed me the buyer packet, too.

Connie, John, and Cindy were also surprised to discover that their offices had packets that were ready to use.

Josie talked about her ability to complete the forms because she “had samples” from her NMO class. She went on to say that one of the things they did in that program was to go through a sales contract line by line. And, then, they gave us some information and had us fill it out in groups. I saved it, glad I have a sample to follow at least for the first few times.

Sally wrote a contract and used a sample, too. Her concern, as well as Annie’s, Connie’s, and Gertrude’s, was “now that I’ve written it, what do I do with it? I had no idea that I was supposed to turn in the completed file so it could be processed.” She added “it was a good thing my manager asked about it. I had no idea.”

Gertrude expressed a concern for not knowing how to handle an offer. After finally tracking down her mentor she asked him, “What do I do now? Do I take it to the seller or what?” She learned that the offer goes to the seller’s agent who presents it to the seller.
How was I supposed to know that? Nobody ever talked about it. I didn’t know to ask until I had one. It’s a good thing I don’t want to do anything wrong and get in trouble is the only reason I asked.

Annie, Josie, and Lisa relied on experienced agents in their offices for advice concerning the correct protocol. Cindy summed up her experience by saying:

I had no problem working with her (experienced agent) on my first deal since it was so complicated. The other agent, who was my mentor, kind of took over and I went with her. So I learned by watching her and working with her. Besides I had some idea of how offers work from buying houses in the past.

The participants all expressed the concern that no one ever told them what to do with an offer or a contract until they asked. They agreed with the sentiment expressed by Sally that “it would be nice to know that stuff before it happens so you don’t feel like an idiot with your clients.”

The participants believed that knowing the market and how to use the multiple listing service (MLS) was essential knowledge. Josie expressed it best when she said:

You have to know your market; you have to know the areas. I mean you don’t have to know the school district or the crime rate because they can look at that themselves. I’m not going to tell them that. It’s mostly knowing your market. If it’s for rental properties knowing what the rents are, also knowing if any new companies are coming to town, knowing what’s happening, where it can affect them with their job, with their employment, affect the value of their property as well.

Connie, Gertrude, John, Katie, and Sally were all vocal about knowing the MLS and the inventory. Sally succinctly stated, “I’m here to help my clients buy or sell. In order to do that, I need to know the market, the inventory, the conditions.”
Certain skills are needed to develop a clientele and build a business. Most of the participants agreed that three skills were essential for success: marketing or getting yourself out there; people skills, especially when dealing with buyers and sellers; and scheduling and planning “so you know what you need to do every day” (Annie).

Various marketing activities were cited by the participants including networking, mailing pieces both via e-mail and regular postal mail, and prospecting or generating leads. The participants seemed to differentiate marketing from prospecting. Marketing seemed to include indirect and impersonal methods (e-mails, direct mailing, signage), while prospecting was considered a “more focused effort to secure clients.” These methods were activities that had direct contact with consumers including phone calls to expired listings and for sale by owners, telemarketing, and door knocking.

Gertrude expressed a concern about sending “things in envelopes like letters or brochures. People will consider it junk mail and just toss it.” She thought postcards would be better. She chuckled as she said, “at least they see your name before they throw it away.” E-mail seemed to be the preferred method of continual contact because of ease of sending and costs. Gertrude remarked that she would even send an electronic newsletter since “It’s way cheaper than regular mail.”

Josie’s marketing efforts included additional materials including the idea to “give everyone you meet a business card” and to “have a mobile billboard by putting decals on my van with my name, company, and phone number.” She also developed a marketing plan that includes quarterly mailings and a notebook “full of ideas.” She went on to say, “So I just wanted to put my name out there, make it simple. I’m focusing more on my
marketing because I know eventually in the long end that’s what’s going to pay off, the marketing that I’ve done now.”

Sally and Connie added a dimension to their marketing efforts with direct prospecting effort of visiting in their neighborhoods, talking to people, and “hanging things on doors” (Connie) if nobody was home. They were both pleasantly surprised when these marketing efforts lead to potential business. Sally remarked, “Several of my neighbors gave me leads–names of people that (sic) they knew and one neighbor even wanted me to do a CMA,” which is an analysis of the market conditions that estimates a value for the property. Connie ended up with a potential buyer. She remarked that she “was going to do more internet marketing because I’m not a social butterfly and so I thought well, there has to be other ways to do this.”

The participants engaged in various prospecting or lead generation activities that included building and contacting spheres of influence, farming (a niche that an agent continually contacts to develop leads), networking, and working fsbos and expired listings.

Gertrude has several sources that she is using to build her sphere of influence: her family and friends, past clients from her mortgage and insurance businesses, and her investment club members. She remarked that she had been sending “out e-mails at least every couple of weeks for one thing to the family and friends, mentioning real estate at different get-togethers, and trying not to bug them.” She added that “I don’t pester them as much as I should because that’s not me. I know I wouldn’t want somebody pestering me all the time.” Gertrude is conflicted between doing what she identified as a necessary activity and “being a pest. There’s got to be a fine line between the two.”
John agreed that “you have to have contacts. A lot of contacts.” He added that you “need to be networking, networking all the time.” He also expressed a concern about “bothering people. You have to think about the timing. You don’t want people to think that you’re only concerned about your own personal gain.”

Josie and Annie had an opposite point of view. They were both concerned with “getting people to remember me, to think of me when they think of real estate.” Josie told about a book she read;

*The Millionaire Real Estate Agent,* it’s a very good book, and it focuses on the 33 touches that you need to communicate with either family, friends, past clients, future clients, you know, people that you’re still working with, 33 times a year.

She went on to say that she developed a plan “of 33 touches a year to my sphere.” Annie was developing a “list of 200 names with 30 people at the core. I’ll always work on this list–weeding, adding, weeding.” She said that working “this list or sphere has the potential for creating a lot of business.” She added that the class she took taught her that “by doing this, my business would grow every year and become easier and easier since I’d end up working with people I know.”

Connie was the only participant who worked a “geographic farm” area. When I started working,

They assigned me a farm area. They asked me what area I would like to be assigned to and I kind of just picked some places on the map. They made sure no one else used those areas and then I was assigned to those areas to farm. Early on I did put together some marketing programs for those farm areas, um, but I would say that I didn’t do much with them. So I really didn’t give this thing my full attention because I was kind of busy at the beginning.
She added that since her personal business activity “listings and showings slowed down, I’m working on my farm. It’s a neighborhood with quite a bit of activity. So I’m hoping it will bring me some business.”

John took a different approach to farming. He wanted to build a niche based on business discounts and specials to his clients. He figured that “contacting and staying in touch with local business owners” would build a referral network for him. “Leads generate leads” was his thinking.

“For sale by owners are a good source of business since you already know that they want to sell,” remarked Katie. She added that “the trick is to convince them that they’d be better off hiring a real estate agent.” She, Annie, Mona, and Josie were all proactive in their efforts with fsbos. They searched for fsbos quite actively. Annie had scripts that she used when speaking with a fsbo, put together a fsbo kit, and actively drove her marketing area looking for fsbo signs. She experienced a dilemma in whether she should work her own area:

I’m thinking do I want to do it in my neighborhood where people know me and they think I’m a pain or do I want to do it to my neighbor because the people know me and they know I know the area and can represent them, I don’t know, I don’t know.

She ultimately decided to work her neighborhood fsbos as well as the fsbos in the market area her company serviced. She set a goal to meet with at least two fsbos every week.

Mona joined the fsbo group at her office. They met every week and divided the fsbo leads that appeared in the local paper. She contacted her new leads via phone. She
said that she was having very little luck with people returning her calls. Mona enjoyed being part of the group because “it provided support and encouragement” as well as providing suggestions about “what to say.” Even though Mona was actively pursuing fsbos, she had yet “to land anything,” which she found very discouraging but she “wasn’t willing to give up, yet.”

Josie put together a plan to contact fsbos and she practiced what she would say when she contacted them. She uses the local papers, Craig’s list, and signs to find fsbos.

I’ve been calling fsbos from the paper. I try to get some information on the house and what they’re looking for. Have they had it listed before, how long did they have it listed, what things would they like to change from the Realtor® they used, anything to get them talking. I do that sometimes on Sunday evenings because it’s more likely everyone’s home on Sunday evening. But I do try to take an hour and a half, two hours, just making phone calls and see where that goes. But I do have two listings from people that have been for sale by owners.

Josie’s methodical and consistent fsbo prospecting generated business.

Gertrude and Katie had a rather laid back approach to fsbos. They both put together “little packets” that they could leave whenever they saw a sign. They both admitted that they did not actively look for fsbo signs but used a more happenstance approach–if they saw a sign and if they had a packet with them, they would drop it off. Needless to say, neither one had any success with generating business from fsbos.

The participants believed that marketing and prospecting were essential activities for real estate agents. “Marketing is something that you need to do all the time. Don’t stop even when you get busy with other stuff,” remarked Mona. Katie echoed this sentiment when she proclaimed, “Prospecting is something you should do every day.”
The participants agreed that marketing and prospecting were important but reported that no one really told them or showed them what to do. They determined what they were going to do because of their self-directed learning activities and from observing and talking with experienced agents.

Another important element in the life of a newly licensed agent is organization and planning. "Being organized and knowing what you’re going to do every day is important," remarked Sally. She added, “I came from a corporate environment where you knew what you had to do every day, and you were accountable to your boss. Real estate doesn’t have that. Nobody tells you what to do. It’s hard.” Sally confessed that even though she knows it’s important to plan and schedule, she had yet to create a plan. She attributed it to the fact “that I don’t really know what to do.” By the end of this research project, Sally concluded that an ideal day “would consist of checking the MLS to stay current, following up on any deals, staying in touch with clients, and doing things to create new business. Prospecting really takes me out of my comfort zone.”

Annie liked the idea of writing down what she wants to do and accomplish, “If I write it down, I’m committed to it.” Annie used a week at a glance system. “Every Sunday evening, I plan my upcoming week. It works real well for me and I do it the old-fashioned way–a paper planner. It’s color coded for my various activities.” Annie learned this form of planning when she took an intense training program.

This way I have something in front of me. They taught us to mark the personal things you’re doing in the book and put in pink, and any appointments that have the potential to make you money, you put in green, and any of the paperwork or the phone calls, you know you put in yellow and you want to look down and see equal
amounts of the colors. You know you don’t want to cut yourself off from your family you know so it was about balance. So when you look down at it, your colors are equal; you don’t have all green; you don’t have all yellow. Because if you don’t do the yellow, the greens are going to go away next month, you know, so you have to do the yellow. So it’s a visual thing.

Annie liked the visual aspect of the planning, “It’s like a bird’s eye view.”

Josie admitted, “Even though I was working, I was going all over the place, so I was very disorganized. I had a plan in my head but it didn’t always go that way. Too many distractions. Too many interruptions.” Working this way became “way too stressful” for Josie. She has:

been getting myself more organized. I picked out a couple days to do marketing. I have other days where I work with catching up on my phone calls, the follow-up calls and, of course, meanwhile I’m setting up appointments. I was working practically seven days a week. I’m trying to narrow it down to where Sundays I don’t schedule anything. We go to church and it’s family time and we do things together. Sometimes you have to be flexible. But I’m trying not to schedule anything on those days.

She added,

Now that I have a written agenda, instead of relying on my phone, I am able to see the picture of what I have going on for the whole week. And I know if I have to hit it a little bit harder this week because if I don’t have any appointments, I need to schedule some appointments. I don’t want my week to be blank. So it’s gives me a better picture. I like going back to the writing calendar part of it, so … I electronic stuff is fine; it’s convenient. But I like to look at it.

Mona worked by using a daily to do list.

Every day begins the same way, I start by making a list of things that should get done that day. Then I check the MLS for updates. I get a lot of e-mails in regards
to the market, updates or whatever so I skim through those every morning. I spend probably a good hour just trying to start my day in regards to seeing what’s happened from the time I left. From there I just go through where I left off yesterday and if it was expireds and cancelleds, I’d start with that again and I’d continue my calls. If it’s you know something from my leads, from the web site, I start with that and I continue on and I just kind of check off my list as I get things done. And then once I clear all that off, I start back over again because it’s normally a couple of days later and I start back over and I go through it all again. It’s just kind of repetitive.

Mona does not fill “every minute of every day” because “you need time for showings and things like that or if something just pops up.” She said that organization is important because “you need to know what you’re going to do every day” otherwise “you just waste a bunch of time.”

Katie said that “there is no such thing as a typical day in real estate.” She conceded that there are things an agent should do every day, talking to people, prospecting, and following up on deals.” Katie said,

I am terribly spontaneous and although I can look and say okay I have to this, this and this. Like if I know I have to go to the store and other errands, then if I get a phone call–can I see this house at 11, I’m like sure and I’m flying, no groceries today. I try to fill every minute and that’s my worst habit.

She added, “My day is so spontaneous, there’s no planning; it takes me days to plan a total day off so that I really don’t have to talk to anybody about business.” Katie admitted that she needs to schedule a personal plan and have a work plan.

I think that you should be disciplined. You should be able to control yourself as far as when you need to work and when you can play. And you need to always, always need to learn as well. You have to acknowledge this is the time I have and is what I have time for. My phone rang at 9:00 last night and I just looked at it and
went no. My husband said, “Well, there’s something.” So, yeah, I am starting to put limits on my time.

Gertrude admitted that her days are “not really structured. The days can get a little crazy.” She added that:

I try to plan my day but it doesn’t always work that way. That’s what I’m working on right now trying to figure out exactly what I can do and where I should go. I am doing that as much as I can right now but I’m planning on trying to do it a little bit more.

John operated without a plan or a schedule, “How can you schedule the unexpected? Buyers call or drop in when it’s convenient. Sellers call any time they want to know something. How do you plan that? They operate on their schedule, not mine.” He conceded that there are things that he should do every day, “like check the MLS, learn new things, and network.” An obvious missing link in John’s schedule was having appointments with buyers and sellers, and proactive, focused prospecting. John admitted that part of his lack of scheduling was because he “did not know what he should do every day or even on a regular basis.” He had a “general idea of what to do but am clueless about how to do anything specific.”

Summary

The participants acquired the information for their roles as real estate agents through both formal and informal training methods. The formal training consisted of the state mandated pre-licensing course and the NMO courses required by their member
Realtor® organizations. The participants thought both of these formal educational offerings were inadequate preparation for their real estate careers.

The participants engaged in two main forms of informal learning: self-directed activities and experiential learning. Informal activities included printed documentation and technology-based information, web-based instruction, company training programs, seminars and classes, office/company meetings, and group learning programs that included instructor led initiatives, and self-teaching. Experiential activities included learning from their own experiences and from the experiences of others.

The lack of linear, sequential, or hierarchical training emerged from the interviews with the participants. None of the participants were required to attend a company training program. Training seemed to be a self-directed activity that occurred on a just in time or on an as needed basis.

Through their self-directed and experiential learning activities, and participation and engagement in their communities of practice, the participants were able to glean what they should know and what they should do to develop their practices as newly licensed agents. There were two kinds of experiences: those experiences that they actively sought once they identified what they needed to do and unanticipated experiences that served as learning events. They were mindful in their attempts to get what they needed but they also found out that they needed a lot more than they had thought. The following chapter will discuss the development of their professional identities.
CHAPTER 6

DEVELOPING A PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

Introduction

This chapter examines the participants’ self-concepts and role identities through their perceptions of the real estate industry and how they see themselves as a part of the real estate business. It looks at the participants’ ideas concerning the reputation of real estate agents, how they identify with their perceptions of the industry, what they perceive as the role of the real estate agents, and what they recognize as the essential characteristics of success in their role as real estate agents. It also introduces the basic activities and relationships that are essential to a real estate career—working with customers and clients. In other words, this chapter examines the developing sense of the participants’ identities and self-concepts as real estate agents as well as their initial activities with buyers and sellers.

Identity is not developed in a vacuum. To develop a sense of who we are involves an acknowledgement and understanding of our roles in a specific group as well as assigning personal or unique characteristics to ourselves within these roles (Burke & Stets, 2009). An individual identity is entwined with the environment in which it functions and so “being and doing are both central features of one’s identity” (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 234).
Initial Impressions of Real Estate Agents

The participants in this study ranged in age from the early 30s to the late 60s. Consequently, they all had developed a self-concept based on the various roles they had played in society. These roles included prior work roles, their relationships, and societal roles such as wife, mother, partner, or significant other. Their initial perceptions of real estate agents were developed prior to the participants entering the real estate business. These perceptions were based on personal contact with real estate agents either directly or indirectly. Direct contact was construed as working with a real estate agent as the participant bought or sold property; indirect contact was interpreted as a participant having a relationship with someone who was active in the business.

Prior to entering the business, the participants had unfavorable impressions of real estate agents. These negative perceptions were based upon the participants’ personal dealings with real estate agents as they bought or sold property. When asked why they decided to become part of an industry that, by their own admission, had such an off-putting reputation, they all expressed a personal conviction that they would be different. Rather than relating their individual behavior to conform to the perceived behavior of the profession, the participants relied upon their sense of self (personal identity or self-categorization) and their own personal ideals or standards to express a commitment to adhere to their own ethics. This parallels Stets’s (1995) observation that when there is a conflict between role identity and personal identity, a person will generally act to maintain his personal identity without regard for the role identity. This was, perhaps, the reason
many of the participants were willing to enter this profession despite their less than favorable personal experiences.

The participants’ initial encounters with real estate agents occurred by happenstance as they were seeking real estate services. This interaction between the participants and their real estate agents created a negative role model relationship. The participants were grounded in an established self-concept based on their past roles. Their identities and self-concepts conflicted with the behavior of the agents with whom they interacted. Gibson (2003) defined a role model “as a person(s) an individual perceives to be similar to some extent, and because of that similarity, the individual desires to emulate (or specifically avoid) aspects of that person’s attributes or behaviors” (p. 592).

When there is a conflict between a role identity and a personal identity, individuals act to maintain their personal identity (Stets, 1995). Annie, Connie, John, and Josie exhibited this trait when they declared that they would not behave like the agent whom they worked with during their buying or selling process. Annie’s, Connie’s, John’s, and Josie’s stories illustrate this point and confirmed Gibson’s (2003) concept of negative role models.

Annie’s experience with real estate agents occurred while she was flipping houses. This experience became the catalyst for her decision to enter the real estate business. “I couldn’t find a Realtor® that (sic) was able to meet our needs. So I was going to be our Realtor®.” Annie and her partners had three bad experiences with real estate agents. She felt that the agents they dealt with did not represent them well. The first agent “became difficult to get in touch with.” Annie suspected that, “he wanted us to spend more than we
were comfortable spending and I think he didn’t think we were worth it after a while.” The next agent just sent e-mails and “three months went by and I didn’t have one phone call from her. I really felt like she wasn’t doing any work for us.” The third agent they hired helped them find properties to purchase. But when it came time to sell, Annie felt that the agent gave them poor advice in setting a price and used bullying and scare tactics to get them to take a “low ball” offer. Annie’s opinion about that agent was “she just wanted in and out and just wanted her commission with no regard for her clients.”

Connie’s experience with a Realtor® was when she bought a personal residence. The encounter left her with a negative impression:

My Realtor® was going through a divorce, a bankruptcy, move, and every other terrible thing in her personal life so she wasn’t very attentive to me. Not that I expect her to call me every hour on the hour, but I like to know what’s going on with my property--how many people have been looking at it, just the normal things. She was very messed up at the time and even at the closing table before we went to close, she said “I’m so sorry for, you know, how things worked out. I’d like to give you some of my commission as a credit on your sale.” So she really felt extremely guilty that she was not diligent.

John, too, had indirect experience with real estate agents through his municipal career and through the vicarious experience of friends who often turned to him for information and to whom he freely offered opinions and advice. John experienced several bad encounters with agents during his tenure as a municipal worker. He recalled an incident when an agent misinformed clients about parking a recreational vehicle (RV) in the driveway of their home. After the couple closed on the property and moved in, they parked their RV on the side of their house. John had to inform the couple that municipal
regulations prohibited RV parking and storage in residential neighborhoods. The RV owners remarked to John that their real estate agent assured them that it was permissible as long as the RV was unoccupied. Another incident involved a real estate agent who misinformed a couple about the plans for the road to be widened and extended in front of the home they were purchasing because they wanted to live on “a quiet little street.” The real estate agent failed to inform the couple about the municipality’s expansion plans. John thought the real estate agent was either “a slick agent in it only for the buck,” engaging in deceptive practices, or “terribly ill-informed.”

The final case John cited involved friends of his who were buddies from high school.

This is before I got my license. Our friend was totally oblivious to the area that he sold him a house in, had no knowledge of septic fields and wells. [Our friend] bought a house, a two-bedroom house that was on the market as a three bedroom house and it’s only a two-bedroom septic field. It’s got an old point well in there, doesn’t even meet five gallons of water a minute, sold him the house. My buddy called me up and said “What do I do about the septic?” I said, “What do you mean?” “It’s only a two-bedroom septic and I just had someone out here to quote me on a new well to fix the well. It’s going to be $5,000 to bring it up to a pressure tank well, to redrill it, to get rid of this point well.” I said, well, this is what I was afraid of. I told you that you got to know--this is prior to me being in real estate--I told you that I would help you look for a house. Not taking anything away from our friend that’s (sic) an agent. But I will help you look at these listings and point out some of these things and go with everybody and he didn’t do that and they’re happy, but they have a two bedroom septic and they have a four bedroom. No, they have four people in the house, which is fine and it’s a small septic field. And the well is terrible. I mean you might as well go outside with a hand pump and pump up the pressure on the well.
These incidents proved to John that he could be a better agent than some of those who are “out there telling clients what they want to hear just to get the house sold.” He knew that he did not want to be that “slick salesperson” that was in it for “the quick sale.”

As Josie reflected on the process that she went through in purchasing her own home, she realized that even though her Realtor® “had me looking at hundreds of houses, I felt that I wasn’t fully walked through the process of being a first-time homeowner and showing the ropes and the things that I needed to do on my part.” Josie admitted that:

You learn a lot once you’re in the business. We did a horrible buy with our house but we didn’t know any better. You think you’re qualified for this much, that’s how much, “Oh my God! We can buy up to a $190,000” or whatever it may be. You don’t factor in reality. You don’t factor, “What if I lose my job or what if my husband lost his job? Can one salary afford the house?” That mentality wasn’t there as much just because you don’t think about those things. You just think you’re qualified. We just didn’t do a good buy, but, what’s done is done. I want to make the process smoother for other people.

Sally had a different personal experience. Her corporate job required several transfers. During the course of these relocations, Sally dealt with a number of agents whose behaviors were less than desirable. However, during her most recent relocation, she encountered an agent who, in her opinion, was the epitome of the ideal real estate agent. When Sally decided to enter the business, she contacted Diana for guidance and advice. In this instance, Sally had a self-selected role model (Gibson, 2003) whose attributes and behavior she wanted to emulate. It was Diana, “the Realtor® who sold us our last house. She was probably the best one I’ve ever dealt with in my life.” Sally said that Diana spent a lot of time explaining things and making sure that we understood the concepts. “She was
a wonderful woman, did a fabulous job for us. She was very personable. She really knew her stuff, was very professional.” Sally decided that Diana was the embodiment of the ideal real estate agent after whom she wanted to model her own real estate career.

Katie and Mona had relatives who were in the business and, consequently, had developed their impression through the indirect interaction with their family members. Katie’s sister is a real estate agent in another state; Mona’s father had been in commercial real estate for years and was semi-retired at the time of this research.

Katie’s impression of real estate agents was developed from her personal dealings with real estate agents, her contact with her sister, and the standards she established as a business owner. As real estate investors, Katie and her husband had encountered ineffective real estate agents.

Because I had my own business, I already had standards and knew how I wanted to treat people. So my biggest thing, my biggest drawback with Realtors® is that if you tell someone you’ll call them, call them back. But anyways I called four or five different Realtors® and I might have gotten a call back and if I did, they never followed up. And, I wanted to buy now. And they knew that. If you’re too busy to call me back, I don’t want to do business with you. So that was the biggest thing. But it’s always been my thing. My sister was a Realtor® even before I was doing this. She was just busy.

Katie’s sister told her, “Always take care of the client; do what you say you’re going to do.”

Mona’s impression of the business developed from her relationship with her father who was a commercial real estate broker and her work experience as an office administrator and marketing director in a real estate office.
Gertrude was the only participant who started into the business with some self-doubt since she thought that one had to know a whole lot to be a real estate agent. She was pleased to discover that real estate agents were just like anyone else.

The Roles of Real Estate Agents

Identification with a role often includes behavioral features or expectational features (Burke & Stets, 2009). As such, individuals take action based on their perceptions of the role and behave according to what they believe is their function. The participants in this study articulated the need to help their clients, the obligation to provide their clients with accurate information, and the desire to build relationships with their clients. The expression of these needs, duties, and wants established three roles in which real estate agents engaged—the role of the real estate agent as helper, the role of the real estate agent as the purveyor of information or knowledge, and the role of the real estate agent as nurturer. These roles, though distinct, are so intertwined that they are codependent and, at times, nearly indistinguishable.

In their roles as helpers, the participants wanted to aid or assist their clients in fulfilling their goals or dreams whether it was as buyers or sellers. When helping buyers, the participants wanted to make the process of finding the home of their dreams easy; with sellers, the participants wanted to facilitate a sale that was in their clients’ best interests. Because of the participants’ concerns for helping, they became purveyors of information. They were conscious of their clients’ needs for accurate information in making decisions
concerning their purchases or sales. The participants understood that they needed to provide this information (or the source of the information) if they were to help their clients.

The participants realized that they needed to cultivate relationships with their customers and clients if they were to successfully help them with their real estate quests. The participants fostered these relationships for two reasons. First of all, without cultivating a relationship, the participants inherently sensed or knew that the customers would take their business to another agent. Consequently, the participants would lose the immediate business. The second reason, as stated by the participants, was that building relationships would be the cornerstone of building their businesses. This nurturing would produce current business and generate future business from subsequent transactions and referrals.

**Real Estate Agent as Helpers**

Annie’s perception of a real estate agent as helper was cemented when she guided a couple who were first time home buyers through a successful purchase. She remarked, “When I sold the first house to first-time home buyers who were a beautiful young couple, that was, this is why I want to do this. That was a great moment.” This was said in the context of Annie having helped this couple realize their dream of home ownership. Annie experienced an emotional high in her role as real estate agent as helper.

Gertrude thought of real estate agents as helpers, “someone who will work with a buyer or seller and guide them through a transaction, someone who works for the client.”
She wanted to make money but was more concerned with meeting the needs of her clients.

Gertrude confessed that:

I’ve always wanted to be more into the real estate side of helping people find what they’re looking for. Or help them with what they want. I’ve always enjoyed going out and looking and checking and helping other people find them even without being a real estate agent.

She viewed the job of a real estate agent “as someone who helps people with their real estate needs, of helping somebody find the home of their dreams.”

As Josie talked about the business and working with customers and clients, she remarked that she wanted them to think, “Josie was very helpful.” I want them “to have the security that they are making the right decision, and I want to help them do that.” As we know from Josie’s personal experience, she wanted to help the home buying process be a smoother experience for her customers and clients than she realized when she purchased her home. “I wasn’t fully walked through the process of being a first-time homeowner and wasn’t shown the ropes and the things that I needed to do on my part. And I wanted to make the process smoother for other people.”

John succinctly stated, “People coming in to buy real estate want help.” He saw his role as the provider of that help. Mona echoed this sentiment, “I’m here to help that person who wants to buy or sell,” as did Connie when she remarked, “If you don’t think you can help people, there’s no reason to be here.”
Real Estate Agents as Purveyors of Information

All of the participants wanted to help clients and customers as they sold real estate or acquired properties. The most prevalent method of accomplishing this was through providing consumers with correct and adequate information or, at least, by making available the source of the information to the clients. A real estate transaction is embedded with an enormous amount of data including information about marketplace conditions; facts about the inventory or property; required disclosures; and laws, rules, and regulations affecting real estate in general or applicable to a specific property. As the participants pointed out, it is important to know the information or to be able to direct the clients to the appropriate resource. By providing information, the participants helped their customers, nurtured their relationships, and became knowledgeable collaborators.

John depicted this role as a purveyor of knowledge most vividly:

I know some people just want to hear what they need or want to hear to buy a house, but they need to know more. They need to know about insurance, maybe construction costs, what they can do or can’t do on the property they want to buy. When I’m working with buyers I start to break things down using my past life. I don’t want to just stick somebody out there.

John said that it is important to verify information for buyers and to know the source of information. “You don’t have to know everything, but you need to know where to find the information.” John wanted to show his clients that he knows the market and the inventory:

And when I talk to somebody, I like that to click right away. You know are you looking for this ranch, with the three car garage? I just saw one. I think you might
be interested in it. Or I just saw this bilevel. A lot in Creekside? I just saw this out there.

John believes providing expert information and guidance to his customers and clients—even when it had a negative tone—would make those “people that I’m working with realize that Johnny does care about us; he’s looking out for our best interests.”

Sally remarked, “As a Realtor®, you need to know to look in the right place to get the right information.” Sally believed that her role was to provide her clients with accurate information and that “a Realtor® owes it to her clients to stay current, to keep up to date, and to provide and verify information for them.”

**Real Estate Agents as Nurturers**

The role of real estate agent as nurturer surfaced as the participants talked about their perceptions of the business coupled with their notions of agent-client relationships. Several of the participants viewed the real estate business as a service business. They thought that by providing good service they would foster relationships that would sustain their business into the future because of repeat business and referrals.

Annie commented,

I want to deal with my clients honestly because it’s all referral business. We’re repeat business. If I’m working with someone who is looking to buy the $300,000 house, I would be thinking that they have people to refer me to if I give them good service.
She saw service as a key to developing relationships that would enhance her business.

Annie went on to say, “I think real estate has to be personal. You can’t be a number or think of your customers as dollars.”

Josie iterated this outlook,

I want to build relationships so that I’m respected that people trust me, not because I’m trying to get a dime out of them. I don’t want that mentality. Maybe they don’t do business with me now, but they might refer somebody and say, “She was honest, she was sincere.” That’s what I want. And, that, to me, is priceless.

Mona and John both explicitly stated that real estate is a service business. They both thought providing good service would build their businesses. Mona said, “Who cares about the sales. If you care for your clients, help them, service them, they’ll do business with you, and they’ll be back again and again.” John stated, “Real estate is a service business. You need to take care of your clients.” He went on to state, “I’m going to make a connection with people and this connection will create friendships.” This expression of service, care, and building friendships indicated that these participants wanted to nurture a relationship with their clients.

Perceptions of Success

“An identity may be seen in expectations regarding a role” (Hinchcliffe, 2013, p. 52). The expectations that the participants have as real estate agents are reflected in their concepts of performance and what activities they perceive as necessary for success. As the participants advanced in their careers, each developed an idea of success in the industry.
The participants’ ideas of success were created through the interplay of personal values, the perceived role or essence of a real estate agent, and the activities or functions necessary to become successful. The concept of success, then, has two components: values and activities. It is a melding of personal or individual values with the role identity or social values of the job. As the participants were in the process of developing a workplace identity, they were influenced by general perceptions and the actual conditions of the workplace (Axelsson, Dahlgren, & Dahlgren, 2010).

In other words, the participants expressed their notions of success as reflections of their perceptions of the role of real estate agents, personal values, job activities and results, and income. Although income was a factor in success, it was not a dominant aspect of the participants’ perception of success.

When the participants were asked what they thought of as success in real estate, they generally responded in ways that reflected the roles of real estate agents as discussed in the prior section.

Gertrude explained her idea of success:

But in my mind, when I automatically just think of it now, is just finding the right house for somebody and being able to have them buy it. That’s a success right there. Helping somebody find something that they really want; helping them find something they really are going to enjoy and want to live in.

She added, “I would like to be out there and be familiar with my community, be familiar with people so they come to me--that would be a success.” Her idea of success also included business results and productivity, “Having at least a few listings every month, and
buyers. It would be great to have a few every week or whatever. Definitely awesome.

That would be great.”

John’s response reflected the roles of helper, purveyor of information, and nurturer, too.

Success is longevity. My first year, I may not have one sale. However, what I want to happen is to have a name, the Joe Stevenson, the Sophie Baker type of name. They’ve got the repeat business. They’ve got the referral thing going. I don’t want to be known for a high pressure sales approach. I want someone to look back in 5, 10, 15, 20 years, someone can look back and say, you know what, I’ve used this person. My kids used this person. My neighbors have used this person. They are what they are. Sell you what you want. They will find you what you want. And they won’t BS you on other items throughout the past. So that’s hopefully my success.

Josie responded, “I want to do things right where I get that referral business. You know, down the road if they decide to buy again, or buy again when they sell, they’ll always think of me and not anybody else.” Success is being there for your clients, “It’s having that relationship. It’s building that relationship, first of all.” She remarked that part of building the relationship is not only giving them accurate information and sound guidance and advice, but it is to treat them right. She thought it was critical to gain their trust and confidence. Her notion of success mirrors the real estate agent as helper, purveyor of information, and nurturer.

Katie responded in kind,

When it keeps coming to me. I would say that I was successful if I had enough of a sphere to have a huge referral based business. I know that I have to help my customers and clients. I would say I was successful if I had achieved the respect of the clients in doing my job.
Mona thought that she would be successful because, “I’m a helper, I’m a nurturer, and that to me is success. It’s just helping the person. I’m not all about money.”

Sally was the only participant who answered, “Money,” when asked about her idea of success in the real estate business. However, she added that before one could generate income, “you have to build relationships with people, develop rapport.”

The response of the participants concerning their perceptions of success reflect the three identified roles of real estate agents, the real estate agent as helper, purveyor of information, and nurturer. The roles of helper and nurturer are evidenced most often through the participants’ expressions of longevity and wanting to have their businesses based on referrals.

Building a Business--Functioning as Successful Agents

“We frequently identify ourselves through our work” (Cairns & Malloch, 2011, p. 5). Real estate work comprises of activities and functions that have meaning in relation to others, namely, customers and clients. These meanings “form the basis of the expected behaviors (role) associated with that position as it relates to other positions” (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 16,). This relational positioning is evidenced in the behavior between real estate agents and their clients or customers. The nature of the work (dealing with customers and clients) drives the behavior associated with the role of real estate agent. The functions of real estate agents are directly related to the activities involved in doing that work. The more one does the work of the profession and garnered experience in the business, the more an individual identifies with the profession and sees themselves as a
practitioner in that profession (Anderson-Gough, et al., 1998; Bilodeau, 2004). Since the work involves working with customers and clients, this study examined the initial source of the participants’ clients and the methods the participants used to procure customers and clients including lead generation, presentations, open houses, broker tour, and marketing and self-promotion.

**Initial Source of Customers and Clients**

In their initial searches for customers and clients, the participants typically relied on friends, relatives, and acquaintances as their main sources for business. This showed a symbolic paradigm: the participants were taught that the best source of contacts would be people who they knew and with whom they had some form of relationship and the participants believed, or were willing to believe, this as having a factual foundation based on their prior interactions with family and friends.

Annie explained that her clients were:

Friends, friends of friends, and people I used to work with is another one so it’s just all acquaintances or friends of acquaintances, so word of mouth completely. Like the one I just got a couple days ago, she wants to start, she wants to list and buy a bigger house, so that was a friend of a friend who I met at a (kitchen gadget party) or things like that so I know who she is but, we’re not, we’re just acquaintances.

Annie’s mother-in-law and her step-daughter were among Annie’s first clients. These clients strengthened her conviction that relationship marketing was, indeed, a powerful source of business. Annie believed, as did her family and friends, that part of their roles and functions were to help each other.
Gertrude acknowledged that the best source of customers “were family and friends, and anybody that I know. I’ve been sending out e-mails at least every couple of weeks for one thing to the family and friends.” She is “trying not to bug them” as she works on “getting them to remember me when it comes to real estate.” Gertrude’s past business experience as an insurance agent and as a loan officer provided her with potential contacts for business. She remarked, “As a matter of fact, my first client was a past loan client of mine, was somebody that (sic) I knew.” Gertrude created a list so she could e-blast her past loan clients on a regular basis. She was the founder and president of a real estate investment club and planned to use those contacts to generate business leads.

Family and friends were also John’s initial sources of clients. As a matter of fact, his first client was his soon to be mother-in-law. He commented, “I’m working with a lot of friends, people who know me. They’re asking me to look around for them and help them.” John wanted to build his knowledge base before he spread into different areas of generating leads.

Connie, Josie, Mona, and Sally all expressed the view that the best source of clients and customers would be family and friends. Yet they all felt that they were at a disadvantage for utilizing family and friends as their initial source of customers and clients. Connie’s and Sally’s past working lives precluded them from “building a sphere.” Sally remarked that except for her husband and a few neighbors she really didn’t know anyone in the area. Connie echoed this lack of “sphere” when she said “joining any clubs or getting involved with community organizations was out of the question. It was just
work, work, work.” Josie had recently moved and did not know anyone who she could tap as an initial source of business in her new area.

Mona compared her initial source of clients in real estate to a prior position she had with a direct selling company:

Friends and family, start with them. I sold Sweet and Simple, still do. Started off with friends and family--just doing that. Now I’ve got people calling me. It’s just all word of mouth. You give good customer service and you get feedback from these people and people talk. They talk, they listen, they call. I’ve had people call me and I asked, “How did you hear of me?” Oh from so and so, okay, great. That’s great. I’ve kind of seen how word of mouth travels--granted on a totally different field--but if worked there it should work here.

Mona mentioned that most of her family was located some distance from where she was working and thought she would have to rely on cultivating friends. Mona knew the value of cultivating friends and family as the initial source of building a business although she had yet to begin contacting them to build her real estate business.

**Finding Customers and Clients—Expanding the Sources**

The participants expanded their client bases by using either direct, proactive approaches or indirect, passive approaches. Direct approaches included active solicitation of buyers and sellers through various methods of marketing, networking, and prospecting. Indirect approaches to generating clients were actions that that accommodated customers or activities that lacked direct contact with consumers. Indirect methods included participating in floor time, hosting open houses for their own listings or the listings of other agents, and direct mail marketing.
Annie utilized direct, proactive approaches to generate business. She knew she was coming into the business “with nothing, zero,” and she began to “pave the way” for generating business while she was in the process of getting her license. She let people she met know that she was going to be a Realtor® and that she’d be calling them.

I touched base the first couple weeks I talked to people I hadn’t talked to in a very long time, that was a nice bonus. Now I’m talking to people who I didn’t know very well; I’ve gotten down to that point, but the first couple weeks I reconnected with a lot of people so it was personally satisfying.

Annie then utilized past resources.

I think I’m lucky because I worked as volunteer for the school the last four or five years so I literally have the entire roster of all the parents. So I started with my son’s friends’ parents, and then I started with, I went to the same grade as my son so I can say, “My son’s in your grade.” And now I’m just down to, “Hi, I’m Annie Powers. I live in the area. I’m a new agent looking to increase my business, (like I have any so technically I’m increasing if I get one), so if you’re selling, thinking of selling, know anybody that’s (sic) selling I would love for you to let me know.”

Annie realized the importance of establishing connections and building relationships in developing her business. Once again, there is a relationship and an expected interaction between the roles of real estate agent and sellers or potential sellers. Each has an expectation of the other.

Annie branched out in her search of customers and clients as she attended an intense training course that focused on prospecting for sale by owners (fsbos) and expired listings. The three main approaches that Annie used to generate leads were networking
with people she knew, making contact with people with whom she had a connection, and working with fsbos.

Gertrude used direct approaches to generate client leads. She contacted one fsbo and realized that she was not sure about what to do. She admitted that the experience stopped her from pursuing fsbos. She instituted a monthly e-blast contact to her past loan clients and her investment club members.

Josie believed that generating business was,

Doing everything possible I can to put my name out there. Every person I meet, I give them my business card. If they’re Hispanic, I mention to them that I speak Spanish. I have a decal on the back of my car. I try to market myself everywhere I go.

Josie combined direct methods: “I go out every time I see a fsbo and I knock on the door. You have to go out there. You can’t just sit behind the computer and wait for the business to walk in the door,” with indirect methods of sitting open houses and sending out mailings.

Connie used indirect methods to generate leads. She said, “I’ve had quite a few leads on floor, which is kind of neat. [I] happened to be there when they’re calling--very good leads.” Despite the “good leads,” Connie was disappointed because the only result had been a failed offer. She also “got leads from open houses, other people’s open houses, but that was early on.” She was considering creating an internet presence to generate business.
John worked on a hybrid system of lead generation that combined a direct method with an indirect method. John planned to send a monthly newsletter that would include “something of value” for the recipients. He solicited local business owners for special offers such as a 10% off coupon or other benefit. He figured this would have a two-prong approach for building his business. First, it introduced him to “community business owners” who he hoped would send him leads because of the benefit to their businesses of generating potential customers for “both me and the business guy. A double win.” And, it offered his sphere something special.

I don’t want the people I send the newsletter to think that all I want is something from them. I want to give them something. I want them to think of me as someone who helps and not just takes.

John thought that his newsletter would be “more powerful” if he followed up with personal contacts.

The participants generated leads through both direct and indirect methods of lead generation. Some of these leads became customers and clients, which provided the participants with actual experience of the work involved in their roles as real estate agents.

Working with Customers and Clients

“Roles are essentially abstractions until brought to life by flesh-and-blood individuals” (Sluss and Ashforth, 2007, p. 7). The performance or doing of role-related activities contribute to identity development (Stets & Burke, 2000). Working with customers and clients is the dominant role-related activity of real estate agents. This
activity fulfills the participants’ perceptions and expectations of their roles and it cements the relational aspect of a workplace identity. It is the doing, the working with customers and clients, that provides the practical experience. When one enters into these specific roles and their inherent role relationships, “abstract knowledge is translated into grounded action” (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007, p. 14). In other words, by or through experience, the participants began to develop a sense of what to do and how to do it, which forged their identities as real estate agents. As the participants became aware of their clients’ expectations of them as real estate agents, it augmented the participants’ perceptions of their identities in their roles as real estate agents. These role enactments in these role relationships (agent to client) will be different with each individual because individuals are different (Ashforth, 2001).

Katie articulated the unique nature of each client contact as she explained how having a procedure or system would facilitate her initial contact with clients:

I wouldn’t call it step-by-step because each person is different. Each person needs different things. So you can usually tell when you meet a person how you can approach them and if they’re very relaxed person then you can go that route. And so it’s real haphazard but it all has the same stuff. It’s just how you give it to them and how do you present it to them.

Katie concluded that during an initial meeting she should provide each client with the “same stuff” but tailor the information to match the client’s needs and style.

As the participants talked about some of their experiences working with buyers and sellers, the various roles of real estate agents surfaced. Annie told the tale of working with a couple who were buying a home that highlighted the roles of nurturer, helper, and
Annie explained that the husband was very opinionated and had rather extreme positions on various topics—including real estate agents. These particular buyers found a home they liked and wanted to make an offer. As Annie told the tale:

I showed them probably 10-15 properties. And they were going to make an offer. I called the other agent to get some information. I was told it was a short sale and there were already four other offers on it. The other agent said that unless you’re going to go full price, don’t bother. So I went back to those people—my buyers—and I told them that. They’re like well what happened with negotiations? I told them sometimes with a short sale there are not negotiations. He said I should have known when you pulled up in your typical Realtor® car that this is how you’re going to handle things. And I was thinking, I’m not trying to screw you. I’m telling you, you don’t have to put an offer in; we’ll keep looking.

Annie explained her reaction:

I think it’s a necessity to make them feel better, and more comfortable. So I still think I’m doing it for the right reason, you know putting them at ease or giving them a comfort level. I’m not scamming them. I’m not telling them something that’s not true. I’m just not disagreeing with something that has nothing to do with the transaction itself. You know, his views had nothing to do with finding a house. It ended up that he stopped using me because I have a Cadillac. Isn’t that ridiculous?

Annie tried to build a relationship; she provided the buyers with information, but was unable to overcome their preconceived notions of typical Realtor® behavior. Annie’s experience highlights a problem experienced by newcomers of reconciling a societal image with their personal idea or identity of their profession (Benner, 2001).

This incident draws attention to the role relationship in a real estate transaction. Each person in their agent-client roles has expectations of the other (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). Annie expected the buyers to respond in a positive manner to her efforts to help
them find a home. She did not expect them to react in such a negative fashion when things did not go the way they had anticipated. This episode also revealed the buyers’ unspoken belief that Realtors® are self-serving and do not really care about their clients. Despite Annie’s best efforts, she was unable to overcome her clients’ inherent distrust of real estate agents.

All of the participants acknowledged the crux of the business was working with customers and clients. As the participants worked in the business, they seemed to cultivate a deeper understanding of themselves and a robust awareness of what they needed and wanted to do in their role of real estate agents.

Summary

This chapter examined the participants’ developing identities as real estate agents in relation to their sense or definition of themselves. It presented the roles of real estate agents as defined by the participants. It looked at the participants’ perceptions of success as they related to the articulated roles of real estate agents. This chapter also presented the importance of role-relationships (agent to client) and the activity or behavior exhibited by the participants in working with customers and clients. It also talked about the methods the participants used for generating customers and clients. It introduced the notion of experience, the doing of the work of real estate agents, especially as it relates to the establishment of role identity.
The next chapter presents answers to the research questions, general findings, and implications for both practice and research. It pulls together the data and offers conclusions.
CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of the development processes of newly licensed real estate agents. The main research question that guided this study was: With minimal educational entry requirements, how do newly licensed real estate agents develop their careers? This guiding question was supported by the following questions:

1. What reasons do newly licensed real estate agents report for selecting real estate as a career?
2. How do newly licensed real estate agents develop the knowledge and skills needed for practice?
3. How do newly licensed real estate agents perceive their roles as real estate agents?

By answering these questions, this study discovered the participants’ motivations for entering the real estate industry. It uncovered how newly licensed agents learned the business and the topics that the participants cited as necessary for developing their businesses. It also showed a career trajectory common to each participant. Two prominent themes emerged while analyzing the data. The first was how these newly licensed agents learned the business and the second was the role/identity of the participants as real estate agents.
The participants identified both formal and informal learning processes as important to their learning the business. The formal learning opportunities included the required pre-licensing class and the Realtor® new member orientation program. The participants’ informal learning opportunities were essentially self-directed activities and experiential activities.

This chapter answers the research questions, discusses several general conclusions, and offers implications for practice and further research.

Summary of Findings

In this section I will summarize the findings as they relate to each research question. The first question uncovered why the study’s participants entered the real estate business. The second question provided insight into their ideas of what they thought about the business and how they saw their roles in the business. In other words, the participants described how they saw themselves as real estate agents. The third question supplied significant data about how the participants learned what they thought was important to know and do as new agents. The following section answers the research questions.

Question One: What Reasons Do Newly Licensed Real Estate Agents Report for Selecting Real Estate as a Career?

Oftentimes the decision to select a particular line of work comes from encounters or experiences with the occupation or personal interest (Billett, 2010). In other words, “career decisions and personal issues are inextricably intertwined” (Amundson, Borgen,
The participants in this study expressed both of these reasons in their decisions to become real estate agents. The common themes that emerged within these constructs were a sense of their own abilities, the desire to help people, the potential for earnings, the capacity to have their own businesses, and the flexibility of schedule. Each of the participants had personal experiences in buying or selling real estate that contributed to their decisions to enter the real estate business. Unfortunately, the majority of the experiences described by the participants were negative. Despite these off-putting experiences and negative impressions about the business, the participants wanted to enter the business because they believed that they could do better than what they had experienced and sincerely wanted to help people.

The participants articulated the concept of self-concern as they talked about real estate’s earning potential, having their own businesses, and flexibility of schedule. Income is a factor in the decision to enter the real estate business (House, 1977; Webb & Seiler, 2001). Jud & Winkler (1999) stated that, “Higher real estate earnings increase the probability that an individual will choose a career in real estate sales” (p. 486). Annie and Connie, participants in this study, exemplified this aspect of self-concern when they discussed earning the commission for themselves in their real estate investment ventures rather than giving it to an agent. They had invested in real estate prior to entering the business. They saw the business as a way to put more money in their pockets and as a means to provide them with a jump on properties that were coming on the market.

Another element of self-concern expressed by three of the participants was having their own businesses. Webb and Seiler (2001) suggested that people who enter the real
estate business are those individuals who “are primarily entrepreneurs” (p. 77), but did not have the capital or the education to start a business. It was John’s dream to have his own business before he was 40; Josie suggested that real estate provided her the avenue for running a business of her own as it provided a support network; and Katie had owned a business and could not imagine working for a boss. Real estate provided them with an entrepreneurial outlet.

Flexibility of schedule appealed to all of the participants–especially the two (Josie and Mona) who had young daughters. They both came from corporate backgrounds with “9-5” jobs. A real estate career provided them the opportunity to spend more time with their daughters, to attend school events, and to stay home with a sick child without worrying about day care or sitters. Josie and Mona also viewed their budding real estate careers as a chance to show their daughters the value of work, the fulfillment of dreams, and a sense of purpose and accomplishment. They saw real estate as an avenue to provide their daughters with a better life. Flexibility of schedule allowed them to set their own schedules but it did not alleviate the need to work evenings and weekends (Webb & Seiler, 2001).

Question Two: How Do Newly Licensed Real Estate Agents Develop the Knowledge and Skills Needed for Practice?

This question is answered in two parts: the first covers the knowledge and skills newly licensed agents need to perform in the workplace and the second examines how this knowledge and skills are developed by newly licensed agents. This study found that the
participants utilized formal and informal learning to gain the knowledge and skills necessary for their new careers.

**Formal Learning Opportunities**

The formal learning opportunities included the pre-licensing class and a Realtor® new member orientation program. The participants reported that neither of these educational offerings provided the necessary practical skills needed for participation in the business. They provided the theoretical or background knowledge of the real estate industry but provided very little procedural or dispositional knowledge. The new member orientation programs were slightly more helpful than the pre-licensing program in providing insights into the business and how it functions. One of the concerns voiced by the participants was the lack of context. In other words, the participants had no experience (prior knowledge) on which to connect what they were learning. It created an environment of unpreparedness.

**Informal Learning**

A study by Eraut (2004) that focused on professionals, technicians, and managers concluded that “the majority of the learning in the workplace itself was informal and involved a combination of learning from other people and learning from personal experience” (p. 248). Experience, whether it was personal ("learning by doing") or through the experience of others, was a cornerstone for the learning activities of the participants. This study affirmed Eraut’s findings and contributed to the idea that the core
of the informal learning activities of the participants were in self-directed learning activities and experiential learning activities.

Self-directed Learning

Since immersion seemed to be the method or process that the participants experienced in starting their careers, it was up to each of them to determine what they needed to know and how they were going to learn it. John embarked upon a course of study that included “being like a sponge.” He planned on taking as many classes as his company and the Realtor® organization offered. When he took courses about the basic workings of the MLS, he devoted time to using that knowledge and expanding it by “playing around with the MLS.” Annie selected an advanced training course offered by her company. It included the actual doing of what was learned in class. Most of the participants concluded that the best way to learn was by doing it and observing others do it.

Experiential Learning

The application of Kolb’s (1984) model to real estate inadequately describes an agent’s experience. The following is an example of Kolb’s (1984) model applied to a real estate agent who is doing a comparative market analysis for a potential seller. The concrete experience occurs when the agent meets with the sellers to present her marketing plan and analysis of the market. The potential sellers do not sign the agent’s agreement at the initial meeting because they are going to interview other agents. The agent leaves and enters the mode of reflective observation. The agent mulls over the experience carefully
considering her preparation work for the meeting and what transpired at the meeting. At this juncture, the agent generalizes and forms abstract concepts attempting to make sense of what emerged during the reflection mode. The agent may come to the conclusion that she should adjust her presentation to the client and develop an individualized or consultative approach rather than a “one size fits all” approach. If the agent has the opportunity for a second interview, she will apply or test out what she has learned. In some cases, she may not have the opportunity to apply her lessons to the particular sellers whose situation created the concrete experience. The sellers may have hired another agent. In this situation, the agent would not be able to apply what she perceived as acceptable adjustments until she has an opportunity with different sellers. This lapse causes an incomplete cycle. This begs the question of whether the next presentation with different sellers completes the original cycle or does it signal the beginning of a new cycle? Either way, the experience should contribute to enlarging the agent’s experiential knowledge base. It seems that the inadequacy of Kolb’s (1984) model as applied to an agent’s listing presentation experience is the transfer or immediate applicability of what one has learned.

John’s experience of accompanying his mentor on a listing presentation highlights the insufficiency of the Kolb (1984) model as does Connie’s experience working with a particular buyer client. They both had a concrete experience: in John’s case, meeting with sellers at their home; in Connie’s case, showing property to potential buyers. They both had the opportunity to review and reflect on the experience that led to abstract conceptualization. John concluded that one needs to be prepared to present using a paper-based method or a technology-based method depending on the client’s preference. An
agent should be prepared and not take things for granted. Connie discovered that a potential buyer’s mental image of what he wants may be different than the reality of what the buyer wants. It is the last step in the model that is problematic–active experimentation. Neither John nor Connie were able to try out what they learned from these clients because neither agent had the opportunity to work with them again. The initial mismatch erased the opportunity. The best outcome for active experimentation is the application of these lessons to future situations, which points out one of the weaknesses of the model–“the possibility that we may not always universalize our experience” (Jarvis, 2006, pp. 10-11). In other words, the cycle in the Kolb (1984) model may not always be completed until one encounters a new or unique experience.

Davies’s model (2008) most accurately reflects the informal learning processes of the participants in this study. Davies viewed experience as data gathering. In accordance with Davies’s (2008) model of informal learning, the participants learned from previous experiences, their own experiences, personal observations, fellow participants, and informed non-participants observations.

The participants cited prior experience as buyers or sellers of real estate and working with real estate agents as a critical event in formulating their own opinions about agents and the business in general. It was their own observations and personal experiences working with other agents that allowed them to reflect upon their perspectives and to gain new and favorable insights about the business. As the participants worked in their respective offices, they observed how other agents solved problems and dealt with
customers, clients, and other agents. It is this immersion in an environment that allows us to build a picture of our world and what we need to do to function in it (Davies, 2008).

Immersion has been described as a “sink or swim method of introduction into a profession” (Kennedy, 1987, p. 153). On its own, immersion is typically an inadequate method for learning or mastering a profession (Kennedy, 1987) since it fails to provide a formal framework for developing the necessary skills needed; what to learn is the responsibility of the novice.

The participants developed their own knowledge and skills by collaborating with and relying on experienced colleagues. Eraut (2007) suggested that:

Working alongside others allows people to observe and listen to others and to participate in activities; and hence to learn some new practices and new perspectives, to become aware of different kinds of knowledge and expertise, and to gain some of other people’s tacit knowledge. (p.409, italics in the original)

The participants had assigned mentors or self-selected mentors. The collaboration and reliance on others adds a dimension to informal learning that is not encompassed in Davies’s model.

Knowledge and Skills

Various typologies of workplace learning (Billett, 2001; Eraut, 2004, 2007; Margaryan, Milligan, & Littlejohn, 2013) suggest there are different types of knowledge used in workplace learning. The participants in this study confirmed that newly licensed agents needed basic knowledge to develop their businesses. This study categorized the
basic knowledge as knowledge, skills, and attitudes. In other words, the things the participants cited as essential were what they needed to know (codified or conceptual knowledge), what they needed to able to do (how to do things or procedural knowledge), and dispositional knowledge encompassing behavior and attitudes (Billett, 2001). These categories are the “what” of the business, the “how” of the business, and the “why” of the business.

In some cases, what the participants named as a need to know topic fit neatly into one of these discrete categories. Rules and regulations and factual information are examples of knowledge that match the category exactly. Other topics were not so neatly placed in a category since they could be included in more than one place. Paperwork is an example of a multi-category need to know topic. The participants needed to know what paperwork was required for what activity, where the paperwork was kept or how to access the proper forms, how to complete the forms, the procedures involved in presenting the paperwork as well as what to do with the paperwork once the transaction was completed, and the benefits of doing it correctly. So the seemingly simple topic of paperwork is relatively complex when viewed from the “big picture” of paperwork. Paperwork may be placed in all three of the categories of learning (knowledge, skills, and attitudes) identified in this study.

Several of the participants reported that they needed both “soft skills” and “hard skills” to be successful as real estate agents. These references to hard and soft skills by the participants are contained within the categories of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Soft skills may be regarded as behavioral competencies or interpersonal competencies since
they pertain to a person’s ability to interact and relate with other individuals (Andrews & Higson, 2008). The soft skill most often cited for success was people skills. These skills included the ability to relate to people and to communicate with people. Communication skills were deemed necessary for procuring clients, for making presentations, and for building relationships. Since the mainstay of the business is working with buyers, sellers, and other real estate agents, the participants deemed it important to be able to interact effectively with various personality types in a myriad of circumstances. The participants stressed the importance of communication skills because it is important to find out the needs and wants of their clients and customers and to be able to relay information in a manner that made sense to their clients. The participants seemed to innately know that soft skills were the essential ingredient in building a referral business and in fulfilling their roles as helpers and nurturers.

Hard skills are the competencies or activities that are necessary to do the job. They include conceptual knowledge and the things that may be readily taught to someone so the individual may function within the workplace. In essence, hard skills are the activities one needs to perform to do the job; they are business related knowledge and skills (Andrews & Higson, 2008). The participants perceived that if customers and clients thought they did not know what they were doing as real estate agents, people skills alone would not allow the agents to build or maintain a client base.

The hard skills mentioned by the participants are things that could be taught or learned through training and honed by doing. These skills included knowing office procedures and processes, the paperwork (contracts and agreements), prospecting and
marketing, rules and regulations, and market and inventory knowledge. The participants concurred that three important aspects of the market were market conditions, short sales, and foreclosures.

The participants agreed that they needed to know the “what” of the business, the “how to” of the business, and the “why” of the business. The “whys” of the business were depicted by the participants as building relationships with clients and other agents, doing business better and differently than the agents they had worked with, and enjoying personally satisfying careers.

Question Three: How Do Newly Licensed Real Estate Agents Perceive the Business and Their Roles as Agents?

The participants developed their professional identities as they became involved in the business as agents. When they worked with real estate agents as clients, they developed negative opinions of real estate agents. Once the participants entered the business, their impressions changed.

Initial Impressions of Real Estate Agents

Prior to entering the business most of the participants thought real estate agents were back stabbing and cut throat, and in it just for the money. Despite their dire and appalling initial impressions, the participants became real estate agents. They were convinced that they would not be like the Realtors® they had encountered when buying or selling property. The participants’ initial perceptions of real estate agents changed
dramatically as they became more engaged in the business. They realized that the agents they worked with were willing to help them by answering their questions, giving advice, and showing them what to do. Since real estate is a service business, the participants concluded that longevity in the business depended on the reputation they developed working with customers, clients, and other real estate agents. Annie depicted the participants’ changed perception:

I expected to work hard, to learn, maybe not as hard as I’ve had to work. I didn’t realize all the ins and outs. I think that was a big surprise to me, how smart Realtors are because it seems like just a dingy job. I know that’s probably a huge insult. What I mean is it’s because you’re smiling all the time or you’re doing easy stuff like looking at houses, working when you want. It probably doesn’t seem like there’s much behind it and there’s a lot behind it. Anyone who’s a Realtor® has had to do a lot of work, be somewhat intelligent, and pay their dues. It’s an admirable job. It’s a much more admirable job than I thought it was. I got into it for personal reasons. But now that I’m into it, I am impressed with Realtors®. My image of them has completely changed.

The participants were drawn into the business because of their personal experiences in buying and selling property. It was being on the outside edge of the business that spurred their decisions to enter the business as licensed agents. Their careers as real estate agents began on the periphery of the business and developed as they became engaged. As the participants learned and did the actual work of agents, they developed a sense of the business. They were gradually moving towards becoming fully functioning participants in real estate.

The participants—with one exception—did not mention how those outside the profession viewed real estate agents. Annie encountered the “outsider looking in”
perspective when she encountered clients who judged her harshly because of the car she drove. It was interesting to note that although she (and the other participants) had a negative impression of real estate agents prior to entering the business, that she did not consider that other outsiders could have the same negative opinion. She was incensed when “he stopped using me because I have a Cadillac. Isn’t that ridiculous?” Annie’s perception of real estate agents had changed and she was having difficulty resolving the difference in her opinion of real estate agents and the perspective of her clients. Benner (2001) suggested that newcomers oftentimes encounter problems with merging their ideas of the profession with the image that society may have of the profession.

The Roles of Real Estate Agents

Their ideas of their working selves were formulated by their experiences prior to entering the business and solidified as they worked in the business interacting with buyers, sellers, and other agents. “The working selves and collective perspectives are formed in and, in turn, influenced their relationships with three groups of significant others–buyers and sellers of houses, other agents, and the managers of their company” (House, 1977, p. 41). When the participants worked with clients, they saw themselves as helpers, purveyors of information, or as nurturers. Because they saw themselves in these roles, the participants expected their managers, mentors, and other agents to behave in similar roles when dealing with the “new kid on the block.” The disconnection between role expectations and experience generated frustration for the participants. For instance, Annie, Connie, Katie, and Mona had managers who were “too busy” with other things to actually
spend time training them. Gertrude and John thought that their mentors were aloof and uninvolved. Katie and Sally had managers who helped them only when they solicited the assistance.

**Perceptions of Success**

The participants viewed real estate as a service business more than as a sales business. This was reflected in their notions of success: real estate was building relationships by meeting the needs of their customers and clients and keeping their best interests at the forefront of their interactions with them; the sign of a successful agent was having a referral business—a word-of-mouth business built on one’s reputation—where past and current clients provided future business.

**Building a Business**

Doing the work of a profession contributes to developing a professional identity by expanding the understanding of what the profession is and what its agents do. It is working with customers and clients that causes one to move from an outsider looking in to being on the fringe (periphery) to becoming a fully-functioning member of the profession. It is this progression that moves one from novice to expert provided one engages in reflection and deliberate action or practice.
General Conclusions

The participants had expressed unbridled enthusiasm as they began their real estate careers. They were excited and believed that they would do well. Within months, they felt the gnawing of frustration as the realities of the business unfolded—unforeseen expenses, feelings of unpreparedness, not knowing what to do or how to do it, lack of training, lack of business (“being busy with no results”), not knowing how to find clients, and lack of income (“knowing the market was slow but having expectations of closed transactions by now”).

The frustration was manifested in two important ways. The first was to lay the blame for the frustration on external sources—the market, the training, and the environment. None of the participants acknowledged themselves personally as the source of the frustration. The second was a consequence of the external placement of blame; several participants explored a change of companies. One participant did, in fact, change companies during the course of this research. Another participant had laid the groundwork to change companies as soon as her employment contract expired. Two of the participants were “hanging in” until another opportunity presented itself either within the industry or from an external source outside of the real estate industry.

Implications for Practice

The implications for practice focus on pre-licensing, orientation, and training. “Practitioners across many disciplines—academic, technical, professional, and manual
work—note a gap between what they do at their everyday workplace and what they are asked to learn when they attend school prior to beginning work….” (Roth, 2010, p. 21). From this study, it may be concluded that formal real estate pre-licensing education—like most formal education—did not adequately prepare the participants for the work of the business. The purpose of formal education is to provide “the canonical knowledge of the occupation” (Billett, 2010, p. 4). It does not purport to provide the how to knowledge or supply the means of skill acquisition for performing in the business despite the expectations of those taking the class. This gap between expectations and the reality could be addressed through explicit explanations in the course materials and an iteration of the purpose of the course by the pre-license instructors, but the practical aspect of the gap has no easy fix. In Illinois, licensed activities, which are essentially the work of the business, cannot be performed unless an individual has a license. For a meaningful, practical aspect to be added to pre-licensing education, the law needs to be changed to allow for internships or apprenticeships during the formal pre-licensing education period.

Shadowing may be a method of adding a practical aspect to a potential agent’s experience. However, from a company’s or managing broker’s viewpoint, shadowing before an individual is licensed may be impractical for several reasons. First, there is no guarantee that the person who is doing the shadowing will pass the state exam. Second, experienced agents may be reluctant to have unlicensed individuals accompany them. Third, there are agency and risk management implications for the real estate company that allows non-licensed individuals to be part of licensed activities. Finally, there is the question of how much time and energy a company wants to invest in an individual who
may not affiliate with them but with another company. Despite these drawbacks, shadowing prior to licensing may provide a potential new agent with a glimpse into the requirements of the job. An informal shadowing program ("take a student to work day") may provide a pre-licensing student to "see workplace circumstances and gain initial knowledge about employment" (Cease-Cook et al., 2015, p. 354).

Shadowing may be an effective practice for learning through work if a company or office incorporates it as an element within new agent training or if license law would make it a requirement of pre-licensing. This, in my opinion, would require a paradigm shift and rethinking of the purpose and function of pre-licensing requirements.

This study showed the need for companies and/or offices to provide new agent orientation process or on-boarding procedures. These do not need to involve a class but could be an alternative intervention. Creating inclusive checklists that categorize items for new agents that show what they should know and who are the best sources of the information. Accountability could be built in to the checklist by including deadline dates and acknowledgement of the completed task by the responsible source.

This study showed that training for newly licensed agents is by and large a self-directed activity with very little additional guidance. Training is learning the job and it should include scaffolding. Scaffolding is a strategy that involves providing a proper environment, a learning plan, and resources (Foley & Kaiser, 2013). Scaffolding is a tool or tools that support the learning that lead to mastery. "The key to the effectiveness of the resource is relevance" (p. 10). Mentoring, coaching, shadowing, and role playing are scaffolding approaches that would work very well in training newly licensed agents. The
participants in this study expressed a need for this type of instruction in learning the business. Research could determine what is the most relevant and effective training strategies and techniques for developing the businesses of newly licensed agents.

Implications for Research

This study wanted to garner an understanding of newly licensed real estate agents: what they do, what they need to know, and how they identify with the real estate industry. It was a qualitative study and the participants were eight newly licensed agents who were in their first year in the business. The study was limited by geographical considerations. All of the participants were in northern Illinois within a 35-mile radius of the researcher’s home base. The formal education requirements were the same for all the participants—a pre-licensing class and attendance at a Realtor® new-member orientation course.

Since the time of this study, Illinois has increased its pre-licensing requirements for obtaining the initial real estate license. The pre-licensing requirements have been increased to 90 hours and a post-licensing component of 30 hours has been added. This study could be replicated to determine if the additional hours of education have any effect on the preparedness and development of newly licensed agents. This study could also be replicated in states with different licensing requirements. Because of the post-licensing requirement, an additional component could be added to the study to determine if the after licensing education adds to the newly licensed agents’ development or sense of preparedness.
This research could be expanded in two directions. First, this study could be conducted in other states since licensing requirements vary from state to state. It would be interesting to determine if the variance in pre-licensing hours makes a difference in the attitudes and perceptions of newly licensed agents. An interesting facet of this study could be a comparison of the required topics for each state’s pre-licensing courses. Second, this study focused on newly licensed real estate agents whose practices were concentrated in the residential market. It could be replicated by studying newly licensed agents in the commercial real estate arena.

The majority of the participants in this study were female and self-reported as White, which created a narrow boundary and constrained the study. A study could be designed that expands these parameters to include a wider variety of participants. Would gender, race, education, or even personality type (e.g., Meyer-Briggs) cause a significant change in the results? Does gender, race, education, or personality type affect newly licensed agents career trajectories? How do these factors affect the learning processes and identities of newly licensed agents?

The participants all seemed to enter the business enthusiastically and expressed confidence in their abilities to succeed. Within months, they all experienced a gnawing sense of frustration as reality set in with unexpected costs, an awareness of the lack of preparedness, and a general sense of not knowing what to do. This trajectory provides a catalyst for further research. A study could be designed to determine the stages real estate licensees go through as they move from novice to experts. Is the stage model of Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) applicable to real estate agents or do real estate agents experience
different developmental stages? Do real estate agents become experts or do they plateau at a certain level of competence? What is considered as expertise in the real estate industry? Are there different levels or types of expertise? Would developing expertise include productivity levels as well as skill acquisition and problem solving abilities?

A study could be designed to determine the expectations of newly licensed agents and the expectations their managers have for beginning agents. It could determine strategies for addressing the gaps, if any, to meet the expectations of the managers and the newly licensed agents. It could examine the effectiveness of mentoring, coaching, feedback, and accountability as strategies in developing first year real estate agents. It might determine which of these strategies provides the greatest impact on the development of newly licensed agents. Comparison studies of various mentoring and coaching programs could be done. Along these same lines, a study could be constructed to examine the orientation processes and on-boarding procedures that companies and offices employ when a new agent is hired.

In addressing the perceived lack of preparedness, a study could be designed to examine what learning methods newly licensed agents perceive to be most effective for learning the business. This study could also explore what the most important topics newly licensed agents perceive as critical to their early career success.

Career motivation and satisfaction are concepts that could be coupled with longevity, retention, and attrition of real estate agents. A study could be used to develop an understanding of the relationship between career motivation and satisfaction with longevity and attrition. A quantitative study could be designed to create a list of factors
that are critical to satisfaction and longevity and what factors contribute to attrition. I suspect a study of this nature would be similar to Herzberg’s (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1993) dual theory of motivation, which includes satisfiers and dissatisfiers in the workplace. It would certainly expand the research done by Frohriep (2009) on the factors contributing to survival in the real estate industry.

The construct of training opens the door to a plethora of future research. Case studies could be designed to determine the best practices of different training programs. Evaluation research could ascertain the effectiveness of various pre-licensing classes, post-licensing classes, and training programs. Evaluation studies could look at factors such as practicality, applicability, and purpose. A future study could contribute to the workplace knowledge base through a quantitative study using a survey method that would determine what the participants perceive as critical knowledge and skills for fulfilling their roles as real estate agents. This research could include a job analysis and a skills analysis to ascertain how situated knowledge contributes to effective client interaction. It could determine what newly agents think they need to know and be able to do when they first enter the business and it could ascertain the most desirable methods of training. A study could examine how prior learning and experience are transferred when one enters the real estate business. The study of Kolb’s model within this project highlights the need for research on the transfer of training or knowledge.

Real estate is an underutilized profession or vocation in the research base for learning and workplace learning. Consequently, the potential for future research that examines real estate agents—whether it is from a perspective of development, learning
theory, workplace learning theory, training, or socialization practices—appears almost limitless.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL
May 21, 2008

MEMORANDUM

TO: Kristine A. Brown  
Department of Counseling, Adult & Health Education  
2495 South Eastwood Dr.  
Woodstock, IL 60098

FR: David Henningsen, Chair  
Institutional Review Board #1

RE: Graduate student research involving the use of human subjects for the project titled *On the path to professionalism: A qualitative study of newly licensed real estate agents*

This is to inform you that your above-named research project has been approved by Administrative Review as exempt from the Code of Federal regulations (45 CFR 46) for the protection of human subjects. The rationale for exemption is section 46.101b, paragraph 2.

Because this research project has been designated "exempt", this approval is final. You will not need any further review of this project unless you decide to modify it. If you intend to change the procedures, subject pool, or otherwise to modify the protocol so that it would no longer qualify as exempt, you will need to contact the Office of Research Compliance to obtain approval of the changes.

It is important for you to note that as a research investigator involved with human subjects, you are responsible for retaining any signed consent forms obtained from your subjects in a secure place for a minimum of three years after the study is concluded. If consent for the study is being given by proxy (guardian, etc.), it is your responsibility to document the authority of that person to consent for the subject. The committee also recommends that the informed consent include an acknowledgment by the subject, or the subject's representative, that he or she has received a copy of the consent form. In addition, you are required to promptly report to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects and others.

Please accept my best wishes for success in your research endeavors.

DH/ska

cc: W. Zheng  
L. Jeris  
C. Law (Graduate School)  
ORC (#3474)
APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT SOLICITATION LETTERS
Dear Manager,

As a doctoral candidate at Northern Illinois University, I’m conducting research on how newly licensed real estate agents develop their practices and identities as real estate professionals. Since you are responsible for recruiting and hiring newly licensed agents, I need your help. I would appreciate it if you would do several things to assist my recruitment of participants for this study:

1. Provide the attached flier to any newly licensed agents that you interview
2. Provide the contact information of the newly licensed agent to me
3. Encourage the newly licensed agents you hire to participate in this research project
4. Allow me to contact you on a periodic basis as a reminder of the need for participants in this study.

The study consists of interviewing newly licensed agents once a month for a period of six months. The interviews will last approximately 90 minutes. The topics the interviews will explore are the lure of the real estate business, expectations of the business, the learning strategies used, problems or dilemmas that have been encountered, and
exploring the development of professional identity. The theme of the final interview will be “if I only knew then what I know now”.

I’ll be calling you within the next few days to discuss your cooperation in fostering this research project.

Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Kristine A. Brown
The interview process is designed to be a discovery path. The evolving nature of the data may require adjusting the anticipated topics of subsequent interviews based on what is uncovered during the prior interview. Questions for the subsequent interviews with each participant may be as seemingly simplistic as asking, “What’s going on?” or “What have you been doing?” However, the initial intent is to explore several themes. These themes will include:

1. **Lure of the real estate business.** What drew you to the real estate business? How does your prior experience equip you to be successful in real estate? What are your perceptions and expectations? What does it mean to be a Realtor®? What is your idea of success in the real estate business? (This will be the gist of the first interview – focusing on the life history).

2. **Knowledge acquisition.** How did you determine what knowledge and skills you needed to practice real estate? How did you acquire those skills? What do you think are the most important things to know … to do? How did you learn those things? How do you perceive a real estate expertise? What (or who) has helped you the most in learning the business? How has prior training or experience helped with your real estate practice? Talk about training and pre-service education and its applicability to what you’re doing.

3. **Subsequent expectations.** Now that you’ve been in the business, is it what you expected? What’s the same? What’s different? What completely surprised you? Do you feel like a REALTOR®? Do you feel as though you are a part of the REALTOR® community?
4. **Problems or dilemmas.** What has been the biggest problem or dilemma that you’ve encountered? Why? How did you handle it? How do you think you’ll handle future problems or unforeseen circumstances?

5. **Professional development and identity.** What do you think it means to be a real estate agent or a Realtor®? Have your perceptions of being a real estate agent changed? How do you propose to improve your practice?

6. **If I knew then what I know now.** Knowing what you do now, is there anything you would have done differently? What advice would you give someone who is contemplating going into the business? What would you tell a newly licensed agent about becoming a real estate agent? Where do you see yourself in the future? (This reflective and contemplative interview will be the last interview conducted with each participant.)
APPENDIX D

RESEARCH PARTICIPATION AND CONSENT FORMS
INITIAL INTERVIEW

Demographic Information

(This was completed by the participants prior to the first interview.)

Contact Information:

Name: ________________________________________________________________

Street Address: ______________________________________________________________________________

City, State, & Zip: ______________________________________________________________________

Phone (include area code): Office: _________________________ Cell: _________________________

Home: _________________________ Fax: _________________________

E-Mail: _______________________________________________________________________________

Company Name: ________________________________________________________________

Office Location (City and County): _________________________________________________________

Name of Primary Multiple Listing Service: __________________________________________________

Please check the appropriate box:

Gender:□ Male □ Female

Age:□ 21 – 30□ 31 – 40□ 41 – 50□ 51 – 60□ 61+

Status:□ Full-time □ Part-time

Office Affiliation: □ Independent, Single office □ Independent, Multi-office chain

□ Franchise, Single office □ Franchise, Multi-office chain

□ Other: ____________________________________________________________________________
Research Consent Form

(Used for every interview)

Participant: ______________________________________________________________

Date of Interview: ______________________________________________

Interviewer/Researcher: Kristine A. Brown

Contact Information: E-mail: KrisBrown92@aol.com

Phone: 815-338-0203

RESEARCH PURPOSE:

The purpose of this research is threefold:

1. To examine the beginning practices of newly licensed real estate sales agents
2. To develop an understanding of how newly licensed real estate sales agents
devlop their practices and professional identities
3. To discover and understand the perceptions of newly licensed sales agents
about the real estate profession, real estate professionals, and being a
Realtor®

RESEARCH PROCEDURES:

As a participant in this study, you agree to participate in a series of six monthly
interviews about your developing real estate career. These interviews will be recorded.
Each interview should take no more than 90 minutes. Prior to the first interview, you will
be asked to complete some demographic information. You will be asked to review and
complete the consent to record the interview form prior to each interview.
CONFIDENTIALITY:

The names of the participants will not be released. Only the criteria for the selection of participants will be reported. It will not be made clear who participated and who did not. Participant’s names will not be used on documents related to the research. A code number or pseudo name will be assigned to the interview data. Names or specific affiliations will not be included in any report or publication of study findings. Quotes used in any report of the findings will not be attributed to the participant by name or in any other way that would lead to identification of the participant. Only the interviewer/researcher will know the names of those who participated.

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE STUDY:

Participation in this study is strictly voluntary. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I agree to take part in the research on the development of the practices and professional identities of newly licensed real estate agents, which is being conducted by Kristine Brown as part of her doctoral studies at Northern Illinois University. I understand that my participation is strictly voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time. My signature on this form indicates that:

- I have read and understand the purpose and nature of the research
- I agree to the audio taping of the interview
- I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction
- I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time.

Participant Signature: ______________________________________________________

Date: ________________________________________________________________
CONSENT TO TAPE INTERVIEW #1

I, ____________________________________________ grant permission to the interviewer to tape record the interview. I acknowledge that the transcript of the interview is being used as part of the data for this research project. I understand that the data will be kept confidential.

Participant Signature: __________________________________________________

Date: __________________________________________________________________

(This signature page was completed prior to each interview. The taping of each interview was acknowledged at the beginning of each recording session. The researcher obtained both written and verbal consent for the recording.)