PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH WITH TENANTS IN PUBLIC HOUSING:
"WORKING TOGETHER FOR CHANGE"

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in the Department of Adult Education, Community Development and Counselling Psychology Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

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ABSTRACT

Participatory Research with Tenants in Public Housing: “Working Together for Change”

Doctor of Education 1997

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This study is a four year participatory research project in which the writer collaborates with tenants in the Longview Tenant Association. Longview is a public housing community in London, Ontario providing subsidized housing for 170 families. Frustrated with the lack of success when formal adult educational initiatives were offered to the working poor or to people living on social assistance, the researcher introduces backdoor learning. A type of informal learning, it occurs spontaneously and unpredictably. Backdoor learning emerges as tenants organize their community and interact with other community leaders in the larger London community. Direct evidence from tenants, collected during the three stages of the growth of the association, shows that tenants have different perspectives related to community organizing and to the function of their association in their community. Their ideas suggest new directions for practitioners wishing to act in solidarity with oppressed people. The framework for the evidence uses Park’s (1993) instrumental, interactive and critical knowledge and relates it to three stages in the development of the association. Tenants offer guidelines for practising solidarity and illustrate how language acquired from reading this thesis, through backdoor learning, assisted a tenant to articulate community concerns. The researcher talks critically of her own privilege and how that can be used to prioritize tenants’
self definitions of the way in which they have been regulated by workers outside their community. Tenants initiate and implement community strategies to improve their quality of life.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study acknowledges the ongoing struggle of the tenants who live in the Longview community. Although they have had many hills to climb and many falls to recover from, they never fail to pick themselves up and move on. They kept me involved and motivated during the four years that we worked together.

In particular, I would like to thank past presidents of the Longview Tenant Association who learned to trust me and count on me to act in solidarity with the community. As I mentioned in Chapter 5, one of these past presidents introduced me to the idea of learning through the backdoor. Another compliments me by using some of the ideas and the language discussed in this thesis.

That the Longview Tenant Association continues to improve and grow is testimony to the commitment of the residents working in the association as well as to those who chose to work for the community in other ways. Perhaps that is why I remain sure of the existence of backdoor learning and of the way it can provide educational opportunities for people fighting for a voice in their own development.
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CHAPTER 1

COLLABORATION, RESEARCH AND LEARNING

Introduction

This study traces the efforts of tenants in Longview, a low income housing community (sometimes referred to as public housing) as they organize the Longview Tenants’ Association in London, Ontario. It is a participatory research project in which tenants and researcher collaborate to develop the role of the association in encouraging other tenants to articulate what they need and how they might implement community improvements. Tenants are described as capable and willing to work although in the past, social agency workers and public housing workers may have labelled tenants as apathetic and unmotivated. Adult students from low income communities lost interest with community college programs established to assist people on welfare. My experiences indicated the course materials were not relevant to the lives of tenants. Learning outcomes were measured according to teacher expectations. In Longview, tenants provide direct evidence that they undertake and enjoy learning (referred to as backdoor learning) gained from activities they undertake in their community. Backdoor learning happens unpredictably in the context of everyday activities. Tenants learn to articulate issues that affect them in community meetings and do not accept how others describe them or their community. They use their own interpretations to decide what the community needs to improve. In this work, all references to tenants mean tenants in the Longview community. In this chapter, I shall discuss my motivation to work with the Longview community and how our relationship developed into one of solidarity. I outline
the study and the organization of the write-up.

Background to the Thesis

Limitations of Classroom Learning

Educational institutions and government planners have a tendency to view learning solely as an activity for the classroom. In the early '80s, the Ontario government allocated substantial funding to community colleges to establish literacy programs. They hoped to compensate for an alarming number of illiterate citizens. Colleges added these programs to their existing list of technical and applied courses, used teachers not specifically trained to work with people experiencing literacy problems and packed the curriculum with social skill learning taught in a classroom setting. Literacy had come to explain how an individual's inability to read and write was the underlying cause of alcoholism, illegal acts, abuse and even the failure of some women to move from welfare to work.

Although at first, the mandate for the funding allowed anyone entry to programs, the rules governing funding allocations later demanded that 50 percent of literacy classes must be people receiving social assistance. In this way, the government hoped to address the failure of welfare recipients to experience economic independence. Literacy skills would prepare them for a more demanding job market, result in less poverty and in increased rates of literacy provincially and nationally.

As a full time instructor in a community college, my role was to pilot new programs that were viewed as meeting a need in the community and many of these incorporated literacy instruction. I met with community workers to plan college literacy
programs that combined learning for personal progress usually associated with further education, and learning to correct social ills. Like other professionals in this area of work, I discussed knowledgeably and publicly how a literacy class teaching English, Math and Life Skills provided opportunities for women to learn something that would improve their life. I, too, concluded that participation in the class would equip them with the necessary skills for advancement. Findings researched and published by one of the government ministries informed me of the social problems that burdened each of them. This enabled practitioners to discuss the needs of these learners without consulting the learners themselves. It was as if the teachers themselves were the ones who experienced illiteracy.

The teaching philosophy I embraced at that time assumed that adult education incorporated social change if it simply attracted and enrolled these “marginal students.” Instructors like me called these participants SARS (social assistant recipients) not directly to students but in conversations. Not only teachers, but college administrators, students and social agency workers assumed the women graduating would soon be capable of moving onto a more productive stage of life at the completion of the course.

Apart from the tendency for a teacher to categorize these women as inadequate because of the educational credentials they lacked, and apart from a perception of them as generally lacking appropriate social skills, the claim that education was the panacea to their problems had a questionable empirical base. As teachers, we should have accepted with some skepticism statistics on programs that reported 80% of the students had completed the course. College departmental secretaries used phone interviews to collect results and only on one occasion. That may have been a good week for the respondent who had finished the course or it could have been a spouse or a mother-in-law. As
teachers, we knew the uncertain life for women living on welfare. A course may have been completed but the troubles that predict a difficult life may not have changed and not because of her directly but because of the environment in which she was living. Program counsellors rarely followed up six or twelve months later by which time the life of a woman might have taken any number of directions. She could have had firm plans to return to college one day when the follow-up was done and be told by a service worker to cancel her plans the next. When a woman's children were in trouble, service workers might encourage her to stay home and put off self-improvement until later.

It was perhaps to reflect the uncertainties of women's lives that the Ontario Ministry that provided the funding defined a successful outcome as a woman, who had found employment, had gone on to further education, had moved away or had become pregnant. Women were seldom recorded as actually dropping out but as putting off their education. Nevertheless, a woman's absence from the program was her fault. There was no category to record her satisfaction with classroom activities, how she viewed the teacher or if the program was meeting her needs. It is my opinion, that the Ministry and no doubt the college was really trying to prove that the teacher was doing the job of providing the opportunity to learn. College administrators could then record a negative outcome if she quit for any other reason, such as an illness or a sick child. This labelled her as deficient and obscured any possibility that the course itself predicted her inability to complete the work.

This is not a claim that there was no good literacy program; it does suggest to me that the funding mandate did not demand any link between classroom learning and the claim that students improved their well being (another term rarely defined). Programs
changed the daily routine of the women attending it, allowing women to go to school and put her child in daycare, but at the end of the course, she returned to the survival strategies she employed before the program to cope with the hardships that still dominated her life. Many teachers, like me, lacking critical knowledge about the lives of people on welfare, did not consider presenting classroom materials relevant to the women's experiences. The possible result was that many never returned to pursue further education for reasons which were quite different from those the data from the follow-ups related.

Whether any woman became more capable of handling her benefits or dealing with public housing administrators remained a mystery to me as a teacher. Possibly, improved literacy skills provided in a program could assist a woman to manage her affairs better but that was never considered.

Social service workers often prodded a woman to enroll in further classes once she completed the first 12-week literacy program, by threatening loss of benefits or reduced subsidies if she didn’t (Horsemann 1990). As her teacher, I questioned how the college model of adult education allowed the learner to control the process that adult educators supposedly value and use in lesson planning (Brundage and Mackeracher 1980). I seemed to be a teacher who was controlling the learning process. The women never prioritized or articulated the issues that could have been the foundation for improving their lives. The teacher can relinquish control to the learner, as I discovered in this thesis, yet remain a participant in the learning process.

Progress was not connected to any participant evaluation but to raised test scores. They supposedly indicated some better educated women who would then be able to access a well-paid job. Low scores meant that she had not worked hard enough, that she had not
grasped what we had been teaching or that she had been absent too often. We had done our job well and with no consideration of the community issues that really affected the life quality of these women. I knew that test scores could not measure the effect of other gains or losses in a woman’s life from my own experience. When my mother died at the beginning of grade 10, the loss affected me for many years. My marks plummeted. The scores required by the college and by the Ministry of Skills Development (then a separate portfolio in the Ontario government) may have been affected by similar life problems and did not develop a picture of progress that could be depended on to suggest future success.

Time dimmed my personal connections to poverty. Having always returned to school by choice, I had not analysed, as a teacher or a learner, the systemic oppression of women on welfare. My language did not include such words as hegemony, domination, oppression or injustice. I did not think of privilege, equality, or the social context even though twenty years earlier, I had been marginalized and needed welfare benefits and subsidized day care. It was not available at that time. As the daughter of an unemployed father with a two-year-old brother, I had no choice when he asked me to quit school to support the family. Leaving home, I made plans to return to school and did so four times, but never looked at either how I had improved my economic situation or how my ability to pursue further education was connected to my economic security. I became privileged enough to assume education would be the road to a better paying job or to higher paid employment.

Literacy classes often develop after a larger economic crisis in the country such as the one in the early 1980s in Canada. Governments may increase public spending to encourage access to jobs. However, the allocation of money for literacy or for job finding
programs tends to also encourage a rejection of the social conditions forced on those most severely affected by the crisis. I obscured the reality of the students I taught by focussing on the teaching and less on the social context that prompted the classes in the first place.

The group work teachers presented as part of the program mainly discussed personal change and how difficult it was going to be. Yet, there was no mandate within the funding mechanism or any decision on the part of the teachers to record or solicit individual statements of how the everyday life of women on welfare developed from social factors, only how she was unable to handle her life adequately. This study uses direct evidence from tenants organizing in public housing to illustrate how everyday humiliations can be used for learning and action to improve the quality of life.

Mann (1978) reports poor people apathetic toward programs geared toward individual improvement and adds that community organizations developed with this intention in mind often prompts the same response. However, the reasons he uses to explain the apathy consider the participants as lacking skills, mistrusting authority, having "intangible" health problems or feeling cynical about political involvement (Mann 1978). At no time does he ask if their family supported their efforts, or if they were better able to deal with welfare workers or if they could articulate their needs better themselves after the program. Nor does he question whether participants gained the respect of social agency workers who had funnelled them into the program in the first place. This research seeks to surface an alternative learning environment and the way in which it may work to build literacy and social skills from activities pursued by tenant initiative.
From the Classroom to Community

Selman and Dampier's point of view is that community educators put programs in place that work for change and that result in improvement in community life (Selman and Dampier 1991). Since the community college programs with which I had been connected did not seem to do either of these, I decided to trade my teaching position in the college for a literacy program I could run in a community setting. I developed this into a relationship in which I could work and collaborate with the tenants in Longview Tenant Association (LTA) and with members of the association. LTA activities offered a different approach to education and learning. While there are no claims of a better economic life for people on welfare, the current good health of the association today and the success of programs suggests that change has occurred. Tenants who organized through the LTA determined their own progress and implemented their own strategies to improve life in their community. By assigning importance to the context of learning, the tenants' community itself, I hoped to begin using the learner's life experience as a starting point. This research provides direct tenant evidence to show what learning has taken place in individuals and in the community.

Smith (1994) explored informal learning opportunities that take place in conversations with community members and in reflections with other community workers. He emphasized that the process of learning occurs unexpectedly, during a meeting, a crisis or a community event. Articulating the experience in reflective conversations encourages participants to see what they have learned and to identify new ideas. Outcomes, while they may be critical for the tenants, may be a less important focus of my role when we work together.
Unlike the classroom teacher who is dependent on incremental learning, the tenants and I can revisit ideas to establish what is learned. Opportunities arise to engage tenants in conversation about social controls because the authority which City Housing imposes affects every tenant through receipt of their benefits. Tenants learned to prioritize their responsibility in decision-making because they learn the value of their knowledge in solutions to issues that affect their community. A funding application not only demands literacy skills but requires that tenants understand the political nature of the allocating of public money. Because it is relevant to the well being of their community, they are glad to learn how to do it. We discuss how Longview's application can be competitive with other requests and this dialogue provides a background with key points for public presentations. Networking among community agencies gives them control of the process of development and improvement. We probe together, talking about systems of government, the language of funding requests, the design that legitimizes programs and how we might stretch requirements. Tenants can learn effective complaining, not just as a results-oriented approach but as a successful communication tool. Demands for participation in decision-making begin with a newly acquired assumption that they belong in that process. Confrontation does not just depend on the issue to be communicated effectively, but on what a tenant is willing to risk of herself and her family.

On other occasions, tenants bring their experiences to meetings where they work out and argue about how their community will use outside expertise such as recreational leaders or maintenance assistance. They initiate the dialogue with community college to deliver programs and contact agencies to solicit input to the planning process. Tenants do not simply react to demands that they attend programs that other community
administrators feel are necessary, but become part of the planning process. They also explore what decisions about their community are negotiable with City Housing. In the process, tenants are transforming the stereotypical and static views of their communities that outsiders have constructed as passive and apathetic. In turn, volunteers and agency workers are beginning to see that some members of the community have valid and productive contributions to make to community development. Freire's notion that a teacher is at the same time there with her students and not there seems an appropriate characterization of my relationship with this tenant community (Shor and Freire 1987). Participatory research uses this idea to illustrate how tenants' knowledge is utilized and given authority in the process of learning how to organize in their community.

**Tenant Organizing as Learning and Research**

The organizing effort of tenants in public housing has not received adequate recognition in the literature. This has, in part, been the result of uncertain outcomes experienced by community organizers who assist them in development projects. Anxious to change the economic and social inequities that define these communities, some proponents of social justice point to the failure of tenants to understand Marxist principles (Repo 1977). Published accounts in journals, magazines, newspapers or local documents focus on the uncertain role of paid organizers. Researchers often describe the conscientious approach of community workers who become convinced that the people whose life they are working to change must master a Marxist analysis of societal inequity and that it should be pivotal in bringing about change. Yet, there are few accounts of the link between what tenants learn from analysing the relationship between workers and
corporate administrators and the action tenants may take to improve their communities. What is often left out of accounts is whether the tenants have sudden insights and new understandings or whether they accept what organizers describe without question and act randomly.

Most accounts of organizing activities in communities describe tenants as recipients of social programming and omit any view of tenants themselves as the initiators of positive change for their community (Pollinger and Pollinger 1972). Programs introduced to assist the community, designed and carried out by researchers, social workers or government policy makers, assume that outside expertise can somehow ameliorate the effects of living on welfare. While tenants may benefit from some of these initiatives, there is little attempt to acknowledge tenants' ability to organize the community themselves or to identify how tenant knowledge motivates change. Collaboration with other groups, such as environmental coalitions or coalitions working to ameliorate poverty has been documented. There are few accounts in the literature, especially relevant to Canada, that describe research using collaboration with a tenant association in public housing. None use direct evidence from tenants active in the association.

This research is the result of a four-year collaboration with the tenants of the Longview Tenant Association (hereafter called the LTA). Longview is a public housing community of about 200 families in London, Ontario. I use the LTA as a teacher might use a classroom, to develop learning opportunities for us both and to provide a context for exploring how tenants learn and use new knowledge to confront the intimidation and degradation imposed on them as welfare recipients. I explore my relationship to their community and attempt to articulate how I became a participant in their organizing efforts.
Acting in solidarity with them means encouraging them to define their perception of community needs and, using their knowledge in this way, to dislodge the control imposed by outsiders.

The way tenants describe the function of their organization may provide additional insights about how communities begin to act collectively. They reflect on what they have learned as they talk about what the association means to them. Their experience suggests alternative approaches to education which I will call backdoor learning as explained in chapter 5. These experiences and approaches are part of a process that shows how learner awareness results in knowledge that promotes tenants as competent decision-makers and productive community members. Of equal importance is how I modified my behaviours to recognize and encourage them to describe and relate what they require from their understanding. Our collaboration has enabled me to mould my approach to draw out knowledge from community members. My understanding of community organizing has expanded because of the ideas tenants brought to the process and because they consistently struggled to self-define issues relevant to their community previously communicated by outsiders.

**Controlling Images of the Community**

**Official Interpretations of Community Needs**

Outsider perceptions of community needs stem from a general societal willingness to accept administrative decision-making and to authorize the skill of bureaucrats who govern. Government workers implement procedures and guidelines imposed on them by administrators remote from the context in which workers interact. Community relations
workers hired by City Housing to visit tenant communities, and social agency workers connected to agencies such as the Children's Aid Society have little or no input as to how a guideline will be used, when or why. A community needs' analysis rarely involves tenants but solicits the opinions of workers hired to solve their problems for them.

Community development consultants or planners, for example, may assume that if they deal with the low self esteem of women, using generic program materials, then tenants will be able to handle their lives better. However, as Dorothy, a former president of the Longview association explained when she was describing her community to a church board, these women would never be able to survive the constant harassment from community workers, from City Housing (who administers public housing locally) or sustain their continual fight to give their children a safe and secure community life if their self esteem was poor.

Self esteem may, I suggest, be influenced by factors related to the fragility of the social safety net. Benefits are unstable, change frequently and create emotional uncertainty for the future. Yet, women see few options for their families and are willing to put up with the whim of governments that provide variable living stipends. City Housing does not give tenants a full schedule outlining how they calculate the housing subsidy. Decreases in the amount given to a family occur without warning when tenants are already budgeting for special drugs and a broken down washer. When mistakes are made in the calculations, tenants wait two or three months to receive the corrected amount. This amount may be adequate but if it has been taken away through some misunderstanding, then hardship results. Some women and many men in the community work at low paying jobs but with all the costs involved in getting to and from work and the income tax that is
deducted at the source, some complain they are rarely ahead financially.

One tenant emphasized that programs brought into the community by outside expertise are often devised from needs determined by people other than tenants. Those implementing the programs use a generic curriculum designed to be delivered anywhere with any group of people. They do not address problems that could help women handle hardship. For example, a common tenant experience is self advocating with one's social service worker. This would be a good starting point for a curriculum that deals with communication skills but few facilitators or teachers deal with that. The needs' assessment compiled and carried out by researchers, social workers or government policy makers does not ask people on welfare how programs can be designed to solve their problems. Institutions and agencies believe they have the answer. They frequently ask for an increase in agency workers to handle such social problems as abuse, substance abuse or child welfare issues. Loney (1983) notes this is the most frequent form of improvements offered.

City Housing, too, insists on their perception of tenants' needs to make their administrative process more efficient. For example, wanting the support of tenants to carry out management changes, these administrators encourage the formation of tenant associations but restrain tenant efforts to organize. Housing wanted the LTA to provide social events but when tenants also started to become vocal about improvements in their community, City Housing threatened organizers with eviction. In addition, City Housing evaluates the effectiveness of tenant associations by what these associations can do to refine the operations of City Housing, not by what they are doing for their own community. If tenants demand better living conditions, City Housing considers them
ungrateful, not concerned citizens. Few accounts trace tenant efforts to confront outsiders by presenting tenants' own alternatives for community improvement.

One researcher designed a survey to summarize the issues facing tenant communities. Never having lived in a public housing community, this researcher may, as many outsiders do, have feared consultation with tenants. Upon discussing the survey with Longview tenants, I discovered the questionnaire used had not been filled in by any tenant from Longview, either from the LTA or the general tenant body. No one I talked to had even heard of its existence although Longview is the largest public housing complex in the city. This suggests reluctance to solicit tenant input, a fact that tenant associations already know. It also suggests that data collected on tenant communities does not contain enough information garnered directly from tenants to build a clear picture of what tenants need. Results may be tabulated from small samples of tenants and large samples of paid workers and bureaucratic decision makers. These people are not only uncharacteristic of the community but sometimes hostile to it. This process only duplicates workers' perception of the community and garners no new knowledge to change conventional ideas of change strategies.

At one community development meeting I attended, tenants asked to see the results of the survey. The representative from City Housing told tenants that it was really none of their business and anyway, it could not be located at this time.

College program planners in developing educational programs for social assistance recipients, consult these same administrators and often use this survey data. An important part of my study was to show not only how tenant perceptions differ from those of outsiders but also the context in which tenants may learn and change.
One researcher, investigating the development of community leaders among tenants, illustrates how privilege influences her perspectives about change in tenant communities. She lamented the loss of self-educated community leaders because they often gain enough skills to move out of community at the end of a project (Naples 1990). Development, according to this researcher, is supposed to mean community development, not personal development. This is a privileged view. Why should a researcher question why a tenant chooses to leave her housing community without regard to the skills that tenant may have gained that could now elevate her economically? That decision must be hers alone. Outsider pressure to maintain solidarity among tenants by prolonging the tenure of good leaders originates from an outsider who lacks any understanding of the hardships involved in the tenant experience. This study contrasts tenant perceptions with outsider perceptions to illustrate that tenants also understand the role of their association in a way that is different from those people living in other communities and taking part in other groups. These notions come from the subjective opinion of tenants and from their position as individuals in a community whose daily life is always jeopardized by economic troubles.

Understanding Privilege

Changing language that describes tenants as lacking, as having a deficiency, involves changing attitudes to allow that tenants promote themselves as capable of defining their own needs and solving their own problems. This is difficult for tenants who have internalized how others perceive them. Just as teachers in a literacy program assume the privilege of naming people on welfare ‘SARS’, workers who serve the Longview
community use language to describe tenant characteristics without connecting to the social inequality that characterizes their relationship. Changing these habits is recognizing how privilege allows workers like me to maintain a social separation between tenants and me. At the request of the tenant president, I avoid the use of the word ‘marginal’ (further discussed in chapter 7). The use of privilege is subtle and its effect on tenants is often well hidden from public view.

I began to understand that mainstream institutions control and maintain social inequalities and that middle class workers had an economic interest in keeping tenants dependent. A class reading by McIntosh (1991) unpacked her personal "knapsack of privilege." McIntosh’s insight was that members of the middle class, which includes me, maintain the inequality of low-income women not by what the women themselves lack but by the privileges the middle class claims for itself. A thoughtful community relations worker reminded me that as a middle income wage earner one of my privileges was my ability to purchase space. My house or its contents were not necessarily more elegant than those of the women that lived in Longview, but the space in which I moved about in was mine, and it was three times as big as theirs. I bought privacy. I could keep a mortgage holder or landlord from entering my space but at Longview City Housing always uses their right of entry, even though the lease doesn't allow it without notice. I could separate myself from my neighbours, from my children or from my husband within my living space. In a three-bedroom townhouse in Longview, with two common walls and a design that demands efficiency of space, there is rarely room for individuals to claim or find their own space. One property manager with City Housing regards the space as borrowed--that no tenants should use as if it were their own. He assumes he speaks for all taxpayers. My
space is not for sale but theirs is temporary, tenuous and controlled by someone other than the tenant. In addition, the space occupied by my high demand single family dwelling results in a greater profit for developers and consequently reduces land allocation for nonprofit housing. There is little chance of any social housing initiatives coming to the community in which I live, even cooperative housing that would combine residents across a wider spectrum of incomes than is currently found. Lastly, according to the London and Middlesex Tenants Association, public housing tenants pay higher property taxes as part of their rent, yet their entitlements are far less than other renters on the private market.

Tenants in public housing are described by those who work with them and by critical theorists as "marginalized" because they have no opportunities to participate in public dialogue (Young 1991; Pateman 1990). Because this description does not come from tenants, because they do not acknowledge their isolation in this way, the term itself maintains tenants as isolated from public life. They react to this labelling but do not always know why. Some workers and administrators assume that tenants are not capable of taking part in decision-making that affects their community because they have no knowledge to use or tenants are too burdened by their own personal problems (Maguire 1987). In Chapter 4, I show that tenants have clear ideas about how the tenants’ association can be used to promote the community as capable.

Establishing a Learning Partnership

I was intrigued, if a little intimidated, to learn how McIntosh perceived privilege. It turned my thinking upside down. She could have stated it by starting with "Tenants can't." Instead of legitimizing the stereotypical view of women welfare recipients as
passively accepting oppression, she provoked me to see how passivity has, as its counterpart, control by those whose interests claim authority. When I supported social housing initiatives in public forums, my input would still be more influential than the tenants' support, even though they needed it more and would be more likely to use it. As a home owner, I held a higher status.

My insight from thinking through this notion and expanding its application is that it is this privilege that enables the needs of tenants to be repeatedly constructed by outsiders. The latter inherit that privilege either through employment or social position. They become the experts. Even as an unpaid community worker, my visibility and collaborative efforts with the tenants meant that in the beginning I was consulted first precisely because I was not a tenant. Instead, others regarded me as a member of the active decision-making community.

If the tenants' community itself starts to define tenant needs and to demand participation in any action taken on behalf of the community, then that, I suggest, is their resistance to mainstream influences and stereotyping. If tenants design and manage their own community action strategies, then in the context of their lives that, in itself, may be social change. Social change, as a concept, may be rooted in middle class notions of social justice, views which often derive from socialists anxious to express their social conscience without actual involvement in such a process. Their intentions are good, however, by talking about what social change is or when it occurs, activists may risk using their privilege to identify community needs and solution to problems. It is not a concept that has occurred in my dialogue with tenants. Nor do they appreciate being described as marginal, low income or disadvantaged. (I revisit this issue in Chapter 7.)
Working through my issues of privilege demanded I make a connection to people affected by my privilege. This was a complex and difficult journey. As a teacher, I started with a conventional relationship, by taking the classroom into Longview. As a learner, I had to move away from the more conventional behaviour associated with adult educators in the classroom and let tenants teach. As a community practitioner, I gained a deeper understanding of privilege and the way in which privilege works to legitimate the perceptions of people from outside the tenants’ community rather than those actually affected by social inequality.

This study seeks to reveal new sites of learning and illustrate that tenants produce knowledge as they organize for improvement in their community. According to Code (1991), individual knowledge claims obscure knowledge arrived at through communal, dialogic activities. As a college teacher, I knew about welfare recipients mainly from data, reports and descriptions in the research literature. The collaborative relationship I formed with the LTA created opportunities for community dialogue and for activities that could surface tenant knowledge. This process examines new ways of understanding how a tenant community develops and confronts stereotypical notions of dependence and passivity. Direct tenant evidence, provided in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 is an attempt to articulate that process in a more detailed way than has previously been undertaken.

The Study

Participatory Research in a Tenant Community

Participatory research literature claims that knowledge produced by the dominant institutions and structures of society often ignore what the people themselves know and
understand (Gaventa 1993). I have said that one purpose of this study is to add to the literature of participatory research, direct evidence of tenants' perceptions about their community. Tenant reflections and their accounts of organizing with the LTA suggest new ways to support and assist tenants in their struggle for productive communities and for individual gain. Tenants' initiatives provide evidence that they are capable of organizing for tenant support and show how this is a process of learning for tenants. Social service departments of local governments or college administrators, have a tendency to accept tenants as incapable of knowing either what their community needs or wants. Their experiences dealing with economic hardship and social stigmas may better equip them to plan and implement improvement strategies.

The evidence will suggest that tenants are motivated to learn and improve when they use their life experiences as a starting point for community development. Workers and researchers construct an objective picture of the needs of welfare recipients using stereotypes that assume tenants are passive and lethargic because they have become dependent on government money. This mitigates any acknowledgement of tenant efforts and reinforces the structures that manage their lives. Planning is frequently carried out by workers and agency representatives who resist and deny tenant capabilities. Workers or tenants are perceived as lacking expertise to plan and as psychologically unable to devise strategies for productive community living.

Steiner (1971) describes the beneficiaries of public housing support as "largely multi problem families who have only weaknesses and no strengths to trade among themselves" (320). Yet, the tenants in this study have used their everyday life issues to establish strategies for improvement such as organizing their own food bank, advocating,
through the leadership of the association for City Housing to complete a backlog of repairs and establishing partnerships with community agencies willing to work with them for program planning. They have hired their own teen leaders, rented and managed a four-bedroom townhouse as a recreation unit for tenant use and have taken over some outdoor maintenance responsibilities in return for funds to run kids' programs. The LTA was one of the first associations to recognize the needs of non English-speaking tenants and to work for an ESL program on a site. The LTA asks and receives input from other community workers into programs and initiatives the tenants design. These programs accommodate the recognized needs of their community gathered by the surveys tenants compile, circulate and tabulate. They argue to negotiate how City Housing directs budget allocations to improvements identified by tenants. In spite of such a record of commitment to their community, the LTA is often passed over as the first source of leadership and information about the community. Its leadership potential is ignored while others who are not participants of their community continue to argue for the use of their expertise in areas the tenants have already proved they handle adequately.

In the past, strategies for change among tenants in public housing have planned and implemented by workers who define the reality of marginal people by quick observation and by the assumptions of researchers careful to separate their involvement from their research. Tenants are described as lacking social skills, presenting more social problems than the larger community and unable to improve because of the low rate of literacy among them (Steiner 1971). Needs, treatments and education become indistinguishable as approaches to community development are largely seen as rehabilitative (Thompson 1989). Problems are attributed to the tenants' character.
Tenants' inability to seek improvement or to prepare themselves adequately result, according to reports, in descriptions of tenants who have deficit personalities (Susser 1982). What they lack is greater than the capabilities they have, or so it is thought.

No study has solicited the tenants' interpretation to investigate how their community would describe action taken to improve the quality of life. This study will do that.

Significance of the Research

This research names back door learning as the process by which tenants come to understand social relations. Not all tenants are active in back door learning at the same time. This research incorporates tenants active in the tenants' association, because it is as a member of the executive that they experience back door learning. Some tenants are not active in the association but are tenants who demonstrate commitment to the community through self initiated work with neighbours who need assistance with problem solving. Others work with small groups of women from their homes to fund raise, run an event or plan a program. Less active or less confident tenants develop their interaction skills in small comfortable groups before they move to become more active in the association. These tenants need to be nurtured because they ultimately become linked to larger community issues as back door learning increases.

Tenants' defining their own community provides a different picture than the one provided by outside experts and workers. Tenant understanding of the role of their association is that, at least in the early stages of development, the LTA plays a supportive
role for the community as it confronts unfairness and solves interpersonal problems. The process of negotiation, how conflict is settled and agreement reached between the association and tenants is as important as the community action that is the result of that negotiation. I suggest that a critical social analysis is not a product injected into a community but a process arrived at through negotiation and conversation. The way in that analysis can take root is embodied in this research. The current active role of the association in larger community events in London may illustrate how the LTA has become more influential and vocal outside of Longview.

In participatory research (PR), participants and researcher collaborate to describe a process of conscious awareness leading to social change. More traditional models, such as research that observes and records the reaction of tenants to government community development initiatives, use learners as objects to be manipulated. While these studies provide some useful perspectives, these models do not recognize the ability of learners to be central to the production of knowledge in the process of research (Tandon 1988). This study considers tenants as partners in their own learning. The evidence shows they are capable of using knowledge from their experience to modify a course of action. Rather than the structured learning of classrooms, which often uses direct instruction that provides hypothetical situations as models for students, tenant learning uses real situations for learning, is unpredictable and less formal. It enables tenants to learn as their association grows, to learn to advocate for themselves and make improvements in their community and to start changing the way City Housing administration perceives them. Since the study has focused on one community, any conclusions apply to this community at a given point in its development. The extent to which it applies to other communities
requires consideration of membership from those communities.

Research Questions

The following questions are considered in this research:

1. What backdoor learning results from the activities of the tenants' association and the community initiatives in which tenants take part? What action do tenants take as a result of this learning?

2. What role does the researcher fill in this example of participatory research and how does this role facilitate backdoor learning?

Backdoor learning occurs as the tenants' association attempts to develop from a small group of concerned tenants to an active community convinced that they can determine the path to improvement. As the association grows, the knowledge that the tenants acquire along the way comes from a process known in this study as backdoor learning. It involves both a specific context in which learning takes place and a process that facilitates learning.

Tenant understanding of why the LTA organizes and what is necessary for community acceptance of their organization is also tenant knowledge that has been gained during this research. Tenants in similar communities may want to benefit from this experience; community workers may learn how tenant capabilities can surface.

Fals-borda (1993) interprets PR as incorporating adult education, sociopolitical action and research. The activities related in this study are examples of adult education because learning starts with tenant experiences, one of the key principles of adult education. Tenants learn to advocate with City Housing to improve their daily life which is sociopolitical action. Lastly, this research involves new ways of seeing events that have
been studied previously. The tenants have described their organizing efforts in ways that have not been articulated in the literature previously. The experience of tenants in this study illustrates Fals-borda's description of adult education and how it applies to participatory research in Longview.

Although adult education has an expressed social responsibility to educate everyone, increasingly it benefits the middle classes (Lovett 1984; Welton 1987). The historical links between adult education and the problems of social justice, once played out in grass roots community initiatives, have been translated into literacy programs delivered by institutions which have little concern for the social context of the learner. This research and my involvement in the community began with that concern. It is intended to motivate others who accept the struggle that participatory research presents but who nevertheless want to use participatory methods with tenants and other similar groups in society as an educational tool.

Organization of the Write-Up

This study is as much for tenants to read about their progress and about the knowledge they use to organize in their community as it is for academic purposes. Although I came to the project for specific reasons which were professional and personal, both require that the knowledge tenants produce supports my new understandings as well as their action.

Because the thesis involved four years of collaboration with tenants, a chronological format could have been established. However, the most important aspect of the work was tenant knowledge derived from backdoor learning. Moreover, the progress
the tenants experienced was not always linear but more often random and unpredictable.

The arrangement of the final document attempts to reflect these issues. This first chapter explores how my experience in a community college prompted my search for an alternative approach to education. I set out the study in detail. The second chapter reviews the literature and clearly illustrates, in my opinion, how the lack of direct tenant input has provided an incomplete picture of community organizing and ignored tenant knowledge. Some researchers refer to critical adult education which may include this study, however, they do not explicate the process. The third chapter describes the social and physical environment in which the tenants' association is situated and lays out the process of collaboration with tenants. The fourth chapter establishes how tenants' articulate their reason for organizing the association and how their perceptions contrast with previously held notions about why and how tenants organize in their communities. Few studies solicit the opinions of tenants in this area, but if tenants can come to see the LTA as growing from their efforts and initiatives, then they may be able to use it to provide opportunities for learning for others in their community.

Chapter 5 points out direct tenant evidence and incidences which illustrate backdoor learning. This learning unfolds as they take control of the dialogue in which we take part as coresearchers and as they participate with others in meetings outside of their community. Backdoor learning occurs as social relations unfold in many contexts. I could not use Freire's five step model of literacy as dialectical in this context, because in it the teacher maintains control of what is learned and of the meaning of words. With the Longview tenants, I am not only looking for the meaning they produce, but introducing the idea of backdoor learning as the process to see where and with whom knowledge is
produced. I suggest that this is a major part of the development of tenant consciousness and that learning results from spontaneous opportunities for conversations which then become sites of learning.

I use reflections in the sixth chapter to trace the change in my own thinking and to illustrate what I have learned in collaboration with the community. The concluding chapter brings together some of the themes prompted by the research questions. It suggests how community workers can assist groups such as tenants by acknowledging that what they know is the starting point for learning for both parties. As this study introduces tenant perceptions using the voices of tenants for the first time, I suggest areas for future research.

Limitations of the Study

The study cannot provide a general theory of community organizing, nor can it guarantee what aspects of this study may be transferrable to other contexts. Because it is introductory in nature, the study should be seen as a starting point to expand what is known about organizing with communities such as Longview, which has been dominated by institutional structures for many years.

Because my collaboration was only four years, I cannot be clear about the permanent effects of our relationship or about the meaning of it. Heaney agrees that the nature of participatory research makes it difficult to clearly identify who is responsible for an action and to acknowledge one person's contribution in the final analysis (Heaney 1993; 45). In fact, when asked what difference I made being there, tenants seemed reticent to answer, and I interpreted this two ways. Either I had become such a
permanent fixture in the community that they no longer thought of me as an intruder working for improvement but as one of them. In fact they often said "You're one of us, now." Or, I had no effect whatsoever, and the community would have moved satisfactorily on issues without me. I will present a short update of current activities and illustrate that there is ongoing progress in the community.

When support is willingly given for initiatives designed by tenants, that act itself suggests acceptance and legitimizes capabilities. The benefits to tenants are hard to define, but they are there.

Summary

The critique of educational institutions does not deny that some members of communities living with social inequalities may be ready to learn from conventional teaching methods employed by outside activists or social change tactics initiated by skilled facilitators. They may use community leaders skilled in traditional approaches to share innovative ideas for community organizing. Rather, I am suggesting how communities, such as the Longview tenants begin the process of consciousness-raising by beginning to understand how their community has been managed by people other than themselves.

As an educator, I undertook the study to better understand how poverty and the experiences of people on welfare can be used in a learning environment. I intend to encourage other educators to look outside the classroom and formal institutions and to see how they can use backdoor learning in the initial stages of engaging particular learners as they identify their own educational goals.
CHAPTER 2
THE STRUGGLE TO ORGANIZE IN LOW INCOME COMMUNITIES

Overview

Early Assistance to Welfare Recipients

The Canadian government resisted enacting legislative reform that could assist people living on limited incomes until the depression left thousands homeless and jobless. In 1929, the government allocated monies for nutrition and income studies, demanding that departments responsible complete them as soon as possible (Guest 1980). The results would lead to immediate social assistance that would alleviate the hardships of people in need. However, it took Canada another 15 years to secure the first universal welfare payment plan--the Family Allowances Act, while the United States legislated similar assistance in 1935. Politicians also deterred federal financing to supply housing to individuals who fell within the lower third on the income scale. Although Canada's National Housing Act was passed in 1944, it addressed the needs of buyers at the low end of the middle class income scale. It was another ten years before an amendment to the Act allowed housing for the poor to be built from tax money. In the United States, public housing began in 1937 (Guest 1980). What seems like Canada's hesitation to assist the poor suggests that the increased activity today among tenants south of the border may be the result of a longer history of government involvement with housing initiatives.

The administrative duties associated with implementing these acts when they were passed fell to local governments. They employed social workers to carry out assessment, counselling and placement of potential tenants. Socially conscious Christians connected to
the church filled, as charitable works, some of the empty gaps— provision for used clothing, food parcels or family support. Gordon's (1989) historical coverage of family violence and the way in which social workers dealt with it documents the antagonistic attitude of the worker to the family which is also affected by poverty. Evidence from interviews discussing the role of the caseworker suggests that those benefiting from help hated the workers most because they were really being "asked to submit to another's interpretation of one's needs" (Gordon 1989:299). This was the beginning, in my opinion, of a long period of alienation for people receiving welfare, many of whom experience violence as a result of the stress imposed by their serious economic situation. What social workers saw as remedying the problem denied those receiving assistance a sense of personal progress that people with better access to economic wealth have come to expect as a result of their own decision-making and demands.

**Current Strategies**

The growth of tenant associations in Canada's publicly owned housing communities has been hampered by the client/provider model that characterized community work in the 1950s and 1960s. Workers managed the poor for convenience rather than encourage them to advocate for themselves (Fox/Piven and Cloward 1971). As church involvement declined toward mid-century, caseworkers or community workers assisted tenants to establish self-help groups which could augment and fulfil social workers' responsibilities. Tenants could improve their quality of life but strategies demanded the use of outside expertise. Very recently, a London tenant community was part of a pilot project designed by City Housing to address complaints about maintenance
and management issues. City Housing hired what they called a Total Quality Service Manager (Author's journal, January 1992). This person was not a tenant but a consultant. He acted as an additional liaison between Housing and tenants, and City Housing paid and directed his activities. Although administrators planned to expand the results of the project to other complexes, only a handful of tenants from one complex met with this individual and provided input to his report. Guidelines for 'better service' were then handed down to other tenant associations by seven pages of directives from City Housing. Tenants had no opportunity to discuss the results of the pilot project, to meet directly with the tenant association involved in the project or to look at implementation by having tenant associations meet together to share findings. This illustrates that City Housing wants to appear collaborative, but is actually managing tenant unrest, sidestepping or perhaps avoiding opportunities to give tenants the experience of decision-making together in matters that affect them. The system has entrenched this pattern of administering to tenants in a top down order of assistance.

This project and other instances suggest that tenants have been alienated from their own capabilities. Research methods based on tenant activities have depended heavily on participant observation and survey methodology but have not included tenant ideas or dialogue. This develops an incomplete picture of tenant concerns (Lamb 1975; Susser 1982; and Pollinger & Pollinger 1972). Observations are carried out at poorly attended meetings over a short period of time and by researchers trying to stay objective by maintaining distance between themselves and the tenant population (Pollinger & Pollinger 1972). City Housing workers, teachers in elementary grades or social workers with Mothers' Allowance put in place to assist tenants, may continue to work from
assumptions of what tenants lack. They expect tenants to follow unquestioningly, advice to correct their deficiencies, often communicating the solution as a procedure or directive (Croft and Beresford 1988; Craig, Derricourt and Loney 1982).

This is how some social service workers use the deficit model thereby maintaining those outside of tenant communities as the authority. It concentrates on correcting undesirable tenant characteristics such as inadequate parenting and poor behaviour that creates family conflict, ignoring how the administration of benefits creates a system of unjust practices legitimized by those in control. Workers and administrators reject the notion that tenants may have ideas about how their community can work through these issues themselves or that the rejection and belittling that workers communicate may affect tenant behaviour in other areas. Keating (1979), Loney (1983), McWilliams (1988) and Pollinger and Pollinger (1972) suggest that the success of community organizing, especially that which addresses quality of life issues, depends on identifying the capabilities of tenants. However, it seems that no one is listening.

In Longview, schools frequently request the parents of young children not to help their children at home, stating emphatically that it will not benefit the child. Yet, that would seem like a perfect opportunity to instill in these parents a sense of worth and responsibility. One worker advised a mother not to become involved in volunteer community work with a tenant association because her children will suffer. Yet, chapter five will record the testimony of some tenants in Longview and another on television that believe some contact outside the community is essential to give them a wider perspective than the one they receive by interacting only with other tenants within their community. Tenants are repeatedly told that they do not and cannot understand the system and that
City Housing puts workers in place to help them with that. Even the police make it clear that parent volunteers are not used in a project to provide rookie league baseball to children 9 to 11 years of age because the parents were the ones that screwed them up in the first place (Interview with author, Paul, October 4, 1995). Responsive, productive tenant communities may be seen by non-tenants as those that unquestioningly accept and use the programs and services put in place by workers employed for that purpose. Management of community activities may see tenants as dependent and complacent and in need of leadership rather than as a community with potential leadership which could emerge in collaborative ventures or partnerships. Part of the job Longview tenants do in organizing their community is fighting for this collaboration.

Some improvement strategies are indirectly linked to tenants but have little success because of the requirements for implementation. For example, according to the guidelines circulated, funding provided for community strategies will "lead toward empowerment" for tenants. However, tenants lack incorporated organizations to administer money over $500, and funding mandates do not allow them to use the money for incorporation. Tenants' ability to manage money themselves could be a major source for decision making and authority since their families rarely have surplus money to use at their own discretion. In addition, the current program emphasis in tenant communities is on the children of tenants because adults are thought to be too entrenched in disruptive and unproductive patterns of behaviour. Tenants hearing this tell me this attitude makes them feel isolated from their children and that parents are treated with contempt because of their inability to provide more money for their children.

Another community developments project in Britain focussed on interagency
coordination as the major objective designed to increase tenant satisfaction (Loney, 1983). This legitimized expanding interagency links in the larger community, making the infrastructure which administered welfare larger and larger. However, there was no guarantee that tenants would be served better. Bypassing any consideration of what the community would consider helpful, such as resource partnerships in which tenants plan collaboratively with community agencies, the initiators of the project redefined communication links between agencies to beef up front line services. In other words, they made the bureaucracy for recipients larger and more formidable, defining the tenant population as more needy and more lacking (Loney 1983).

This study traces the positive efforts that tenants initiate organizing their community and suggests, at the same time, that back door learning occurs during that process (see chapter 5 for a full explanation). Members of the tenant association and I believe that it is worth providing evidence that tenants are capable and industrious even as media reports and research reports seem to say otherwise (Twelvetrees 1976). The mainstream media maintains a view of welfare recipients generally as lazy, illiterate, drug-crazed, deceitful and fraudulent. These articles and editorials stereotype tenants but often lack any real evidence (Hasselback 1994). To satisfy demands to remedy these poorly established claims, the city welfare office recently implemented "enhanced verification" a program designed to ferret out welfare cheats. Couched in this language, local government attempted to hide from tenants its intent to pry into their private lives tenants by questioning neighbours and friends. At a community meeting, I offered the explanation that it really was a procedure for snooping indiscriminately and cautioned tenants to spread the word—provide no information over the phone and phone the association's office
ifyou need assistance. Some tenants have little experience establishing their rights, and the language used in a phone call is often incomprehensible but tenants prefer not to admit this. The language of agency workers and government community relation’s workers is confusing and tenants are already fearful of their relationship with the worker.

Some American social workers recognized these injustices and became part-time activists. They espoused a liberal reformist ideology that encouraged systemic change by lobbying for legislative reform within the established government structure. These workers, many of them women employed by City Housing, also collected the data that would form the basis for individual’s to receive social security payments while they advocated for these same individuals. They fought for increased stipends and met with community groups to hear their concerns. Golding and Middleton (1975), reviewing media reports covering welfare issues, sees how this double intent gave privileged exposure and authority to social service representatives and administrators. Clearly, the position of the workers compromised the voice of people on welfare because the workers use tenant knowledge as if it was their own.

Until the civil rights movement of the 1960s, there is little record of the work of community activists outside this group representing the interests of welfare recipients. Consequently, the separation of help and advocacy became blurred. There are few examples of organized tenant groups themselves initiating demands for people who are unable to meet their housing needs or who are finding it impossible to deal satisfactorily with the welfare system.

The credibility of social workers employed by the state to advocate for tenants is now regarded suspiciously among many tenants and even among some politically-oriented
activists (Fox/Piven and Cloward 1971; Young 1990). Workers paid by the system cannot, at the same time, fight for justice within the system. Many are single women with dependents living on a single wage. I also suggest that few people have the leadership strength to confront a dominating bureaucracy successfully and, in addition, buy into the stereotypical view of welfare recipients as all bad.

Women on welfare are caught in an economic rut which influences the way in which they take part in organizing activities. The Just Society Movement (JSM) in Toronto was started when issues of injustice led to a dialogue with single mothers on welfare, including tenants from housing developments. The movement sought to answer the need for grassroots action, that is action that originates at the local level with those directly affected by poverty. These women recipients were "angry at daily humiliations" and used a "union of poor people" slogan to develop a power base (Buchbinder 1979: 132). Professionals from service sector occupations, academics and teachers joined them in the struggle. As Buchbinder describes it, working mainly from the back lines, they took a low profile in publicizing and establishing the action the group would take. Critical of the liberal/pluralist approach which accepts solutions to social injustice through weak legislative reform, the paid workers involved assumed the Just Society Movement could be the impetus for change. They maintained a vision of systemic transformation that involved redistributing capital among all members of the society and disintegrating the corporate monopolies which maintain capital in the hands of a few. Buchbinder's final analysis, however, regretfully notes that although initially those on welfare saw the capitalist system as needing change, the action they took could not address this issue nor did he feel that the people affected wanted this kind of action. Walter's (1987) findings
that theory and practice have problematic empirical links, are applicable here. Buchbinder (1979) contends that professional intervention in their actions would have maintained a critical stance toward the capitalist system and is the only possible one for social action and change. There is no evidence for this.

The tension highlighted by Buchbinder remains today. Did the women on welfare want to transform the entire system or was this just the view of professionals? To what extent did the professionals shut out the social reality of the women welfare recipients that might have revealed a potential site of transformation for them, if not for the system? Was Buchbinder's struggle better conceived as a long term plan and not one that could come to fruition in two or three years? I agree that as an organizing effort, as a practice model, the Just Society Movement may provide a useful case. I am still not convinced how this kind of organizing, as an end in itself, can integrate the ideological motivation for systemic change that Buchbinder longed for with the humiliations of daily life that the women experience. The products of organizing are sometimes not immediate but emerge years later (Bergman 1994). This suggests that organizers may have to expand their idea of what signifies change and turn to the people themselves to identify not only what these signs are but what is important.

Organizing as Back Door Learning

Brian Bergman's (1994) account of the Winnipeg Strike of 1919 highlights a case that suggests the lessons learned from organizing have a long-term effect on those involved. Union leaders precipitated the strike with their ideals about fairness in the workplace which directed immediate action. But the strike itself did not, at least in the
short run, bring about change. He suggests that most participants in the movement were not ideologically attached to Marxist revolutionary attitudes as Buchbinder suggested they should be. In fact, their daily humiliations spoke to their lack of a living wage and no right of collective bargaining. However, negotiators for the workers in the strike of 1919 did not enshrine these collective rights for thirty more years after the strike, making it difficult to see what direct effect the strike had. Three individuals, prominent in the organizing activities, sought and won election to the Manitoba Legislature soon after the strike. Some years later, they were instrumental in passing the first pension and unemployment legislation.

In my view, these events illustrate that organizing activities provided a context for backdoor learning. This is learning that is non-formal, spontaneous, pursued by the individual, learned from and applicable to real life situations and, therefore, often valuable in coping with the daily humiliations people on welfare experience. Community organizing is a complex process and it is often individuals, learning as they progress, who effect change and not necessarily the momentum of the movement itself. The passion of the movement, or the objective understanding of some ideology that explains oppression, may be less important than the active participation of individuals and their efforts. Events need not necessarily develop from a Marxist dedication to socialist ideals, although they can illustrate for research purposes a pivotal philosophical foundation for action. It is, in my opinion, the impact of everyday lives that is the catalyst for action, and it is here that the strength of the potential for social change is embodied—in an individual's raised consciousness coupled with the courage to act, sometimes unilaterally, against injustice.
Theory and Practice in Community Organizing

Marxist Influence

Some of the strategies employed to organize in the community emerge from Marxist ideals as the philosophical foundation for legitimizing attempts to confront the authority of bureaucracies. Marx saw that the domination and oppression of workers followed from the manipulation of capital by corporate elites. Owner control of capital tied workers to positions where they would be forever subservient to the demands of employers for higher profits. In much the same way, people on welfare are subject to the same control through the system of benefits reduced to maintain the health of profits to the wealthy. The main goal of employers is generating capital appreciation while keeping the expense of production, such as employee wages, as low as possible.

Some Marxists working in the community suggest that people on welfare can best be served by establishing links with unions, but, at the time of writing, there has been little effort in this direction (Repo 1977). Even within unions, members want a restructuring within the ranks to prioritize voice workers as the impetus for change. Cunningham, Findlay, Kadar, Lennon and Silva (1988) lament what they see as the weakening of the socialist agenda from previous years, suggesting that today's feminist socialists may be able to invigorate it. Some researchers focus on systemic change as the only answer to the inequities that people on low income must suffer. My everyday contact with tenants at Longview emphasizes that they are less critical of the system itself than they are of the contempt and isolation imposed by those in authority over them. My understanding of state instability and injustice is different, more objective and less concrete than tenants who come face to face with injustice as a way of life. They receive assistance and abuse
from the same source, government workers and administrators. My privilege is knowing that the status of my mortgage provides me a safe, single family dwelling that is not controlled externally but my me. In addition, I have a relatively secure stable income to pay it off, or the means to secure loans for that purpose. This is what the system does for me. My argument and dissatisfaction with government ruling is to some extent ideological in that I perceive the distribution of wealth increasingly funnelled to the rich, yet I have a relatively secure income. The state affects me by increasing my income tax, but it also offers some protection for the way I live my life day-to-day in terms of rent review boards or safe practices for administrating bodies. Tenants who organize in public housing must work from a position that emphasizes the privileges they do not have, mainly economic ones, and then initiate any strategy that brings immediate improvements to their community. They do not relate to the need for systemic change because their immediate concern is enough food for tomorrow's breakfast. Nor are there any guarantees that systemic change would suddenly set priorities differently to address the needs of the poor. Permanent change in their situation may take many years to achieve. In the meantime, tenants cannot motivate their membership without concern for individual hardship or the transient nature of people's lives.

I believe Buchbinder's desire for transformative action came from his impatience. He was too fixed on the necessity of adopting Marxist principles in analysing social injustice. These principles could be useful as the movement evolved, as daily conditions improved, but he imposed a time frame that was too short and too quickly abandoned. Ideology can maintain a theoretical connection to social change. It can also provide long-term motivation for outsiders who want to form alliances with and strengthen the struggle
of poor people. However, I see little evidence of that in Canada, perhaps because short
term gains quell the fire before it gets too hot.

Gramscian Influence

Gramsci (Femia 1981) contends there is a destructive nature inherent in the
authority imposed by the state. When government power is total, the term hegemonic
applies. A constantly replaceable peasant class reproduces to serve the interests of a
dominating and abusive industrialism. The resulting poverty and hardship lived by the
people indicates that systemic change (or a redirection of government administration) is
the only means of returning earned capital to the workers. This requires that the working
class seize control of economic activities and put their leaders in key decision-making
positions.

Revolutionary activities in Italy prompted Gramsci’s insight, suggesting how the
relationship between the people and government be restructured. He uses the capitalist
state and its single-minded interest in profit-making to define hegemony. Gramsci does
not restrict his ideology to the Marxist view which advocates the defeat of capitalist
corporate owners as a starting point for better wages and working conditions. He
proposes, and this is only one interpretation of his ideology, that the relationship between
worker and owner move closer to create an equilibrium, or a better balance in the way
profits are distributed. The tension between these competing interests demands a
continual working-out to reduce the domination and oppression imposed by the owners
who support the capitalist state. The other aspect of hegemony, in Gramsci’s
revolutionary writings, addresses the idea that he does not mean domination by one, but
intellectual manipulation by many representatives from the civil sector. Those who define the popular culture, the everyday life, and those in the political sphere who organize the activities of the state must collaborate. Hegemony is a pivotal concept in Gramsci’s writings. It is the impetus for a revolution which seeks, as it moves toward equilibrium, to incorporate “organic intellectuals” drawn from the popular front, not just from the corporate elite who controls profits (Femia 1981). Leaders from among the workers provide the impetus for a people's movement. Organizing for Gramsci is an intellectual practice. Strategies undertaken come from the work of critical and rational participants in the movement.

As I understand this, the people use rational argument and evidence in the fight for justice. Since the inequality they live under is indisputable, those in control will eventually understand their claims and will move to a more equitable means of capital distribution. Moreover, the fight will never be over, but there will be a constant vigilance to maintain a just and fair society using the people's knowledge. Gramsci emphasizes his firm belief that the people's organizations are at the very roots of consciousness, that they give birth to resistance. These groups are the mechanism by which systemic transformation can take place.

Gramsci’s ideas form the underlying tenets of participatory democratic theory and are the notions which many community organizers build on when working with community members toward social change. Walters (1987), referring to Gramsci, points out that the theoretical imperatives or concepts which form the basis for organizing include participation, collective action and group consensus. These beliefs emphasize the concepts which describe the most effective strategies for establishing a new equilibrium
between domination and leadership for social change. Participation makes an organization strong and also allows members to benefit from the intellectual strength of others. The political strength in numbers can itself bring about the equilibrium between civil and political. A revolutionary movement ignoring this aspect of organized social change eventually dies. Collective action is valued above individual motivation and increases participation. Consensus is derived from the sharing of information and is more crucial for social change than conflict. Members who argue and express dissent over solutions may never win.

A key notion in Gramsci's theory is that people are led to social change by "organic intellectuals" (Femia 1981). Thinkers capable of knowing, interpreting and applying critical social theory emerge from the masses and become the leaders in the social change. They create democratic government by transforming the very organizations in which they work. Practice follows theory by using effective strategies prescribed by the people's intellectuals for successful community organizing. Walter's (1987) reaction to this reflects my own discontent with Gramsci's approach. His empirical data does not suggest the unity between theory and practice which he envisions. While his theory on hegemony of the popular front can be translated to mean, we should regard the intellectual ability of the masses as central, it is a leap of faith to say he is informative about what constitutes successful community organizing. Femia, in interpreting Gramsci, talks about hegemony by the people communicated by a leadership well versed in appropriate ideology. To extrapolate further and say this indicates a movement's success may take liberty with interpretation (Femia 1981: 25). Organizations have been successful without strong intellectual leadership as evidenced by highly successful tenant organizations among
people of colour who use governing structures in which power is shared (Lamb 1975).

There were intellectuals among the oppressed in Buchbinder's account of the Just Society Movement who could intellectualize for the movement, but it was the humiliation of everyday life that kept people involved and protesting. There is a link between understanding domination, being able to rationalize power as an organic intellectual and being able to work in community organizing effectively. In my view, Gramsci's work does not explain that. Of interest is the fact that the tenant president adopted Gramsci's term "organic intellectuals" to describe herself as a result of reading this thesis, so I revisit the term again in chapter 7.

Other Issues Relevant to Organizing in Longview

Walters (1987) points to a lack of intellectuals within organizations, noting that those who can do the analysis and thinking that is required to develop a critical consciousness are often not members. There is little research literature providing evidence of grassroots leaders who analyse social situations using an ideological framework. In addition, strategies for community organizing and critiques about that process are problematic. For example, there can be no clear measure of participation when a meeting in January may attract three tenants and another in May attracts twenty-five tenants. Which one did the researcher attend? The action from three at a meeting in my experience can be just as formidable as that action that results from a meeting of twenty-five. Furthermore, the tenant association in this study learned that the lack of member attendance at meetings does not necessarily indicate lack of support for the association.

Other studies point to the limitations that time places on a clear picture of
organizing activities especially when participation is evaluated (Cairncross, Clapham and Goodlad 1992; Lamb 1975). My experience suggests that activities outside of meetings could be called participation but how a researcher incorporates that into the analysis of data is difficult. All studies point to participation as a problem in the success of an organization. Numbers are easy to observe, count and to suggest conclusions. However, it is similar to the college outcome criteria discussed in Chapter 1 in that the results that highlight poor participation are designed to place all of the failure of tenant efforts in the hands of the people themselves rather than attribute any fault to the organizer. It is possible that organizations can withstand periods of low participation and still be active in learning and change. Other activities happening outside of meetings, such as discussion about community events, indicate participation. It may be that fear is keeping community members away from meetings but there may be issues circulating from person to person that connects tenants to each other in more subtle ways.

Lamb’s Local Change Study (1975), an in-depth analysis of political power in poor neighbourhoods, repeatedly found that researchers and academics traditionally pointed to an impoverished group life among the poor. He noted that the leaders of the poor tend to be more politically-oriented within their organizations and involved with the relationship between members. Tenants who are poor, Lamb reports, tend to mistrust organizations emphasize action and hesitate to openly support these organizations. If the time allowed for this study in Longview had been one month, I might have reached similar conclusions. Organizers should consider that members may support their association and the advocacy work they do, but these members do not have a visible presence. For Longview, the issue of participation is ever present. I try to encourage the association to work through
periods of low tenant visibility and save their political energy for times and events when tenants demonstrate overt support of their association. Tenant leaders must look for alternative signs in the community that support is there. The result may be an overly-political hot dog sale shortly after a poorly attended community meeting? Disbanding because of a non-participatory moment or moments may not be a successful strategy. Disbanding may stop community efforts needlessly. Patience with the ups and downs of participation may keep the organization alive and even well.

Consensus, another conventional assumption of successful organizing theory, is less definitive than it would appear. West (1990) found that co-operation co-existed with conflict within the welfare rights' movement. Conflict or lack of consensus did not necessarily threaten group life. While interracial middle class and low income women worked through consensus to garner more money for women's basic needs for their children, the same groups also fought individually for control of resources to sustain their local organizations. Moreover, racial differences at the national level could create conflict, while locally an easy consensus operated between women from different racial backgrounds.

In many tenant communities, personality conflicts interrupt ongoing association activities because members have other arguments with each other outside of the association (Interview with author, Kim, Nov. 8, 1994). In an incident at Longview, one executive member complained that other members of the executive should not express conflict or disagreement with her over issues tabled during a community meeting. What was behind her feeling threatened? Her relationship with Housing was consistently confrontational and in conflict. Yet she maintained a dialogue with them daily. She is
willing to live with that but not with conflict among her community support group. I suggest that conflict may prolong the life of a group rather than end it and that ongoing consensus may be unrealistic and needs to be seen in context.

In spite of some questions raised about Gramsci’s organizing priorities, I retain Gramsci’s notion of hegemony. Rather than emphasize the collective nature of hegemony, I argue that there are individuals who experience change and use that to encourage the group to see itself as an authority. This process is a direct result of everyday experiences and builds community commitment by the tenant’s understanding (Collins (1990) uses the term self definition) of common problems from those people involved. Pragmatics is not just politics as Gramsci understands it. Consciousness is a developing process often learned and the meaning of pragmatism could reflect social reality as consciousness develops into an action taken. Gramsci uses the organization as initiator and as the basis for action. I prefer to see the individual in this role, and as a catalyst in community organizing.

In my view, attributing meaning to concepts like consensus and participation is exactly how theory may become the means by which tenants’ knowledge is subjugated (Foucault 1992) or dominated by authority. Gramsci’s theory may be used as the standard for understanding and constructing the motivation for community organizing rather than describing the experience of the participants themselves. His theory posits some important concepts for organizing but there are more practice variables that, if considered, could surface the complexities involved.

Because community organizing with tenants derives from definitions of need that originate with government employees and rarely with tenants, presumptions about
successful organizing results from prescribed concepts about how it should be. Few researchers have looked at how tenantsfew their efforts and evaluated that. The Community Action Program (CAP) initiated in the United States is one example. Government and community organizers decided that by organizing tenant community associations it would encourage them to be more involved in decision-making. This could improve their living conditions and award them political clout. Pollinger and Pollinger (1972) could find little evidence of this in the Community Action Project they researched. They related no successful outcomes to tenant influence or to their social controls over daily injustices. It is hard to determine from their report what processes were transformative experiences for the tenants or what consciousness might have been raised to take action at another time. The inability of researchers to explicate these processes promotes a pessimistic view of tenant organizing. This study seeks to renew hope and suggest optimistic directions for the future.

In an effort to put into practice some of Gramsci’s notions, I will to expand the conventional view of community organizing. Collins (1990), in Black Feminist Thought, prioritizes the role of the individual in social change and its importance in providing consciousness raising. She notes that

Empowerment involves rejecting the dimensions of knowledge, whether personal, cultural or institutional, that perpetuates objectification and dehumanization. Other individuals in subordinate groups become empowered when we understand and use those dimensions of our individual, groups, and disciplinary ways of knowing that foster our humanity as fully human subjects....and value our own self-definition. (Collins 1990: 230)

This author highlights the many ways that tenants are devalued: by individual workers who misinterpret their needs, by the media who overgeneralize incidents of welfare fraud, and
by institutional authorities such as City Housing who disregard their claims and requests.

She starts from the reality of individuals and uses their experience as the motivation for transformation toward social change. By starting with some of the individuals involved in the origins and growth of Longview and with incidents of their learning, a more complete picture of community organizing could be available for activists and workers. Whether tenant associations provide a mechanism for social change in tenant communities depends on how the process of learning, transformation and subsequent action arises out of their organizing activities.

Organizing in Tenant Communities

Many studies of tenant associations investigate change following the demands imposed on tenants by government or the objective opinion of researchers (Pollinger and Pollinger 1972; Lamb 1975; Repo 1977). Any evidence that tenants may self-initiate change can be overlooked. Government workers or paid researchers measure what has been accomplished by professional organizers with the presumed cooperation of the tenants but not using their perceptions (Twelvetrees 1976; Loney 1983). The evaluation begins by assuming that quality of life changes should result from tenant association's activities. Researchers do not probe the tenants' part in that or the beginning of a growing collective awareness as it develops individually and may be transferred to other members in the community. Pollinger and Pollinger (1972), for example, examined three associations and reported that all paid community organizers noticed that little was accomplished by tenant organizations.

Organizers and community developers enter a community with a predetermined
agenda. Their wages are often paid as part of a government funded project. Guidelines are determined by the government and by what they would like to see happen. There is little or no input provided by tenants in the community but it does include workers' perceptions of how the community association should develop. They expect to finish the project with tenants more aware of class inequalities, better informed about organizing techniques and with better strategies for getting information from local authorities. Organizers and government benefit by describing the reasons for failure as outside their control. They also want to be funded again for another project.

The failure of these organizers to report success results in redefining what the community lacks, not what the organizer has failed to do. Stereotypes already well entrenched by media reports are strengthened. Tenants are again incapable and this result further legitimizes more government funding of projects that employ community workers to try again. However, there are some less obvious reasons why paid organizers may not succeed in organizing tenants. Organizers are not affected as tenants are, by evictions, by changes in subsidy, by isolation and claims that they live in a ghetto. Nor do organizers or researchers have an ongoing relationship constantly tested by anger and resentment that tenants have with City Housing. Many organizers and City Housing administrators are men and cannot understand the threat to security a woman experiences when a property manager threatens to evict her and her three children because she has been vocal about some maintenance issue. Some men in the tenant community can successfully have their demands met, but it is more often the women in this tenant community who take up matters relating to house and home. Paid workers have not endured the harassment and economic struggle that some women experience just because they rent in a subsidized
housing development where they can have guaranteed housing for their family (Fox/Piven and Cloward 1971).

Consequently, studies of tenant associations may discount gains, or consider them unimportant, gains that for these tenants indicate a substantial difference in their daily life (Pollinger and Pollinger 1971). Evaluations which use participation rates at community meetings, may overlook how tenants are dealing creatively and successfully with internal conflict outside of meetings. Individual acts, in and out of the tenant association, may result in tenants communicating with the local authority more effectively but could be missed if collective action is the only focus. This study incorporates these considerations.

Research with tenants in public housing such as Longview is relatively rare in Canadian literature yet there are 100,000 people living in subsidized housing owned and operated by Canada Mortgage and Housing. Single parents, many of them women, have in the past made up 75% of that population. At this writing, Longview's tenant president suggests that number may have decreased as the unemployed, immigrant families (typically with two parents), and two-parent families with one poorly paid wage earner seek out cheap subsidized housing.

Most studies involving welfare recipients have looked at tenants in Britain or the US, and among these there is little optimism or identified patterns of success (Cairncross, Clapham and Goodlad 1992; Lamb 1975). There is no clear indication of how long it can take tenants to work with the controls imposed by the housing administration. Tenants themselves must work through interpersonal conflict in conjunction with a community issue just as any organization must. The effect of a community organizer, coming in for issue-oriented social action and then leaving after success or failure, surfaces results which
may have reversed the community move toward positive change. There is a tendency to want to gloss over tenant conflict and to move on to action, yet that conflict may be the starting point for change.

The passing of time affects the ebb and flow of participation from within the community. The association expects consistent high rates of participation over time, but the personal lives of tenants indicate that involvement constantly changes. There are no studies using tenant knowledge to question existing views of tenants, their community and their organizing efforts. This study shows how the tenant association is working with these issues. The answers found in these issues give direction for other tenant associations and for community workers who may want to work in a supportive role.

Organizing With Tenants In Britain

Cairncross, Clapham and Goodlad (1992) did a valuable study of six tenant associations in six different local housing authorities throughout Britain. They found evidence that suggested diverse reasons for the growth of tenant associations and specific characteristics to describe how each operated within the communities studied. Most of the research investigated the sociological structure of the public housing estate, the role of prominent community leaders or the success of militant action. These criteria are easily recorded by the participant observer who may conclude that banner parades and sit-ins affect change. Community leadership can be observed and this method can provide insights. Inside tenant communities, however, leaders are sometimes thought of, by other members in the community, as stepping out of their social place to become bigger and better than others. A researcher must be cautious of any conclusions reached if a leader is
observed as antagonistic to some other members of the community during a meeting.

That reaction is not necessarily an omen of failure nor does it indicate that the leaders future in her position as president is doomed. Interviewing community members who may be uninvolved with the association, but who are in favour of its activities, frequently draws a more balanced picture of events.

Dominant notions in the literature frequently suggest that tenant associations are born out of a response to a common threat, they agitate and then they die because the threat no longer exists (Pollinger and Pollinger 1972). From my experience in Longview, the number of common threats are so numerous, it is hard to imagine the tenant association having a finite life. It is always struggling for a presence and a voice with tenants who may see the existence of the association as a threat to their housing. Who has defined what constitutes a threat—the researcher or the community? Cairncross, Clapham and Goodlad (1992) note that research is often location specific and time-bound. Research may dwell on one association, and it is easy to miss one that is growing and being successful sometimes because successful associations are more of a nuisance that something of which government workers are proud. Furthermore, either the funding agent for the research or the need to publish quickly imposes time restrictions on research projects. This discourages any longitudinal approach to research that may reveal periods of intense activation followed by a quiet period and then another intense uprising.

Another problem, and it is one I have both identified from a close reading of the Buchbinder and heard from tenants in Longview, is that an over-emphasis on confrontational activity can deplete the energy and time tenants have available for other activities. Little attention is paid to the association's ability to negotiate with the local
council or its interaction with local participants. Lastly, initiative and commitment demonstrated by tenants is not an important component of any of the studies to date. The tendency to generalize and search for theories that can be applied across contexts means researchers and others remain impersonal and present objective knowledge. The complexities of organizing may be lost.

Cairncross, Clapham and Goodlad (1992) further suggest that the actions and attitudes of the local housing administration can be supportive or non-supportive of the growth of tenant associations and influence their success. A non-supportive administration discourages grass roots tenant support. This creates problems. If tenants coalesce and agitate around a common issue, conventional ideas of organizing would almost expect them to do so when they are denied support. Would tenants necessarily bother to organize, for example, if the local council was compatible with their efforts? Or would tenants conclude that since the council is listening to them, they do not need to pursue collective organizing?

In many tenant communities, and in Longview, City Housing only supports what they initiate, for example a joint tenant/housing employee committee to look at maintenance in the developments. Tenants know that this is probably another move to control them, and they are unlikely to consider involvement. City Housing rarely supports tenant-initiated activities or allows agencies to deal directly with tenant associations. The relationship between Housing and the communities formed by those who live under Housing’s administrative control is complex and constantly changing. This study may shed some light on that relationship.

From 1968-78, the British government implemented what it described as the
"largest ever government funded social action experiment" (Loney 1983), naming it as social action and social change even before the results were in. It was publicly billed as government efforts to implement community development in housing developments. Taking its impetus from strong public sector critiques of overly centralized government policies and their implementation, perceived inequities in the distribution of wealth accompanied a recognition that growing deprivation existed among the nation's poor. This describes aspects of a welfare recipient's life that has been reworked along similar lines since before the turn of the century (Katz 1983). In the British project mentioned above, social action involved professional community workers organizing tenants for self-help within the communities and improving social service responses to recipients needs as the service workers themselves defined it. The planning rhetoric spoke of involving people...in community schemes flowing from their own perceptions of need and translated into action with their participation (Loney 1983:3). Clearly, these architects of change, the government bureaucrats in Britain's Home Office, planned to implement social action to transform injustice and allow tenants to determine their own destiny. They focused on the products of the plan, but paid little attention to the process. There is no optimism in Loney's evaluation of what social change took place. The indicators of change, chosen for the evaluation stage in the project, unfortunately entrenched the stereotypes often applied to tenants. The indicators improved personal care, improved family functioning and improved child-rearing practices, to name three. All indicators originated from a deficit model which describes an individual in terms of what is lacking. Trained social science researchers measured the improvements. They used self-report measures but only for moral, education and
community quality. None of the measures evaluated how tenants became involved in or accepted the strategies, discussed issues of participation or revealed how tenants displayed initiative and individual strength from within the community. How would tenants have evaluated the researchers, the local professionals, or the project itself? Would individuals confirm that change had taken place? Did the community learn how they could act to realize social change? Did they raise consciousness in any way that could lead to change? Once a tenant improves personal care under the scrutiny of a social service worker, how does that change the feeling of powerlessness experienced by tenants who feel they are always being watched, monitored, improved and their opinions disregarded?

The failure of the project to qualitatively improve the urban conditions of poverty in any way led Loney (1983) to conclude that there was no link between research evidence and social policy. In other words, while there was some commitment, at least by local community workers, to make people's lives better, the government was no further ahead in establishing how that could really be done. The initiative bypassed the idea of it "flowing from [tenants'] own perception of need" and moved right along to "action" (Loney 1983). The wringing of hands and the shaking of heads summed up one official's insightful comment that "he who innovates is not heard: he who is heard does not innovate" (Loney 1983:197). Unfortunately, the government workers are the innovators, not the tenants.

Lovett (1980) documents the specific activities of a tenant committee called a community council in Liverpool, England. His contact with the community was through a tutor educator who worked and collaborated with the council members in the housing complex. These councils are, in effect, tenant associations. They provide a link between the local housing authority as an administrative body and local residents, identifying
needed services and implementing social programs. Although the councils originally restricted membership to professional and voluntary community workers, tenants struggled in the late 1960s to establish their participation on these councils. That coupled with the growing popularity of local resident associations resulted in a move toward larger tenant representation on the council. The one in Lovett's study is composed entirely of tenants.

Similar to my first encounter with the Longview community, Lovett assumed that formal educational initiatives would predict improvement of the community as a whole, especially where a formal community structure was in place. He discovered, as I did, that the group neither responded to, nor felt the need for this kind of education. Possibly, that response is a direct result of the isolation imposed on the community by mainstream society. Tenants internalize this and build a protective wall around themselves which ironically maintains their submissive roles at the same time. Workers from the community at large consistently penetrate that wall and move inside, but it seems harder and harder for tenants to push out of the artificially imposed enclosure and become tenant leaders in the larger community.

One strategy for improvement began with a comment from a tenant council member about the inadequacy of primary education in the area (Lovett 1983). The council asked the tutor educator who was working with the tenant community to chair a subcommittee to examine the issue. Talks and discussions took place with teachers and local housing authority employees in which the role of the school in the community was central. As a result of this collaboration, Lovett recorded increased "awareness and interest" in education and larger social problems, but failed to identify what either the
awareness was or what exactly had prompted it. Was it the residents raised consciousness of how their experience deprived them of appropriate primary education? Was it just having the new information that educational opportunities existed and that they could access them?

In another example, Lovett recounts how a request for a new constitution from the council encouraged the tutor educator to suggest they attend an extramural course on the history and development of councils. He thought, and I am sure I would have too, this background information valuable in understanding the place of tenant councils in communities and their work. The course interested only a few tenants on the council. Lovett attributes the success of the course to the "articulateness and intelligence" of individual members and not to the formal education structure or its content. What were the members articulate about, and what was the content of the discussion that lead to his evaluation that they were “intelligent”? Did they repeat exactly what the session leader had presented, perfectly? Did they connect issues to their own community? Were they able to pinpoint and discuss the link between social issues and the actions of their own council? Did they take the knowledge back to their community in some form?

Apparently, it was the close personal contact with the person teaching the course and others in the group that encouraged tenants to keep coming to the program. I would add that if community workers use individual contact as a source of informal learning that tenants may use what they learned at some later date in their own community meetings. It may result in some action. One tenant in the study this thesis covers thought group learning was a middle-class activity, resisted by tenants whose claim to privacy is constantly being eroded by housing administrators (Author's journal, January, 1995).
Another tenant comments further on this in chapter 4.

Nevertheless, Lovett's insights are worthwhile. He notes that any attempt by adult educators to offer structured courses indicates the educator/tutor must become part of community activities first for the course to be effective. This role definition is what separates non-formal adult education from a more structured approach used by teachers who deliver courses to workers in unionized settings. Educational initiative that take place in context specific classrooms such as those found in the workplace is often the result of planning by administrators. Curriculum guidelines may be put in place from workers' stated needs but the skills of the educator dominate student teacher interaction. Employers often give workers paid leave to attend. In communities where residents receive income subsidies, any links an educator can establish with them is tenuous and fraught with distrust, fear and memories of tenant's own failed educational experiences in the past. Their children are now repeating some of the same negative experiences. It takes time to cement a firm relationship with the community.

A community educator must be collaborative and honest about her own privilege so that stereotypical attitudes are not reflected in discussion or communicated to individuals. Yet, as Lovett points out, done carefully, an adult educator can influence learning and provide input to practice as events in the community unfold. Links to other community activists and organizations may provide learning that can assist with community development. This learning is spontaneous and typifies back door learning as explained in chapter 5.
Tenant Organizing in the United States

In a discouraging one million dollar analysis of the Community Action Program (CAP), researchers told the Office of Economic Opportunity that efforts to support militant efforts initiated by welfare communities was a misguided effort (Lamb 1975). In a complex research survey and analysis of 4000 residents, 630 community leaders, plus a few organizational and institutional heads, Lamb used a middle class control group to compare the relationship of poor communities to political power. He was after facts for the purposes of general policy formation related to program delivery and ignored local contingencies and self-definition that could have been provided by tenants.

Lamb (1975) reported that there was no reason to conclude that political revitalization of poor neighbourhoods occurred as a result of the government program. His description of community leaders questioned the "apathetic" stereotype that researchers before him had identified. He next suggested that radicalism in the form of public protest, while it does contribute to political awareness, is unfortunately not accompanied in the community by the "strong ideological underpinning" he advocates. Instead, people well-informed of local problems and events are more likely to seek future involvement in local political activity than those ideologically prepared. Then, he noted that government policy needs to recognize that "poor neighbourhoods do have leadership cadres capable of competent involvement in the full range of anti-poverty programs" (Lamb 1975:198). He advocates that resources, instead of being funnelled to community workers employed by the state, be given to community leaders at the local level to plan and implement programs in their communities. That Lamb specifically identifies neighbourhoods as environments ready and ripe for action is optimistic. It is, however,
discouraging that governments continuously point to the social disorganization among the poor, their high rate of illiteracy and low self-esteem when, in Lamb's view, the people are ready to act, the government is not.

In an attempt to uncover resistance which combines worker's reality, community issues and gender based issues, Naples (1991) analysed legislative reform within the U.S. Economic Opportunity Act, to address poverty. With money directed through the same Community Action Programs that Lamb researched, residents who received welfare or were low-income recipients designed, directed and staffed the project. It hired residents to do community work who were already active in unpaid work and hired mothers as paid community relations workers linked to City Housing. They advocated for other residents, worked with residents groups on community improvement, oversaw the struggle for increased funding and fought for educational equity for all. Few described themselves as feminists although Naples constructs their efforts as feminist-like. These workers fought the bureaucratic state, the patriarchal nature of organizations and made private needs public, resisting sexist and anti-participatory practices at all levels. This is her description and not that of the participants. For this study, Naples interviewed some of the original workers, half of whom were still active in community positions by the mid 1980's. Only four were white North Americans and the other 38 were women of colour.

The assumptions behind this strategy were not compatible with results. Conditions of poverty worsened, the reports said, because of the lack of community organizing among the poor. The same issues underlie much of the planned change that is currently being attempted in Longview. The community Naples studied was isolated, highly individualistic and anti-collaborative. However, when tenants attempted to meet over a
social problem or a problem with City Housing to work it out, Housing workers sometimes threatened them with eviction and loss of benefits. Were the women co-opted for this project with the promise of better treatment by the authority or was money mandated from higher-ranking administrators to be used only for employment of low income women? These women had been active organizers in their community before the money from CAP came to them. With CAP, they were offered no educational opportunities along with their job. They retained a volunteer status in the eyes of their community and other more permanent coworkers, even though they were paid, because they were doing many of the same things they were doing before the program came into the community. Furthermore, as one of the women pointed out, they remained in their community far past the nine-five working day of the typical community relations worker because they lived there. This looks like a good deal for the people overseeing the project. In all likelihood, contact with tenants would continue during evening hours, since problems often occur at supper, in the evening or very early in the morning when stress is high.

Naples (1991) does try to identify where learning occurs. The following words from a participant provides some evidence.

I was responsible for the parent programs, so I became part time director, then assistant to the executive director, and just started to write proposals and get funding to do parent training. As a result of that, I became very knowledgeable and negotiated with the members of the board.....I really got a hands-on experience beyond belief that is not written in any books. (322)

The transformation she is talking about, however, results from her contact with the administrative bodies with whom she has learned to negotiate. There is no mention of her
increased duties accompanied by higher wages. Progress does not result from her contact with the residents themselves or from an increased understanding of the way in which business is done at the upper levels. What Naples cites as "her efforts to empower others" may better be referred to as Naples' ability to empower herself since I see no evidence that the residents as a community gained any knowledge from this. The parent program continued but what did people learn that would serve them better in the future?

In another incident, Naples (1991) quotes a worker who negotiated with a school to have teachers put their cars somewhere other than the school yard so that kids could play there. Naples describes this as an intense class struggle, but I am unable to connect this with the worker behaviour which influences and changes the way an institution works. She talks about the way in which landlords, businesses and public officials "contribute to the economic stress" of residents but she fails to trace how resident workers use that consciousness to move to action. Landlord neglect of property is historical and well-documented where low income tenants are concerned (McWilliams 1988; Fox/Piven and Cloward 1971), but Naples does little to illuminate how tenants move ahead to improve their community using resistance strategies. Quite often, she mentions issues that are fundamental to social change, but she does not solicit more information in the interview to clarify what links experience, knowledge and action.

Her findings reflect Lovett's (1980) insights about the role of formal education structures and with these Naples starts to analyze how new knowledge allows new understanding. She uses a direct quote from a tenant worker to describe how examples from practice may signify learning but uses none of her observations to see how that plays out in the larger community. Citing Collins (1990), Naples states that workers assess
knowledge claims by emphasizing "concrete experience as a criterion of meaning" but doesn't take this far enough to allow the reader see how meaning develops from experience. Classroom learning did not educate either the workers or the residents in community work. It was the day-to-day reality which illuminated and clarified the direction for practice. Does Naples know this empirically, or is it her own conscious awareness? There must have been workers/tenants who could have articulated this. Where is their input? Two of the tenants in this study shed some light on this.

My own frustrations with the slow progress in community work could prompt me to advocate a similar program for Longview. However, both Naples and I know, that such programs are limited in their effectiveness. First, they are short-lived, funding dries up, the political climate changes, and people's attention is turned away from projects geared to those with low income. I disagree that the answer to this lies in connecting communities such as tenants to larger social movements. It may be, but I can find no empirical evidence that tenant issues can be solved, not subsumed, by larger social movements such as unions that decide to act in solidarity with tenants. I would suggest that ongoing collaboration with and support of the residents themselves can provide the necessary energy in the community to sustain community organizing while the pendulum shifts again to community concerns. During slow times, residents can develop their own infrastructure. They understand the political climate, but they also understand when public opinion against them is overt, prolonged and even dangerous. During these periods, their organizing may not be overt, but it is there, bubbling underneath the surface, in a hundred kitchens and over many more cups of coffee.
Tenant Organizing In Canada

Rothman (1974) attempted to be explicit about the necessary characteristics involved both in the practice one would follow and in developing a social analysis of power in different types of community work. He clarified the concepts involved in community organizing while allowing some flexibility for context. Rothman identified locality development, social planning and social action as three potential models. He hoped to build a typology that would embody a variety of approaches while making specific, appropriate strategies for each model.

While Rothman's model is, as Wharf (1979) has suggested, useful for discussing community practice in the classroom, I would argue that it is not "unsurpassed in completeness and in connecting values and strategies" as he also contends. Organizers write most accounts that chronicle community efforts to act collectively and the organizers ideas about practice form the theory. The organizer makes assumptions, as Rothman has done, to describe community interests, the structure and the problems without much input from the people themselves. These assumptions become generalized across contexts and through practice. A lack of context specificity results in views of practice reduced to a small number of variables for convenience. While practice may inform theory as it originates, it is important to remember that the theory needs consistent revisiting to try to fit practice into the category provided. Generalization, I suggest, may not be fruitful, since using it diffuses the complexity of practice and what practice may tell us about the complexities of working together.

Repo's (1977) account of tenant attempts to fight the demolition of Treffan Court in Toronto, a subsidized housing apartment, is typical of this tendency. Her contention is
that the tenants refused to develop a class analysis, that they overdid public confrontation and that they had no other recourse but to turn to socialist organizers for information and initiative. There remained little room to observe the input of tenant knowledge at all and to observe grassroots practice. In her opinion, the tenants gained absolutely nothing from the experience even though she neglected to include tenant reports of either expected change or other aspects of change they may have experienced. Did new community leaders emerge? Did the people gain more awareness of the political system? Did they attend more municipal meetings? Reports by community organizers consistently neglect to include statements from those for whom the organizing was intended. What is the organizers' idea of change, and how do those affected regard her interpretation of the change? While organizers and tenants alike recognize the need for tenants to be instrumental in solving the problems that disrupt their lives, there are few accounts that record this process. Many reports lament what tenants lack yet again. What is tenant input? How do they construct the relationship between the City Housing and themselves, and what do they see as useful and exciting for practice in community organizing?

**Tenant Initiated Community Organizing**

A written report by a tenant (McWilliams 1988) recorded how community members can participate as innovators and agents of change. In 1985, tenants living in a low income housing project in Cleveland, Ohio, formed an association to take over the management of their apartment complex. The city had lowered tenant rents, but the decreased revenues resulted in the city's neglecting the property. Tenants articulated their own definitions of the neglect. They saw it not just as a maintenance issue but pointed out
how it threatened the health and social well being of tenants. Vandalism, theft, lack of security and dangerous structures left little reason for tenants to feel satisfied with their quality of life. Assuming these tenants to be apathetic, not motivated and incapable, the city property manager did not expect trouble. The tenants decided on their own course of action. They raised funds to rent a van to transport their executive to other sites where tenants had already fought for the right to manage their own housing complex and had won. Once tenants worked to gain the support of the majority of the community, they applied for a grant to do repairs and hired their own on site manager to administrate the complex from among tenants. The complex elected community leaders. Negotiating, working through conflict, often with other tenants, and collaborating, the tenants gained control of maintenance. In a recent legal battle, they won the right for tenants nationwide to manage their complex so that the initial organizing work that they had done could be bypassed by others. The right for units to be purchased for a fraction of market value has also been won but affordable prices have not yet been set.

The tenants initiated these changes and confronted the system to change it. In spite of employees of the welfare department harassing their community leaders, the tenants carried on. The department refused to write the tenant association a letter stating that they were willing to participate in a tenant management scheme, although no grants could be assigned without it. The tenacity of tenants overcame and ignored the claim of City Housing who insisted the tenants "would be in over their heads" (McWilliams 1988). Tenant initiative and action was the deciding factor.

The tenant association in my study is not focused around one initiative but demonstrates a complex and varied pattern of community involvement with no single
dominant strategy for change. A recent study in Britain investigated the activities of six tenant associations. Cairncross, Clapham and Goodlad (1992) concluded that, contrary to a commonly held idea that associations coalesce around one issue, there are diverse reasons for the growth of every association, and no common theory can generalize its life and structure. Recognizing the local housing authorities as a major influence in the development and activities of associations, the study recommended that future research describe how the relationship of the association to the local authority encourages or deters tenants. Most important, these researchers emphasized that the largest part of any research should incorporate the perspective of tenants. This account encourages the direction that their study suggested and prompted a focus on learning as a process and on the production of knowledge.

**Community Organizing and Learning**

Selman and Dampier (1991) identify non-formal learning and informal learning as characteristic of adult education, suggesting that the structure, systematic nature and product centred characteristic of formal learning may not fit in with adult education principles. One of these principles is that learning should proceed under the direction of the learner and Selman sees this as incompatible with adult education. Non formal learning includes non-credit courses and self-directed courses. Informal learning is unsystematic, unintentional or unorganized (Selman and Dampier 1991). Both credit course and self directed courses are organized with a structure that accommodates the material that needs to be learned. Informal learning has no selected structure but occurs during situations that may not have been identified as a learning situation. This work,
while it falls into this category, is informal in the extreme in that the situations identified occurred in an unorganized and spontaneous way. There was no way to predict that a tenant would learn that the Minister of Housing for the government of Ontario and the tenant were similar and could talk together. The data in Chapter 5 tries to capture events such as this. Community development strategies reveal many of the characteristics attributed to informal learning and suggest a starting point for expanding learning.

Coombs (1974) suggests that informal learning is “the lifelong process by which people acquire skills, knowledge, attitudes and insight.” Smith (1994) points out that informal learning includes spontaneous conversations and encounters. There is unpredictability. The adult educator responds to the moment. This is the kind of learning that I call backdoor learning.

Learning in adult education is learning that occurs for both the educator and the participants. The literature describes this learning as a process and notes that it takes place in a specific context. Ramirez, for example, relates how promoters of a community development project gathered information about learning resources in the community by talking to farmers (Ramirez 1990). The promoters, acting as learners, valued and recognized the knowledge of the farmers who in the past had seemed apathetic when the promoters, acting in the role of teacher, had approached them with information. While Ramirez paid scant attention to the way in which the promoters made clear that they prioritized the farmers' knowledge or used it, his account exemplified how this study incorporated tenant knowledge.

Welton, in attempting to unravel a Habermas’s view of human learning, states that the process of problem solving demands not just technical information, but moral and
practical knowledge (Welton 1991). Those involved in a learning process get at this practical knowledge by rational communication between citizens. Habermas saw society's injustice as the result of applying technical rationality to social institutions with no opportunity for communication between competing subjects. So, for example, City Housing administrators set up a system in which they insist that people in subsidized housing are clients. This enables workers to treat them like consumers and to handle tenant issues mechanically in much the same way one moves anonymously through a grocery store. The disrespect of store employees who control your buying habits, impose unfair pricing and hidden service charges exist for the general public as well as for people on welfare. There is no communicative process among competing interests to deal with subjectivity that could reveal the moral issues that affect everyone involved but in a different way. The Habermasian view is that technical control such as this erodes the possibility that learning be arrived at through consensus or, I would say, collaboration with the use of dialogue. Welton (1991) claims that a critical adult education must incorporate this notion if social struggles are to make any progress in their emancipatory agenda.

In asking "Can we extend ourselves to hear from the voices of those we have not heard from?", as Hall did, it is prudent to keep in mind that the major struggle is on the part of the oppressed (Hall, 1991). As adult educators we must be open to listening as Hall advises. A bigger question is under what circumstances will the oppressed speak and how can we encourage them to articulate their knowledge as they participate in the consensual communication that Habermas sees as critical to social justice?
Tenant Knowledge Connects Communities to Action

Gaventa (1993) identifies the "popular production of people's knowledge" in which communities and minority groups can use the knowledge gained from experience to confront objective knowledge used by outsiders. Change is possible when people such as the Longview tenants articulate their own perceptions about the action to take. Because they have used their terms and conditions to describe the problem, they are more likely to want to use their knowledge for the solution. This is a process of learning that may not only change stereotypical views that see tenants as incapable of action but decrease dependency on others. When tenants use their interpretation of a problem to select a solution instead of the one provided by those who serve the community from outside it, that interpretation uses experience to make a direct link to change. They become motivated to find their own solutions because they defined the problem. This is the process of learning followed by action.

When the Cleveland tenants reframed their problem not just as their inability to deal with maintenance problems but as a health and a management issue, the solution made their strategy for change legitimate and worth fighting for (McWilliams 1988). They had the motivation for organizing the community, and their goal was always in sight--tenant management of the complex. The chain of dependency loosened, and outside expertise became less important that the expertise of the tenants themselves. The experience of naming and problem-solving led them toward an analysis of the forces which constrained them. The tenants themselves confronted the authority of the property manager, reflected on their disenfranchisement and took action to make changes in their lives.
Not all tenant efforts result in success. In London, an activist assisted low-income tenants to convert their apartments to a coop living arrangement because of poor maintenance. The city made tenants redundant when the city suddenly found a private buyer for it. No news has been heard since. Whether the activist took the place of the tenants' voices and made it easier to disregard the efforts of one person is difficult to say.

People come to knowledge in their own way. Pam Colorado (1988) investigated notions of science in a first nation's community as an alternative to Western science. She used participatory research to explore the dynamic relationship between native science and people's understanding of experience to explain the underlying philosophy of life. Western science uses expert authority to transmit to the larger society what people should believe and accept. There is little room to incorporate indigenous knowing in this view, and Colorado sought to investigate how this could be done. The process she used to explore the alternative was as important as her findings. She discovered by sensitive questioning of people that even the interview process to begin investigation requires a balance between getting the information you want and establishing a safe environment for the person you are interviewing. Each tribe or group was different in their approach and feelings were a fundamental part of the knowledge generated. A western approach to interviewing during research concentrated less on feelings and more on content to get the right answers. Colorado did not reject western research but used her research as complimentary to that carried out by western science, as providing a deeper understanding of science. My research with tenants benefits from her insights. Education, now thought of as needing institutional formality, could be modified by the tenants' experience of learning in the tenant association. As co-researchers, we will try to identify how this non-formal
education takes place.

**Participatory Research Perspectives**

One focus of participatory research is to dislodge the power that acts as an authority over a community or group (Gaventa 1993). In traditional research, the expertise resides with the researcher and the results develop from the researcher framework. As a researcher and collaborator with the community, I tried to examine my knowledge and compare it to their understanding. I knew aspects of research they didn't and aspects of welfare as a general concept they didn't but they felt the effect on their community, had some sense of what was important for their research and how they were affected by welfare policies. If they lacked knowledge it was seldom either obvious or detrimental to the process. Yet, what they know rarely had a chance to surface publicly because their attempts to inform others, to be the one who communicates knowledge, frequently ended in tenant perceptions being shut out. This research is more than changing stereotypical or traditional views of tenants. It is bringing to the surface new ideas never before heard from tenants. Tenants needed courage and commitment for this process. Small (1988) suggests that researchers doing participatory research need to assume some self-reliance from their subjects. She refers, I suggest, to the idea that a researcher use her own social conscience as a person and as participant with the community. The researcher is still responsible for her attitudes and actions. She must have a rationale which speaks to advantage for the community in the context of her work. As a participant with tenants, for example, I should know how to confront others who accuse them of fraud and deceit. I should have evidence that confronts biased views that
reveal societal stereotypes. Maintaining self-reliance as a researcher means I retain some control over interpreting how knowledge is produced, whose knowledge it is, and how it is used. I mesh my interpretation with theirs, if they find it acceptable and we work together for community progress. The president of the tenant association at Longview checked my perceptions by reading and reacting to this thesis. Small notes that the experience of the thesis supervisor or of colleague may shape some aspects of an analysis and interpretation. It is on the conscience of the researcher to decided what perceptions she is willing to advance. Some opinion derive from the demands of academic rigour and are far removed from the way the people interviewed would have talked about it (Ellis 1988). Tandon (1988) denies the ability of PR to identify adequate examples of learning that might be transformative, although he does not adequately define a transformative learning moment. By saying this, he divorces the context from the end result before it has been realized. Transformative learning is still in his mind but not in his practice. He runs the risk of imposing an end result and of concluding something about social change that should be identified by the community involved.

There are very few instances in which the potential for social change or its occurrence is identified by community members instead of by the researcher. Does it take place only when I say it has? Self-reliance should not venture too far into unwarranted assumptions that magnify the image of the researcher dressed in community clothes.

**Conclusion**

As is often the case, the research literature suggests only partial strategies for use in community organizing with tenants. The most compelling accounts advocate tenant
participation in solving those problems affecting their community. The least productive strategies seem to be those in which outside expertise applies band aids to wounds that have had little attention over a long period of time.

Participatory research is a process rather than a product. It seems to offer the most promise for changing relations of domination that characterize the way in which government workers have interacted with tenants. To find out what change occurs, how, why, by whom and how a community interprets it, may establish new patterns of knowledge production. They may describe how egalitarian and just relationships between tenant communities and others develop. The process of participatory research can motivate other community members experiencing similar problems. By identifying the accomplishments of the community and valuing the efforts of the association to change, regardless of how small a gain, tenants may learn to trust how tenant knowledge can promote community development.
CHAPTER 3
THE CONTEXT AND RESEARCH PROCESS

The Context

London: A Community of Established Privilege

One historian describes London as a "Fat Cat City" with no internal tensions, crime waves or ethnic clashes (Armstrong 1986). The name personifies the influence of corporate leaders on London's growth and development. It also suggests that residents of the city enjoy wealth and prosperity as a result. Yet, with a population increase of 32,000 from 1930-60 and 207,000 from 1960-1990, it is not surprising that the 318,000 people in this city today are in shock, if not denial, about the resulting diversity. To keep pace with this growth in population, local government must acknowledge and administer to a mixed ethnic group, new immigrants and refugees as well as the very rich and the very poor. Support services for those in need have not developed compatible supportive attitudes among the population as a whole, especially for those at the low end of the income scale.

The current attitude of the residents to welfare and its recipients mirrors the reaction to a proposal put before the Middlesex county council in 1867 to open a House of Refuge. Rejected out of hand, the "gentlemen councillors" of the day expressed an opinion that many people today often express regarding aid to the disadvantaged. The council stipulated that to provide such a facility would only encourage them in their dependence (Armstrong 1986: 103).

In 1932, although only 8% or twenty-five-hundred people in the city received
assistance, far less than other Canadian centres, the city still reported a shortage of
finances and cut single men off relief roles. In post-depression times, public works
provided some employment, but these public works' projects did not include any
expansion of educational or medical facilities that people experiencing hard times might
use. Instead, the city fathers approved more bank buildings, railway stations and other
institutions designed to augment the corporate activities in the city. Until the 1970s, there
was little movement of established capital away from business-centred development into
more diverse areas. This pattern still maintains a picture of London as elitist and
isolationist. London also ignores what other cities have established to assist the
disadvantaged. Today, business interests still take precedence locally, and leaders in that
community influence how politicians spend local tax dollars.

An agreement with the provincial and federal government put Mother's Allowance
in place by 1937, but no low income housing. It was not until the late 1950s, that the city
annexed a piece of land to the southeast to satisfy the need for municipally run subsidized
housing for war veterans. The city did not finance and manage a Community Services
Department to assist low income tenants until 1975 even though they had established the
family public housing complex seven years earlier. By locating these residents well away
from the city's centre, the social services that people in need make use of regularly were
hard to access. A lot of the low income housing, similarly located, necessitates a more
frequent and wide-reaching transportation system than London has. This system typically
increases when the city prospers and decreases as it declines. When benefits are cut back,
tenants must take an expensive taxi ride to straighten out benefits since transit planners
drop routes and lay off drivers to more remote areas. City policy dictates that its social
service workers make few on-site visits and then only in an emergency according to their opinion.

London’s reputation, however, is one of wealth driven by successful corporate ventures. In 1977, Wall Street awarded the city its first Canadian AAA municipal credit rating, establishing its reputation as a commercial stronghold. Although it has always been thought of as a corporate centre, the award strengthened his resolve to make sure the description followed through to any future plans the city might have. Formal corporate-like structures characterize the management of city community services. The names of established families still predominate among the leadership of community agencies.

Historians portraying the make up of the London community do not include mention of the active role of non-government organizations or of women in developing a community infrastructure (Armstrong 1986). The recent election of a female as mayor suggests this picture may change, but it is still obvious that the influence in the community comes from the corporations.

Media reports of an unemployment rate in Southwestern Ontario that is lower than provincial rates is compatible with London’s vision of a city blessed with success and prosperity. Newspapers use figures from the manufacturing sector extrapolated to the entire region. They do not consider employees in the farming industry or other part time jobs in the food industry for example. Nor do the more than 16,000 people on welfare reflect the apparent good health of employment opportunities (Hasselback, London Free Press; July 1994). The media also keeps up appearances by attacking those in need. At the time of this writing, the major editorial in the city’s newspaper is a one-man attack against welfare and its beneficiaries. Denouncing the evils and immorality of this
dependency, he promotes the moral obligation that desirable citizens pursue work to maintain appropriate family values. A letter to the editor in February of 1995 echoed my sentiments that his focused attack on one sector of society failed to consider wider economic problems and should not blame the people themselves but pay more attention to wider economic problems. Yet, many agree with the editor based on the assumption that people make choices which, if handled wisely, always result in individual prosperity.

The recent child pornography case and the burning of crosses by the Ontario Heritage Front received less coverage than those condemning the immorality of welfare. Local community organizations struggle for inclusion in the local media and are wary of too much exposure in case a public backlash deters funders. A less biased approach that incorporates issues central to other sectors of the population, such as the initiatives of tenants in public housing, never appears in print. Only when City Housing generously provides money for what it sees as necessary programming do London residents read of the good work being done on their behalf. Then the focus is on the gift, not the accomplishment of the people involved. This tendency for the media, itself a monopoly controlling radio, television and newspapers in London, to focus on business interests continues to promote corporate attitudes and does not necessarily reflect the attitudes of the larger London community.

Longview: Temporary Tenants, Permanent Community

Longview is a community of tenants, many of whom depend on the availability of rental assistance to augment low incomes. The original intent of government subsidized housing was to provide temporary accommodation for families at an affordable rent until
their income from paid employment stabilized. Since then, two downturns in the economy in the early years of 1980's and 1990's have meant that the working poor are unable to get far enough ahead economically to use the public rental market. Some families have lived in Longview since London built it in the late 1970's, but there are an equal number of transient families. As one tenant pointed out, accumulating two months rent to move into the private housing market is impossible. People receiving assistance are always trying to catch up. Their status as welfare recipients prevents them from accumulating savings. Tenants who have permanent low wage jobs with no benefits, such as driving a school bus six hours a day, never recover enough to have access to the public market. They also often have continuous health problems that prevent them from working long hours. Most stay in subsidized housing because their minimum wage job allows them few other choices. Economic conditions, however, are not the only pressures that have extended the stay of many families in public housing.

Close ties among friends deter many residents from leaving the community and moving to another community. Tenants depend on other members of the community for support, such as reciprocal daycare, financial as well as emotional support when a spouse leaves, or short term assistance when benefit cheques arrive and a tenant is incorrectly short changed. This reduces the possibility that Longview will serve as temporary housing because these connections are harder to make in other communities. The services that tenants provide free for each other cost money in other communities. Fear of being accepted outside Longview also keeps tenants in place. When a potential landlord in the private market finds out an inquiring tenant lives in public housing, Longview tenants report that he tells them the rental space has been filled.
The government perception that families with three or four children would move in and out of different housing markets, as the ups and downs of the job market took effect, has come to be realized as unworkable. Consequently, the temporary function of public housing has been recast in recent years as a more permanent answer to low cost accommodation. The stigma of living in subsidized housing, however, remains.

Located ten kilometres and a one hour bus ride to the south of the city centre, Longview is the largest public housing complex in London with close to 200 town houses. A person driving past on the street views open space and grass surrounding the complex. No doubt, the low cost of property and an abundance of available space 20 years ago resulted in the planning of a relatively spacious townhouse complex. Positioned in rows of ten with sidewalks between and about 50 feet of open space separating the rows, some privacy is afforded tenants, and there is ample parking. A large grassy border surrounds the complex where it meets the road, and each unit has a back and front yard, making this complex look generous by design.

Although intended for families of a least four, inside the houses are small. Kitchen work areas are best for one person, and planners designed the dining/living room as one area, big enough for a small amount of living room furniture but no dining room furniture. A kitchen nook area can accommodate a family of four or five but with no extra storage space or room for visitors. Unlike Longview, many of the privately owned townhouses with which I am familiar have more inside living space and less outside space. Possibly, when the city built Longview, the purpose may have been to present a public vision of largesse while keeping families contained in a less-than-comfortable living area, based on an assumption that this would decrease the likelihood of their staying too long.
An Ontario government legislative order as early as 1971 allowed tenant associations to use one townhouse for every 60 units in a public housing complex, although the space inside is inadequate for that many people. Longview tenants, with creative planning, use it as a recreation unit for the community. The Longview Tenant Association (LTA) uses the unit as an office and as a meeting space for tenants. They would like to offer it to groups in the wider community for a minimal rental fee but the Housing Ministry frowns on that. The unit is intended only for tenants in the Longview community. Nevertheless, tenants must demonstrate their commitment and their ability to sustain the unit. The LTA pays the Housing Ministry for the unit by funds raised within their community. Their obligation is 23 cents for each townhouse or double that if they run two units. In addition, the LTA accepts responsibility for insurance and maintenance, a cost of more than $500 a year, assuming that the association will be able to carry out substantial fund raising events for this expense. Many of these events prevail upon the generosity of tenants, already strained by financial hardship, to support the recreation unit. There are some funds available under other legislation tabled by the Ontario Housing Ministry and directed from City Housing to tenant associations for programming and ongoing expenses. On the one hand, the Ontario government infers a custodial role by stipulating arbitrary requirements for managing the tenants’ recreation units. On the other, making these units available to tenants does assist them in community development initiatives. Most townhouse communities in the public market have a recreation unit available for resident use, and it is paid for as part of their rent. The LTA has to manage that function beyond their usual responsibilities.

Any legislated funds available to tenants must be applied for every six months. At
that time, the tenant executive provides evidence for their appropriate use in advance. Consequently, tenants evaluate programs constantly. Most recently, the association completed a 12-page report in order to receive $1800 of funding, part of a $4000 grant made available to them every year under a five-year Ontario Ministry program to encourage tenant associations in housing complexes. In Chapter 4, I discuss how tenants perceive the function of their association and how slowly outsiders have come to accept the LTA members as managers in spite of the work they do to sustain the use of the unit for the community.

**Longview Tenant Association (LTA)**

While tenant associations in the United States frequently form from tenants’ participation in a protest movement, for example, around an issue such as poor property maintenance (McWilliams 1988), those in London have been the result of workers, employed by City Housing, promoting tenant management of their community. Paid by the government to monitor the needs of tenants and enforce regulations, some of these workers are, nevertheless, sincerely concerned with helping tenants to become self-directed. Such workers are constantly juggling their allegiance. A woman named Flo formed Longview’s Tenant Association, having lived in public housing herself years before. I often witnessed her professional side surfacing when she informed tenants of the rules and procedures they must follow in managing the recreation unit. Privately, however, Flo spoke in a committed way about her concern for their progress.

In the beginning stages of the association, Flo solicited the services of anyone volunteering to take an executive position just to get the association going. These tenants
formed an executive and took the first step—they applied for a tenant unit with Flo's assistance. Then again with her help, they invite members of the community to a meeting at the unit to acquaint them with the new association. It is no exaggeration to say that associations would not have formed without the efforts of Housing workers. There are few activists in the larger London community supporting tenants. Historically, social workers have tried to fill this role, but since they became more bureaucratized, they have become more centralized, doing their work from an office. They seldom enter communities such as Longview. Tenants go to them.

Longview Tenant Association began by renting one four-bedroom unit. The biggest room holds no more than 20 people sitting down which limits the potential size of meetings. Other rooms are nine feet by nine feet or smaller. Recently, another tenant association learned that the fire department regulations prevent children's programs being held on the second floor of the recreation unit. Consequently, the community is constantly devising creative ways of handling events since there are more than 600 people in the community, most of whom are children. Since the space precludes the possibility of large community meetings, tenants employ word-of-mouth strategies in Longview. I know from experience that communication often takes place over kitchen tables and that these conversations contain some of the most vital information about community issues.

Although legislation formally allows Longview to apply for three units, it is currently undergoing intense scrutiny by City Housing employees as it applies for the second unit. Negotiations started a year ago and may continue for another year while the tenants’ association justifies its demands. The tenant executive must file with City Housing, a comprehensive report of ongoing activities, indicating how many attended, the
outcomes in terms of success or failure, and future plans for obtaining funding, before Housing approves the unit, even though in September 1995 there were seven empty units. Tenants need more space for English-as-a-Second Language, more daycare facilities and access to the unit for parent meetings. However, the application must be sanctioned by the worker from City Housing first, then reworked into a report by her and then still must pass through several levels of scrutiny at the local Board of Directors. The Tenant Relations Division of the Ontario Housing Ministry releases the application to be approved in the legislature before tenants receive the okay. My link to Longview, as a resource teacher, went through a funding application process that was similar but in a shorter time period. The funding for the program was the Ministry’s idea.

Program evaluations and requests for another unit go through the provincial legislature. Significantly, most of the scrutiny is done by people who have no knowledge of the community and have never met or talked to the tenants’ association to inquire about its future plans. Tenants are never given the opportunity to meet with the official bureaucracy to define their own claim for additional space. The filing of the claim is a paper process completed by the same assigned worker who validates their income and records their benefits. The worker makes appropriately worded reports of the LTA’s submission and the approval comes to the tenants through this worker. It is not surprising that tenants do not see themselves as autonomous decision-makers or in command of their own destiny. They do not have impartial assistance in matters pertaining to the tenants’ association and their work is constantly scrutinized by outsiders.
Longview Tenant Association Executive

Tenants elect an executive as stipulated by their constitution, a document supplied by the worker from City Housing when the association first begins. An appointed president, vice-president, treasurer and secretary form a working group, usually directed by the president. Since duties are set out in the constitution, tenants do not act aggressively in this role. To be elected president is clearly a source of pride, but that tenant may be unclear what the role involves. If a member is unable to carry out the duties of his or her elected office, the president will take responsibility for asking that tenant to resign. Since Flo established the first executive in 1989, mainly by convincing certain tenants that an association would benefit the community, the pains of a proper election procedure did not occur until about a year and a half later, by which time I began working in the community. During the initial stage of the association, the appointed executive held community meetings once a month, completed documentation to secure the unit for activities and started to let community members know that the unit could be used for recreational events.

This first appointed executive consisted of two gregarious and outgoing community members who knew more members of the community than most tenants. Their vision for the tenants’ association was to organize after school programs, work with the on-site chaplain, and act as a liaison with City Housing to secure funding and establish a bank balance for ongoing expenses. Monthly meetings attracted a half dozen tenants on a good night. Some programs gained little support, but the LTA did attract a small group of faithful tenants, many of whom still lend assistance today. Some winter meetings saw only my attendance as well as one or two members of the community. Occasionally, the
tenant executive would invite someone who had either asked to be introduced to the community or whom the executive itself thought might have some information the community could use. This did not necessarily increase attendance at meetings since those invited were rarely the service providers with whom tenants had the most problems. One of the biggest meetings took place when representatives from the local school came to the unit. Tenants took control of the dialogue on that occasion but the visitors did not know how to handle the barrage of complaints. The visitors tried to calm things and placate tenants instead of dealing with issues and using information from the tenants.

Election of the second executive followed accusations that the first appointed group had misused funds and appropriated money intended for tenant activities. I was never privy to the actual evidence to substantiate this claim but was present at the election of the new executive. The outgoing executive made an impassioned speech, pointing to their service to the community and to the unfair accusations that ruined their name in the community. To everyone's credit, it was business as usual with the newly elected executive. Tenants spent little time rehashing what had happened. To their credit, they moved forward from that day. Each executive body, as well as those accused of wrongdoing, enhanced the work of the tenants' association in some way. Typically, presidents last about eight months to a year. Some resign and reappoint another tenant but always according to the constitution. There have been few days when the positions were left unfilled in spite of the turmoil and stress that characterise the lives of most tenants.

During the early life of the association, tenant work on the association was threatened both by community workers who controlled their stipends and by other members of the community who might have perceived a tenant's election success as a sign of superiority.
One woman, a former member of the tenants' association's executive, was threatened with eviction following a 'man in house' report to her mother's allowance worker if she did not stop working for the association. Tenants frequently complained among themselves that so-and-so on the executive is, as Freda reflected during an interview, "trying to be the boss" (Interview by author, Freda, October 11, 1995). Other tenants lamented that the tenants' association could do nothing while Housing was in control. Some just refused to acknowledge its presence in the community adamant that if an activity is being run by the TA, they would not be there. Rather than spending valuable research time analysing why this behaviour appeared, I supported tenant activities non-judgementally, focusing on continued support. However, our relationship, from the beginning when I tutored in the adult learning centre to the collaborative role I came to fill, was never accompanied by smooth sailing in the LTA. Mindful of the tenuous hold of the association, the following relates how I came to Longview and how the collaboration for research and mutual learning continued.

**Achieving Solidarity with the Community**

**Connecting to the Longview Tenant Association**

In November of 1990, I started working with that first appointed executive of the association to plan and implement a literacy program. The executive stipulated the approach and the curriculum materials in an attempt to give tenants some control in decision-making. In my qualifying research paper for entry to the doctorate program, I argued that education delivered by formal institutions constituted education for social maintenance (Geddis 1991). In my view, middle class educational administrators
duplicated the class structure by tailoring classroom activities to benefit middle class children. In contrast to that, I saw community education as having the potential for social change. It offered a possibility for modifying the traditional relationship between teacher and student. Teachers involved in community education in countries other than Canada's described innovative curriculum, delivered by adult educators who also acted as participants in the community on development projects. The focus was on collaboration and solidarity in community issues (Lovett 1983). Field centre programs in Northern Ireland, for example, described initiatives in which informal and democratic discussion groups with women in the community suggested a potential for social change. Knowing this motivated my intention to collaborate with the tenants' association and left room for them to set their own direction as to how they saw the program evolving.

**Problem: The Relationship Between City Housing and Tenant Associations**

The fact that the Ministry of Housing set up a $500 funding allotment for literacy programs in these tenant communities suggested that someone in government recognized the inadequacy of the programs geared to people on low income. Was government really looking for another approach to the problem or just trying to fund a cheaper program? The LTA and I had a face-to-face meeting only because this was a requirement of the funding— that the tenants' association should meet and plan with the person giving the program. This requirement in itself was a non-traditional approach to working with Longview.

In spite of the small amount of money involved, deciding on a program and working out the details proved difficult. A picture of how our relationship developed
emphasizes, on one hand, the difficulty of forming a collaborative tie with tenants who have been left out of the negotiation with other community members and, on the other, how other adult educators might work through some of these same problems.

Some initial problems resulted from my background and experience. I was an outsider in London in touch with economically secure residents who skilfully rejected the idea of poverty by hiding the poor from public scrutiny. There was little evidence of public housing or poor people in the city centre. Any attempt to discuss work in the public housing complexes caused residents in the wider London community to act surprised that they even existed. Some people showed similar discomfort to think that I would enter those places. The reason for these attitudes stems in part from London City Council's bureaucratic control. By refusing to sanction demographic research, they hid pockets of diversity that have existed in London and ignored the presence of poverty within city boundaries. Social services makes no attempt to collect any demographic information related to public housing complexes that might also assist tenants to serve their community. Only in the last six months of my time in Longview did the association receive a list of tenants living there. No indication of family size was supplied, although it would have been helpful to the LTA planning programs. At one social gathering I attended, a journalist guessed that the non-English speaking population of London was probably about .5 percent when in fact it was and is closer to 20 percent. By forming contacts in community agencies, I composed a more realistic picture of diversity in the London community for myself, but I was still checking my information and forming that picture when I started planning the program with the LTA.

In addition, using my experiences of funding gained at the community college, I
assumed the funding would be continued automatically. I reasoned that the constant flow
of government money to the colleges for literacy indicated that a mere $500 would
certainly be available to continue this program in Longview. This was a large community
with specific needs. Money should be easy to come by if I wanted to extend my
involvement. At that time, I ignored the fact that the money was coming to me for doing
what someone in that community possibly could have been hired to do. The job did not
even get circulated in the community. This is evidence of the way in which programming
creates dependency on outsiders and reinforces the idea those with knowledge exist
somewhere outside of tenant communities. Both the tenants and the worker who are hired
believe that this expertise should come from “outside,” even though many tenants have
finished grade 12 and could possibly access this funding themselves. Credentials confer
privileges and the tenants themselves conferred a privilege on me when they agree to hire
me.

With the first LTA executive and with the community’s first experience with
managing funding, the worker from City Housing encouraged them to determine the
program contents as they saw it. The president, a man who worked part time, directed the
conversation and decided unilaterally that I would offer resume writing and job search
skills. This suggests that together we "could get these people doing something other than
drinking and smoking." Access to learning, he suggested, would motivate the people of
Longview back to work. I discussed my misgiving with the tenant executive. I asked him
if the assumption that tenants needed a job search program might limit the usefulness of
the program. He insisted that was what the community wanted and other executive
members agreed.
Attendance in the program was voluntary. Because the association publicized in
their newsletter that I would be in the recreation unit two afternoons a week, I assumed
that once the community knew a teacher was on site and one hired by their association,
they would feel more comfortable working with her, for course taking as well as for skills
they needed for letter writing or communicating with City Housing. Their needs might be
for filling out applications or getting a resume together, but it would be in their
community. I imagined they would think that a safer environment for learning than
college classrooms.

In terms of the goals of literacy, my preparation of the proposal for the funding
may have been problematic. Tenants said they did not feel capable of doing it and simply
rubber stamped what I brought them to sign. I decided that if I was going to accept the
authority of the tenants, I would agree with their views of my participation. I wrote up
the proposal as they directed. The tenants' association approved it, as did the worker
from City Housing. The $500 cheque was delivered to the tenant association by Flo, the
community worker. The LTA assigned me a small room upstairs in the tenant unit, and I
began in February of 1991, little concerned about how I would receive payment or what I
would do when the funding ran out. I intended then, to solicit their approval to work with
this community, paid or not and to do it under their direction. I was determined to
introduce a community education program that was meaningful to this community. I had
some faith that a successful environment for learning would somehow evolve.

Several tensions began to take shape in that first month. When I arrived that first
day, boxes, papers and garbage filled the room intended for my use. Then I knew that this
was no longer a classroom. I did not fully understand that I was no longer a teacher
waiting for the arrival of students. Moreover, I was unsure if other members of the tenants’ association and other workers in the community supported what I was doing. I realized that if the president of the LTA had talked disparagingly to me about tenants in the community, he probably expressed these views in the community itself. If I had been brought in to fix the drinking and philandering of tenants, I was not going to be popular.

It was difficult for me to assess and make conclusions about how the program was proceeding. In a college, colleagues became sceptical about a program’s effectiveness at the completion of it when pretest and posttest measurements signified students were successful or not. This time it was immediately evident that something was wrong, but there were so few participants and the curriculum materials so random that it was impossible to establish whose performance was faulty.

Moreover, the attitude of some tenants toward the association as a presence in the community was ambivalent while others outwardly rejected the LTA, seeing it as a foot soldier for City Housing. Tenants talked about mistrusting anything which involved City Housing and refused to participate on those grounds alone or let their children take part. Another issue was the executive's insistence that job search and resumes must be promoted in a community with more than 400 children less than eighteen, the majority of which were less than ten. At that time, the head of the family for most tenants was a single mom with sole care responsibilities. Many others had multiple problems such as an alcoholic ex-husband, health issues or were going through a difficult separation. There was a unit which ran a subsidized daycare facility but it only accepted 12 children and then only full time applicants. They could bring their kids to my program but discipline made that less workable as there was no allowance for daycare. There were clearly some kinks
to be worked out. Many college programs folded faced with these odds or as soon as the attendance dropped to less than eight. I was determined to continue this program if it could support the community in encouraging tenants to become active in initiating community projects for improvement on their terms.

As I reflect now, the failure of that first program I undertook with the tenants’ association did not deny the potential power of such associations as some social movement literature suggests (Loney 1983). Rather than only offering a literacy program, it occurred to me that the tenants’ association that could be the mechanism for tenants to improve conditions in their community. I grasped the idea that the association itself could be the educational tool by which tenants could educate themselves and by which others in the larger London community might start to see them as informed community members. I used this conviction to reshape a collaborative relationship to support tenant initiatives.

The Research Process

Preparation: Consciousness Raising

Six months after I opened the adult learning centre at Longview in September of 1991, the course work for my doctorate started. Because I considered my work as that of a community educator and not representing any institution, I gave more importance to the context in which I was working and to understanding the people in it. My attendance at community meetings continued to provide evidence of the potential strength of the Longview tenants’ association. Tenants talked to me about inadequate policing, the disrespect and put-downs they continually felt when they tried to articulate the needs of their community to managers at City Housing or the problems they experienced with
incorrect benefit cheques. Although the tenants substantiated these claims with their experience, I did not understand nor fully acknowledge the validity of them. They seemed to be over-exaggerated. As I became more involved with tenants, I realized they were not. In my opinion, people of middle-class privilege like myself may use denial to protect themselves from the reality of the lives of people who live on welfare. In my first doctorate course, I wrote reflections that denied Narayan's concept of "epistemic privilege." As it applied to tenants, it meant I should accept their descriptions of reality as knowledge because they lived them. I came face to face with the tenant's anger every time I went to the community. Yet, it was difficult to accept that someone else's knowledge other than mine, described a situation in a more complete way. I had objective knowledge about the issues affecting tenants from the literature (Fox/Piven and Cloward 1971). The tenants articulated exactly how specific hardships affect them. By interacting with families, I developed a more complete picture. For example, I knew that many tenants have a difficult time getting the welfare office to correct a short-changed benefit cheque but I had no idea of the emotional and economic turmoil it caused in families (Geddis 1994). The idea that knowledge from the people could add a significant dimension to that gleaned either from experts or from the literature took roots during the first year of taking courses. Applied to the tenants’ association, tenants could lead the community in dislodging the hegemony imposed by experts and the bureaucracy by using tenant knowledge to manage and direct it. Code (1991) implied that hegemony is dependent on maintaining power structures and is therefore always unstable. Maintaining the power depends on people’s compliance, often because they see no other recourse. The research focus I chose came from acceptance of Narayan's claim for "epistemic privilege" of the
oppressed and the hope expressed in Code's thinking.

Establishing a Research Approach

Until the spring of 1992, I operated the adult learning centre one afternoon a week and talked informally with the elected president at her convenience. I had been working with the community for a year and a half. During that time, events moved so slowly that a paid organizer would have abandoned the project. Getting the community to accept the presence of a tenant association was still extraordinarily difficult. The fact that it had hired an adult educator was even more so. The community elected two women presidents after the initial appointment of that first man identified by the community worker. It was Frances, the fourth president (some previous presidents stayed in office less than three months) who formally asked me to work with the executive to redo the constitution the association used. This was the point at which I sensed tenants trusting me enough to invite me to work more closely with the LTA executive and to invite me to bring my knowledge to issues directly affecting the LTA. The election of Frances as president came with new commitment, strategies and directions. The executive agreed that the design for the literacy program, as conceived by the first executive in 1991, needed to be more diverse to appeal to more tenants. Because Frances and I conversed more often and because we worked together more often than with the previous executive, I learned in more detail, the obstacles experienced by the tenants' association. Tenants accepted my presence at community meetings, indicated by their conversations with me about their personal lives or about the community.

In the fall of 1992, I approached the tenant executive with the idea that they could
provide valuable knowledge about the way organizing proceeded in tenant communities. They could expand current notions about how tenants organized to improve their communities by using their day-to-day experiences. Most of the collaboration would be carried out in the natural unfolding of events. I made it clear that I was there to assist them whenever they thought I could add something to the process. I never came to a meeting uninvited, and I never asked to come to a meeting for tenants outside the community unless they mentioned it first. I deliberately gave them management of their immediate environment and of our relationship, in contrast to the way, as I have already explained, they experienced their relationship with City Housing and other community workers. In addition, I constantly checked with them and solicited their perceptions as to whether I acted as an intruder or a collaborator. It is questionable whether they would have pointed out any instances when I had acted aggressively.

By assuming that the tenants in the association at Longview were community organizers, I made it clear that I considered that they were doing the organizing, not me. If issues came up that evolved from the community, I was there to collaborate and use research techniques to work through them. My main focus was to accept their expertise and to see what that might tell me about how the tenants' association provided opportunities for learning, learning that could lead to action.

The introduction of participatory research principles through my course work provided a research methodology compatible with the relationship I developed with the Longview TA. The choice of a research approach presents an abundance of available methodologies. At the same time, the issues I considered as important for investigation restricted what I would accept as methodology.
An ethnographic analysis, such as Shlay and Faulkner's (1984) account of organizing a tenant union, provides a microanalysis of individuals and the organization as it works for change. Participant observation is the main source of data collection. Researchers were present in the community at significant times. They rarely became involved in the organizing process itself, and frequently recorded who was present and the effect on the intended goal of the organization. Shlay and Faulkner analysed both the product and the process as having failed. The union did not deal with structured inequality and failed to organize appropriately, although it agreed that its organizing methods encouraged assertive tenant behaviour, prompted recognition among tenants that they experience problems collectively and provided tenants with language for expressing the role of powerful others in their lives. However, the positive results get lost in the overall failure that the researchers report. It seemed that the researchers, having established the parameters of success, also established its failure. It was unclear how ethnographic research could incorporate and legitimize tenant knowledge. Tenants do learn lessons from failure that inform future organizing but it is not overall failure. They know what can be learned from that, but these researchers concentrated on the failure to produce social change.

Serrano-Garcia (1979) used a methodology called intervention with research in which they taught group dynamics to a group of tenant leaders and two years later worked with them to organize a tenant association in their community. The researchers reported that although the participants learned the skills well and increased their awareness of power structures, the project was less effective organizing the community at large. Tenant organizers failed to develop a strong sense of community, to promote recruitment to the
organization or to increase consciousness levels in the wider membership. The links between the skills learned and the needs of the community seemed tenuous. Were these skills generic and detached from the reality experienced by the tenants? This methodology came closer to what I had in mind, but I was looking for something that gave tenants more authority, more direct leadership in forming the conclusions arrived at in the study. The tenants needed to be constantly working out their organizing efforts, not my efforts organizing them.

Lockhart's (1990) critical action research emphasizes dialogue as a means of promoting critical learning among people ignored as capable of managing their own improvement, in this case, native people. The historical context describes government neglect of native demands. The treatment they have received defines the issues which affect them and becomes crucial to understanding how the results of the interaction may serve to prioritize the interests of the natives. Lockhart encourages native people and similarly isolated groups to move past the pessimism and disillusionment that have characterized their efforts to improve their communities. He recognizes that the knowledge frames of outsiders with expertise ignore details indigenous people need to use but maintains that both are needed if organizing is to result in a better quality of life. The principles Lockhart expressed are compatible with this study but his account does not explain what native knowledge can be found in the dialogues that occur during community interaction. This study sought to get closer to tenant knowledge in that context.
Developing the Relationship

Two years after I joined the association, community members motioned and approved an entry in the minutes that I had no connection to City Housing and that I supported the community voluntarily. It took an act of tenant governance to clarify this. In May of 1994, I was officially appointed as external advisor to the tenant executive, with no job description but with the assumed task of supporting and assisting the tenant executive. This study will try to explicate the results of their efforts and of any assistance, whether positive or negative, they think I provided.

When I accompanied a tenant to a meeting outside of their community, I saw first hand how the attitudes of many in the community outside of Longview continued to alienate tenants. This rejection which tenants experienced in conversations with outsiders suggests that if other members of the wider community can accept their input and knowledge in conversation, this may be a way to begin change (Narayan 1988). In one instance, a tenant and I went together to a meeting with workers I met for the first time. I was treated as a tenant and not greeted or talked to. On another occasion, if we went to a meeting with community workers who knew me, they engaged in conversation with me at length, but did not include tenants even though the subject of our talk might benefit from what the tenant knows about the community. I witnessed casual conversations in which representatives from City Housing sent a message of fear. The intended message was “keep a lid on this association or we’ll evict you.” Tenants needed to understand these veiled threats lacked power or validity. In some conversations, tenants were made to feel powerless when a Housing worker threatened suspension of the privilege to rent the townhouse unit if participation did not improve immediately. What was threatened was
often untrue. It was a two-way dialogue but the message was one way. The presence of an advisor or mentor in the community balanced some of these threats with information and resulted in an alternative conversation. For example, I could refer to their expertise and commitment in the wider community when conversing with others, especially in their presence. Sometimes tenants could have the same conversation with me as the one that threatened them, change the content and express their feelings. I was only one person, but I could confirm the value of what they knew and thought about an issue, within or outside their community. This was time consuming. It was not a process for an organizer anxious to see tangible results daily or in a short period of time.

As we formed our relationship. I worked on waiting for tenants to initiate a conversation before I provided input about community issues. Then I followed their lead. I might provide some generic information that clarified some legality, but I never introduced an issue. It was not until I had established my solidarity with the community two years later that they encouraged me to speak out spontaneously. Hard work, patience and reflection brought me to that point and involved me more often in issues they wanted to do something about.

What they wanted to work on became apparent at community meetings, particularly when anger surfaced. Sometimes it was a community conflict or anger at someone outside of the community. When I had been a classroom teacher, my approach was to try to calm the reaction down, keep the peace, and redirect my students' emotional outpouring to something more productive. In my opinion, letting the anger run its course, when communicating with tenants, proved to be more useful. It motivated tenants to act on injustice in a way they perceived most productive for them. We made use of that anger
to probe for understanding and to look at the reasons for it. That often included analysing a social situation, and seeing what kind of assumptions may have prompted them to be isolated from an interaction. As a participant in the process, if I focussed on the negative behaviour such as expressed anger and saw it as a barrier to learning in the way a teacher or a social worker might do, then I would work to develop alternative behavioural strategies to modify the anger itself. However, if I used the context in which a tenant's anger exploded and collaborated with that tenant to learn the meaning of it, then I become a participant in the action that might follow. My affirmation of the anger as normal acknowledged that the source of the anger might reveal an inequity that should be dealt with, a situation where a tenant either is or is perceived to have been rejected or intimidated.

Narayan (1988) suggests that an individual's sense of self is violated when non-community members like me interpret emotional outbursts as spontaneous action having little or no meaning. The following example may illustrate this. As external advisor to the tenants' association executive, I and one other tenant not in the association attended an orientation of students employed to supervise summer recreation activities in housing developments. During the meeting, we agreed to a noon meeting time with the tenant executive in the recreation unit for a week later. When I told Frances, the president of the association, about the meeting later that day, she swore and became impatient. Her anger was about the assumptions made by others that the tenant executive would be available for them and that tenants had no other agenda that mattered. She did not blame me for my part in it, but said emphatically "the tenants' association is always the last to know."

Other incidents proved Frances right. I had assumed I could act as a tenant rather
than as an external member of the community in agreeing to the noon meeting. In a sense, I used the privilege I might have had in other community situations to make a decision which discounted the association and the people who ran it. We talked about this and about the privilege of do-gooders. She reminded me the many times the Housing administration made changes, for example, to rents but they did not inform tenants until the effect changed their benefits and the tenant has $100 less to buy food.

Narayan (1988) identified those community members who

cannot fail to be aware of the fact that presence of good will on the part of the members of advantaged groups is not enough to overcome assumptions and attitudes born out of centuries of power and privilege. (35)

It is important that others ask tenants for their perceptions and accounts of their life experiences so that any action taken to correct an injustice consider the position of tenants. Frances phoned and explained any meetings would have to be agreed to by all her executive. She would get back to them. My role as researcher/educator was to assist tenants to assist to bring these instances to the surface in ways that acknowledged meaning as it was understood by the tenants, not by me.

This dialectical process forms the basis for participatory research (PR) -- a collaborative research process which draws on the participant's experience to interpret effective action for community organizing. Some of their life experiences have common characteristics in which discrimination, control or authority is often a factor, but there are always different interpretations that illustrate the complex nature of power over others. Tenants do not generalize about experiences that illustrate external control of their living situations. Often they have to create meaning and self-definition again and again, about similar experiences, but they get to action. I suggest my role as a researcher was and is to
work through that process with them and to encourage them to understand the commonality in these experiences. From then, tenants can begin to understand their oppression as a problem inherent in the social structure, not as a problem inherent in them. As an educator, I can add information about other experiences, I can probe, paraphrase and reinterpret with a group, but the final interpretation must be theirs if they are to move on from that point. This study seeks to provide a richer description of what "move on" means in the context of a tenant association. It was not until my third year with Longview that I extended my role as a community participant and reactivated my role as a teacher. As an educator of adults, I ignored the idea of working with the children in Longview, but the tenants' association convinced me that because of the family focus of the community, I could reach adults better by reaching their children. Homework Haven was a kid's club I started at the suggestion of the tenants' association. It increased my contact with more tenants. Kids ages 9-13 who were ineligible for an on-site teen club, came one night a week to play games with an educational focus. Some nights there were 12 and sometimes only five, but this turned out to be the teaching environment that best suited the community. Parents dropped in to see what was going on, older teens dropped by and the troublemakers of the complex came to play games that were either group or individually oriented. More conversations about this program lead to other issues. This year, in my absence, the program has been delivered by members of the community.

It is significant that the LTA would suggest this program and reintroduce my role as a teacher in this way. What I first thought would be the role that facilitated my entry into the community was actually one that reshaped my teaching role, proving to be most beneficial and wanted in the community. The first tenant executive could never have
envisioned this.

Three years elapsed between the time I joined the executive for constitutional talks and my leaving the community. There had always been some uncertainty in my mind and in the minds of tenants as to my role in the community. Some still asked if I was employed by City Housing, or if I had been sent by another worker, or if I was part of the government. I wondered if I was intimidating them or acting as an outside expert or communicating a feeling of distance somehow. They seemed unable to believe that I would want to be there for any other reason. Their comments reflected their general mistrust of outsiders. In conversation with them, I checked. They pointed out that I could not possibly know the alienation and rejection they had experienced from some community workers. They needed to convince themselves that I was okay. In other words, I was being watched. In any other community agency, my presence would have been accepted more readily. I had to learn to live with this mistrust each time new tenants came to community meetings and to act in ways that allayed their fears. Waiting for trust to develop was one of the most agonizing aspects that characterized the development of our relationship.

**Tenants as Practitioners in Community Organizing**

Tenants working in the association or alongside it are community workers/practitioners carrying out the activities of the tenants’ association and do similar work that others are paid to do. Planning programs with the community, talking to City Housing employees about funding or discussing ways to handle community meetings in ways that encourage community involvement is as much part of the practice of community
organizing as issue-oriented discussions. Each of these activities uses tenant knowledge. Tenants have something important to say about practice. The reflective interviews I carried out encouraged tenants to explore the activities of the association and what they had learned as they worked in their community.

Reflection has become an integral part of the professional development of some practitioners. Smith employed it to encourage educators in the community to articulate process issues (Smith 1994). Teachers and researchers in schools use it to articulate aspects of practice that may yield insights into areas of improvement. The interviews I completed, as part of my involvement with Longview, assumed tenants to be practitioners reflecting on community organizing. For them, this involves thinking about situations and interactions while attending to the emotions evoked. It is connecting experiences into patterns that suggest successful strategies or failed ones. Reflection involves talking about processes as much as it is about evaluating outcomes.

Because I did not want a set of interviews to mark the end of my collaboration with the Longview community in June 1995, we scheduled them to take place six months before that. Four tenants who held office on the current executive, another two who were past executive members, and two inactive members were interviewed. Three tenants involved in the community, but who did not have profiles as association members, agreed to reflect both on how they viewed the association and on the community work they did. I interviewed an employee of Tenant Support Services from the Ministry of Housing. She resumed her position as a City Housing community worker with the tenants shortly after. She has been active with tenant associations generally. I talked with one on-site paid community worker and one agency worker to establish a contrast between how the
tenants perceive the function of the LTA and how others see it. A final session with the current president of the tenant executive reviewed a draft of my entire thesis and the findings from the interviews. I have followed the success of the tenants’ association, and at this writing it continues its commitment to community improvement.

Summary

When I first applied and got approval with the support of the tenants’ association to deliver an on-site literacy program, the context of my work and my concerns suddenly became less acceptable publicly than they had been when I was employed by the college. Friends no longer asked questions while some were visibly uncomfortable hearing about women on welfare and public housing issues. Others never asked. The context of my work went underground without the legitimacy of the college behind me. Known to be a contrary individual, I often wonder if this public reaction influenced my forming a participatory research partnership with a community to which I did not belong? And if so, why was I influenced?

My own reflection allows me to connect past and future events. As I became involved in situations and sometimes with individual tenants, these triggered remembrances of the past and the present, of new understanding and learning (Smith 1994). It shaped my relationship as researcher/collaborator. Some of my past experiences are those that tenants are now struggling to overcome. It is in trying to see hope in those struggles that people like me often become involved as practitioners with communities such as Longview. The strongest motivation, however, is the conviction that tenants have the potential to be leaders in developing the expertise of their community. To be a
participant in this process is to renew the commitment of early adult educators who recognized their role in surfacing issues of social justice (Welton 1987). The evidence provided by tenants in chapter four and five determines if that has been done.
CHAPTER 4
OUTSIDER PERCEPTIONS CONFRONT TENANT CONCERNS

Tenant Associations: Managing the Disadvantaged

Chapter 3 indicated that most tenant associations (TA’s), particularly in public housing communities, start under the supervisory eye of a conscientious community worker. They do not form directly from a tenant vision of how collective action may assist them. Possibly, this is because the original intent of public housing was to illustrate government benevolence. For example, in 1972 the Toronto council gave the order that would allow bulldozers to eradicate slum dwellings forever. They supposed, as I had when I first moved the classroom to the community, that exchanging one antagonistic physical space for a more comfortable one would solve people’s health, family and economic problems. Local planners imagined “a clean, modern building, bright and cheerful,” which city officials thought signalled the beginning of a new life for economically disadvantaged people. This new life alluded to in descriptive literature talked about citizen participation in community activities financed by federal support to new tenant associations. The Originally, the rationale for this provision described it as “good business practice” and a necessary condition for “providing decent, safe and sanitary housing,” although I could find no explanation of why funding for these associations was imperative for adequate housing (CMHC 1975:24).

This financial support for starting associations meant, according to government wisdom, that the tenants would have a mechanism for articulating demands for community services through their associations. As tenants specified the kind of social programming
they needed, such as employment assistance, the city could direct monies to provide appropriate resources. This was met with some opposition from some middle class citizens who felt that aid for the building of low income housing was the only assistance those tax monies should provide. Some activists cautioned planners about the hostility of tenants in the United States, advising that tenants would become more militant without tenant associations. Others contended that community involvement would always be difficult since tenants would not want to risk the disapproval of the landlord. The history of tenant associations in Canada has proved the latter to be true, while the militancy of public housing tenants served or not served by associations has not. The introduction of an association to the tenants' community frequently causes internal tensions. Overt confrontation is rare and easily controlled because many tenants don't want others to be vocal or cause trouble. The tenants who impose this control prefer not to communicate dissatisfaction with their living conditions in case assistance stops.

In my view, government funding of tenant associations purposely extended control over these communities and served as a watchful eye over the activities of some tenants seen as complainers or trouble makers. The government now had a permanent window into the community, monitoring funds, maintaining contact and legitimizing all this in the name of social development. At the same time, politicians made public statements about turning "ghettos of the poor into communities that offer hope and opportunity" (CMHC 1974). That tenants have not experienced the hope and opportunity promised suggests there were some flaws in the plan government set up for them.

By using City Housing employees for direction, they bureaucratized the process by which tenants could form an association. Consequently, many initiatives and community
activities serve to implement programs and ideas for improvement that originate outside the tenant community. Housing employees lead the association's executive through the process of submitting an application for program funding, or bring agency representatives to meet association members to set up activities. Longview has, only in the last year, taken these essential tasks on themselves.

The start-up funding is $5 per unit. It is provided by the Ontario Housing Corporation (OHC) to a maximum of $500. As in Longview, a group of three to eight tenants, usually identified and assisted by a City Housing employee, apply by submitting an outline of their plans and objectives. This is a relatively simple, but official process. The funding to develop an organizational structure is $15 per unit to a maximum of $2,000, provided 51% of tenants favour the idea of formation (CMHC 1974). To receive this, groups must hold a general meeting, present a proposed slate of officers, an outline of activities, a budget, short-term objectives and the proposed structure of the association. This kind of strategic planning, while rarely the choice of tenants or the structure with which they are familiar and comfortable, is how associations get going. Tenants who voluntarily come to meetings are not usually antagonistic to the idea of a tenant association and those who are antagonistic stay away, with the result that seven associations have been formed in London. In this chapter, I will contrast how outsiders perceive the function of the tenants' association and, in my opinion, the well-articulated purpose that Longview tenants now define.

One would expect that because tenant associations are externally motivated, perceptions about the reasons for their formation may reflect the views of someone other than tenants. A review of some British studies attempting to clarify the formation issue
pointed out that tenant responses have been influenced by the answers or options provided by self-report surveys (Cairncross, Clapham and Goodlad 1992). These options, often the choice of researchers and community organizers, narrowed the reasons for formation. Three functions were offered by the researchers: to lodge grievances against the local authority, to provide education in self-managing the complex and to establish a communication link between the housing administration and the tenants. Remembering that tenants do not play an active role in forming their association, it is important to investigate how they begin to perceive it works for their community. It could be assumed that the lodging of grievances either gives birth to a TA or is the reason for its continuance. This did fuel participation in the study reported by McWilliams (1988). It may also assist City Housing to deal more efficiently and succinctly with grievances. However, the major purpose that tenants express is their wish to gain respect and to be encouraged to become productive members of the community.

Cairncross, Clapham and Goodlad (1992) completed a study expanding even more on the formation issue. They argued that previously held notions of tenant associations as being strictly functional are not only false but stem from external control of TA activities. Tenant associations do not exist only to fill in the gaps left by the network of formal organizations serving the community. To assume this purpose, according to Cairncross, Clapham and Goodlad (1992) forces the role of tenant associations into an "impersonal and deterministic" framework. It denies the way tenants may wish to decide what their own agenda will be and to act purposefully on issues of their own making, those that have little or nothing to do with the purpose for which others assisted to set up the association. In Longview, a paid worker came armed with a vision of a successful tenant experience in
the United Stated in which tenants had become managers of their own complex. When I interviewed this worker and asked her to explain the impetus for forming the Longview association, her immediate reply was "to be able to provide the community with a rental unit for programs" (Interview by author, Flo, Nov. 10, 1994). The worker's willingness to start the process depends very much on the trusting and productive relationship that she has developed with the tenant community. The support tenants receive while they get going is a product of that relationship and in no way involves a commitment from other social service workers to encourage tenant involvement. Flo was sincere about wanting empowerment for tenants (Interview by author, Flo, Nov. 10, 1994), compared to some other City Housing employees. She was a collaborator with other tenant association starting up.

City Housing has expected workers to maintain a neutral position in relation to the tenant community (Interview by author, Flo, Nov. 10, 1994). In the Longview community itself, there are no neutral opinions when it involves Housing in its dealings with the community. Nor are there neutral acts suggesting that resistance and struggle are defined by establishing a TA with tenant leaders. Housing administrators may threaten to kick tenants out of units if participation is, in their view, too low or if tenants are not in the recreation unit a certain number of hours weekly. In a recent incident, a property manager threatened to take back the recreation unit if the association did not pass the books to their auditor immediately. He had no authority to do this, but tenants, whose homes are in his hands, do not always know that.

Particularly in the first two or three years of the association, one tenant during the interviews reported that any communication by TA with City Housing resulted in some
resistance by tenants because the City Housing administration denied or filled requests haphazardly (Interview with author, Francis, October 14, 1994). Compromises with other workers, with Housing or with other tenants were hard won and dominated much of the activity during this time. The history of a tenant association in public housing is peppered with conflict, cooperation, internal antagonism and pressures from the wider community. There is no easy way to make it happen, nor does it receive much support from the legislated bodies that support TAs with start-up funding.

Acknowledging the Legitimacy of Tenant Associations

The organizational structure of the Ministry of Housing for the Province of Ontario includes a Tenant Support Services Branch. In Appendix I at the end of chapter 7, I provide an organizational chart to show how this branch supports and encourages financially the work of tenant associations. The organizational structure of City Housing contains the local administration for low income housing. As shown in Appendix II, it does not include tenant associations, even though they expect input and joint decision-making to support their relationship. In fact, there is a tenant representative on the board of directors of City Housing. If you telephone the information office for the City of London, there is no listing for tenant associations even though all tenant associations have units, and some of these units have telephones listed at a permanent address. The tenants' association works as a community agency by it is not recognized as such. To reach a tenant association by telephone, a caller will have to contact City Housing. On two occasions their representative would not give out the TA number. Although the maintenance division at City Housing might call on association members to talk to
problem tenants or to monitor their neighbours for wrongdoing, decision-making committees formed by City Housing ignored tenants as part of the property management team. Under 'Responsibilities of Housing Authority Members' (Housing Authority is the old name for City Housing), a book of guidelines put out by City Housing, it states that any representatives of Housing must ensure that "tenant organizations and members of the general public are familiar with the policies of the authority." Yet, it was only within the last year and a half of my involvement that tenants had access to policy and procedure manuals and then only by contacting a tenant federation. However, that federation is funded by the city and is connected more to tenants in the private market. Policy familiarity, as well as rights and privileges, has been left to the discretion of Housing employees, and they often neglect to communicate that information to tenants and, at the same time, neglect to use the policy familiarity in a consistent interpretation with tenants. Although Housing allowed its workers to assist with the formation of tenant associations, tenants received a message from Housing that there was no commitment to two-way communication as intended, only one-way. Reflections in the interviews illustrated this.

The relationship between the TA and City Housing, about what managing the property actually entails, was constantly problematic because of the uncertainty about who controlled what and the reticence to inform tenants about that. In an article on tenant life McClelland (1991), reported the difficulties of organizing tenants and the danger of getting "co-opted by the landlord into doing his job." This, he wrote, destroyed the credibility of the TA executive, citing the case of tenants who left garbage on the floor instead of putting it in the garbage chute. City Housing called on members of the tenants' association to monitor and correct this behaviour. City Housing did not consider whether
it is the landlord's or the tenant's job to monitor the situation and bring offending tenants in line with policy. There was no negotiation, only the assumption by City Housing that tenants have an obligation to monitor each other because of the handouts they already receive.

At Longview, because the city collects garbage under a private contract with Housing, tenants sometimes put garbage out on non-collection days, especially if they live across from private rentals where the city collects garbage on rotating days. The associations are frequently asked to stop tenants from doing this. The problem is two-fold. Tenants say that since they have a different garbage day than the rest of the community, this makes them visible as different. If tenants monitor the situation, it puts them in the unfavourable position of monitoring other tenants and creating interpersonal conflict. Moreover, they contend that garbage collection is a right, not a privilege. The city does not isolate other areas of the city by establishing different garbage days, nor our neighbours required to censure each other if one of them inadvertently puts garbage out two days early.

Tenants pay city taxes as part of their rent, and it is not their responsibility to police other tenants. While this may seem insignificant, it signals the way in which Housing employees treat tenants as people in debt to the city. Tenants must resist these outsider perceptions that construct their responsibilities by prioritizing their status as welfare recipients. Tenants want to be seen as citizens deserving of city services and of the respect other citizens receive.

More recently, City Housing asked tenants to do a spring-walk-around and post notices on the doors of all tenants who had not maintained clean up procedures on their
property. At a recent community meeting, tenants refused to accept this responsibility. They believed that to ask tenants to do this constituted passing-the-buck and co-opted tenants to do a job for which City Housing is paid. Moreover, it created hostility and bad feeling in the community. Either way, it was unacceptable to tenants. It illustrates the way in which roles are consistently problematic, because City Housing, in using TAs to implement policy, took and continue to take the liberty of ignoring the rights and privileges of tenants as renters and citizens.

The association's role in the community, while concerned with tenants' asserting and defining the way in which they want to participate in community life, constantly addresses this tension. Association members react negatively to and resist verbally what they see as the association's inability to act as agents for the community. One frustrated tenant, also a president of the association, recognized that "the tenants' association seems useless" (Interview with author, Kim, November 8, 1994).

Since City Housing administration uses tenant associations for lodging grievances, they often refuse to talk directly to individual tenants if they are not on the TA executive (Author’s journal, January, 1994). A property manager instructs the tenant to "go through your TA," to not talk directly to the local Housing property manager. In this way, the property manager minimizes interaction with tenants and the hassle they may create.

Leys and Mendell (1992) point out that metro governments try to absorb the power of community groups by seeming to use democratic discourse which ultimately robs them of any real power. Tenants indicate that they are aware of this and, in my view, it is an important part of choosing other strategies for community development than the
ones suggested by City Housing. For example, rather than reporting untidy back yards, the president bought a lawn mower for the association that tenants can borrow. She uses the tension between the TA as the vehicle for getting things done for Housing and getting things done for tenants. Along with the repairs that tenants as renters accept as responsibilities, they may be more prepared to become involved protesting inadequate living conditions, complaining about upkeep or supporting social movements for equality, as their role as citizen evolves.

Tenant management of their role in community affairs affects tenant participation keeping it low on some occasions and increasing it on others. There are few tenants who would volunteer to be the foot soldier of City Housing aware as they are of the external control Housing imposes. The latter issues directives sometimes only to their workers intended to be implemented by the tenants’ association for the community. They rarely accept tenant-initiated communication or input beforehand. In fact, a newly elected president of the TA, phoned City Housing three times and left a message to make contact and suggest ways of keeping in touch but no ever phoned her back. More recently, Housing mailed a letter stipulating that tenants should set up a volunteer program to take over some of the maintenance problems now looked after by unionized paid employees. Program providers such as the police who run a rookie baseball league contact City Housing before they contact the tenants. Preschool programs using the TAs as community contacts or the association's recreation unit always make arrangements with City Housing or the community relations worker that deals on a site with tenant issues before the tenant association. There are several levels of decision makers that outsiders talk to before they consider tenants. This means that resisting outsider perceptions and
prioritizing tenant concerns is a large part of the struggle in which tenants are involved.

**Tenant Concerns**

In reflective interviews with the tenants, they often came back to what they believed their association should be even when the question did not address that. With day to day family concerns and conflicts involving benefit administrators, there is rarely a chance to step back from their immediate involvement in the association and think about what motivates their efforts. Reflection is compatible with critical practice. It encourages the dialectical process that provides a context for learning (Little 1991). As a result of their reflections, the association began to construct a mission statement and a set of objectives or goals they would circulate among tenants to strengthen the LTA's verbally stated commitment to the community. The interviews assisted that process.

Their perceptions of the role of the tenant association illustrate that tenant experience shapes how they expect their association to act. They reflect issues that they are sensitive to and vulnerable about as tenants, while my perspectives often stem from my privilege as homeowner and middle class income earner. As a board member on another community agency, I vote on how that community agency distributes their funding, handle their staff and the facility, even though I am not directly served by the agency. The tenants, directly affected by events in their community, make decisions and act relative to their relationship with each other and with Housing. They rarely identify financial issues, the lodging of grievances with housing or the management of the recreation unit in their statements about the purpose of the TA. This may suggest, in my opinion, that the TA, although five years into its life, develops its own identity and works out its own specific
purpose that fulfils a critical agenda using their definitions of need, not definitions supplied by others. The support that tenants used as they travelled through that process is the support I offered as a critical adult educator.

Organizing their responses into categories, I gave them names inferred by their words and ones that I hoped would be useful to them and to others who are at a similar point in the growth of their association. Leadership (both instrumental and moral), tenant voice, and practical purposes best explain how tenants articulate the role of the association in their community. I examined the comments occurring most often and devised section headings from that point. The tenant president who read the completed third draft of this thesis thought they captured key areas.

The Practical Use of the Tenant Association

There is a contrast between how tenants and how agency and government workers see the function of the TA. The workers often spoke about the need for the associations to be involved in handling funding resources and to provide links to program providers. One saw TAs as a device for obtaining financial aid from outside the community and reiterated this in a metaphor describing the TA as "a funnel into the community." Another worker who works in the community daily, expands the TAs role by her commitment to including them whenever possible. She agrees tenants benefit from dialogue with other members of the community:

...anything that I go to...I try really hard to have at least one tenant come with me each time so that it's coming right from the mouth of a person who lives there rather than me. (Interview by author, Sandy, Nov. 10, 1994)

She continued by saying that other tenants may perceive this as a way to play a leadership
role in the community.

The tenant association itself is regarded by many tenants as an official body that, as one tenant put it, "should be represented by an office." One wanted "the office ... in the office, not in someone's home," a temporary move by one president with a preschool child. Many tenants thought the TA was a business and that it served people in this capacity. This parallels City Housing's regard for tenants. Office status awards credibility to something in their day to day lives. An office gives their association equal status.

The office itself has the trappings of a business, with filing cabinets, voice mail, photocopying available, people coming and going daily and all the outward signs of a busy enterprise. One executive members expressed practical reasons by saying that when you were part of the TA:

...you got public relations work, regular office procedure experience, cash experience here too, because of the ongoing fundraising. Once again, your budgeting experience is right there. It's an invaluable outreach work.
(Interview by author, Kim, Nov. 8, 1994)

Her trademark for promoting the TA is "a newsletter that tenants recognize as coming from the TA." This has been a contentious issue. The effect of the newsletter is hard to isolate. Is it the effect of a catchy newsletter or the compelling words of a community leader contained in the newsletter that motivates people? Who knows? Longview has both just to be sure.

The literature on tenant associations often gives TAs a narrow fixed role (Cairncross, Clapham and Goodlad 1992) while tenants themselves describe it as fluid and adaptable. They assume:
...we can adapt the system to serve ourselves. You've got the base framework, but personalities being what they are, I think we just adapt from that and take from that what we can use, what we are comfortable with and work from there. (Interview by author, Kim, Nov. 8, 1994)

This is a point for practitioners working with tenant associations to keep in mind.

Community workers and possibly activists tend to see a more political purposes for a tenant association but this threatens their longevity. In my case, in the beginning of our collaboration, that tenants failed to be overtly confrontational about injustices frustrated me. They seemed to let things pass that were obviously unjust, to accept bullying and unfair practices bordering on abuse. This may be the reason that outsiders come to stipulate the direction and activities of a tenant association by outsiders, yet the tenant's future is less certain than it would be if tenants shape not only how but when their association decides to develop voice. Tenants must chose the context for confrontation.

My public support of the way they articulate issues can do more to encourage their awareness to grow than changing how they express injustice to what I think is a more powerful and accurate way of communicating it. This is not a generalization, but applicable in this instance.

One tenant's contention that the purpose of the TA is "to be good with kids" again points out that the association can never separate its purpose and activities from the day to day reality of tenants. Their concern for each other, for their children, especially in a family development, and for the well being of each family means that working from that concern will draw the community into the activities of the association. That does not mean it is leaving political issues behind, but it does mean that resistance and protest cannot always be on the front burner.
On Leadership as Listening

Most tenants interviewed hold the opinion that the tenant association executive must be effective communicators, motivating, good listeners and build self-esteem with others. In fact, while all these characteristics are repeated often in conversation with tenants, every tenant interviewed emphasized listening in a number of different ways. One tenant who comes to meetings but never takes an active part on the executive explains the problem with the TA during the early years:

Everybody thinks [the TA] is here and telling [tenants] what to do, but they're not actually here to listen to what [the tenant] is explaining.  
(Interviews by author, Freda, Oct. 4, 1994; Doris, Dec.1, 1994)

Yet, as an observer at meetings and in other activities with tenants, I don't see them not listening to each other as much as I concern myself with listening to tenants. Yet, tenants say that the TA must:

- listen to what goes on in the community...go with tenants to Housing and sit there and listen, but not speak for the tenant. (Interview by author, Francis, Oct. 14, 1994)
- to care about the tenants, to take a few minutes to listen instead of pretending to listen, but not.  (Interview by author, Freda, Oct.4, 1994)

One social agency worker, in the interview, remembered how teens recognized how the TA heard what they were saying. When the TA wanted to get rid of some furniture:

the teens said it was theirs and they didn't want to get rid of it and the TA listened to them ....  (Interview by author, Barb, Sept. 8, 1994)

Listening, as a key component of tenant relationships, comes up in many contexts throughout our conversations. One executive member links participation in the TA with Housing's historical tendency to ignore tenants in favour of its own agenda, in other words, to not listen. She is not sure that the LTA serves any purpose if it can't make City Housing listen to tenants pointing out that
People just don't think that Housing is listening well enough at this point in time to get that kind of participation. (Interview by author, Francis, Oct. 14, 1994)

She infers that tenants would be more likely to support the TA if they thought it could harness the ear of City Housing. These concerns follow directly from the history of neglect of City Housing as well as from their relationship with the larger community in the city itself. Referring to the Longview community as being put in a glass bubble by City Housing (Interview by author, Shirley, Oct. 4, 1994), Shirley identified how tenants are isolated from mainstream life. There is more than a hint in those words that tenants want to act as independent citizens and be heard, not dependent ones managed by a paternalistic system where passivity results.

Colorado (1988) talks about the importance of listening when she interviews native elders to better understand how native wisdom contrasts with knowledge from western scientific institutions:

Sometimes I have all of my information and the person goes right on talking two hours more! Some of our people have never had anyone listen to them; someone they trust to talk to. (Colorado 1988: 56)

The tenants have a similar experience. Their daily life brings them in contact with government employees, social service workers, and teachers. In most of their relationships they are expected to listen. Now, they want their own association to involve someone who will listen to them. That is more important for these tenants than it might be for a parent who phones the school trying to find a teacher to listen to their complaints about their child. Listening, in some senses, becomes a activity which indicates a recognition and worth. The tenant's knowledge is important. To be listened to means that you have credibility, worth and value. There is nothing unusual in that view.
On Qualities of Leadership

A member of the executive explains, in her view, just who a good candidate for the tenant presidency is:

Somebody that's had experience dealing with bureaucrats.....dealing in a community setting, lived on his or her neighbourhood for a long time, that doesn't have any trouble. (Interview by author, Kim, Nov. 8, 1994)

Her words have been echoed by others. Community leaders in Longview explain that difficulties in your personal life mean this is not the time to be active on the tenant association. In one case, a member of the tenant executive confronted another with a moral problem occurring in her family and encouraged that person to resign her executive position. In my experience, tenants can be fastidious in demanding a squeaky clean record from tenant members of the executive. Considering the conflicts of interest that the public puts up with from politicians, this may seem praiseworthy, but I have no insights on why tenants take this austere attitude.

One worker in the community is insightful when I question her about a successful president. Her comments are valuable since she has worked at two levels of Housing and lived in public housing herself:

You have to have a lot of guts....be thick skinned... You have to be balanced, balance the job of president with your own personal needs. You have to be willing to support the members of the association to deal with contentious issues with the Authority. (Interview by author, Flo, Nov. 10, 1994)

She sees the relationship with Housing as a fight, a fight to make the community better, not the people in it. Her remarks point out that community leadership is more than a person's commitment to an issue that oppresses the community in some way. It involves personal issues, an up front manner and an understanding of what is worth fighting for.
That this association has kept a president in office for the last five years suggests that there are tenants with specific capabilities able to fill the job in this way.

Tenants expect their elected officers to play a motivational role, and often speak directly about their expectation that these people will be models of leadership. They should:

...try to get people out and get them involved and let them know if we're doing something you don't like, then question it. (Interview by author, Francis, Oct. 14, 1994)

...empower the have nots to understand that what the haves have isn't necessarily the best. (Interview by author, Kim, Nov. 8, 1994)

The second quotation addressed how tenants can start to establish an equitable relationship with others and not be measuring someone's worth by possessions, but by initiative and independence.

One tenant, active in the community but not on the TA, describes a useful metaphor to explain how the LTA might motivate the community towards involvement:

You get your kids involved in your community, you've got it made. If you don't get them involved, you've lost it. You let one child help and another one comes, then another and so on. You use the kids as bait. It's like a rope, you get what you want by roping it in. (Interview by author, Doris, Dec. 1, 1994)

Community members perceive motivation in a more complex way than community organizers have in the past. In a 160 unit family complex, CMHC estimates there are 280 adults and 600 children under eighteen years of age (CMHA 1974). When you decide to work with only one-third of the people, the adults, many of whom already have the burden of single parenthood, you leave a large group of the community unattended. This won't work in any neighbourhood initiative, I suggest, no matter how pressing the issues are.
Moreover, these parents know that their living situation and the economic state of their life affects their children as much as them. In the last year and a half, I have increased my contact with the children of tenants and that has put me in touch with more adults. By improving programs in this age group, the TA increased attendance at meetings and won the confidence of more tenants. In addition, the TA secured permanent funding for their teen program sending out a clear message that the TA works for all members of the community. This is an aspect of motivation that activists and organizers should use.

**On Self-Esteem**

Although there is frequent reference to women on welfare as having problems with self-esteem, its application to tenants such as those in Longview needs to be problematised. Newspaper columnists, planners of community programs, and those concerned with the social development needs of people on welfare often mention self-esteem as lacking. Notions about self-esteem often come from people who think they have acquired it. They identify those who don't using another life experiences. Tenants are likely to mirror an interpretation of self-esteem provided by outsiders because it provides a relatively easy remedy for their problems. However, programs that teach it may be another manifestation of education for the social good, serving to correct deficit characteristics in the participant rather than improve the lives of tenants.

At a community meeting a couple of years ago, some community members not living in Longview expressed concern about the low self-esteem of tenants and how it served as a barrier to their improvement. The one tenant present stood up and reported that because the welfare system imposed so many barriers to tenants getting ahead, they
had to be more creative than other people in solving their problems. She pointed out that low self-esteem was not necessarily self-imposed, but that it was more often a message sent by the community outside of Longview. In fact, she contended, tenants often felt they had done a good job of surviving although agency workers often let them know they had failed in numerous ways. (Author's journal 1992) Schools earmarked their children as 'ghetto kids'. Another tenant talked about how single motherhood leaves a blemish on a woman's character stigmatizing her socially. As a welfare recipient, you are expected to receive and not expected to give. (Interview with author, Francis, Oct. 14, 1994)

How self-esteem counts or does not count in the lives of people receiving income subsidies matters but perhaps not in any conventional way. There is evidence that TA members relate self-esteem to feelings of worth that grow from being considered an equal member of the community. When asked about the current structure of the TA, one tenant, a community leader but not active as part of the TA executive, connects self-esteem to the way in which tenants perceive the association treating all tenants equally:

I think, it'd be a group of people with no titles, personally. Titles frighten people. If I keep going around saying well, I'm chairperson, this is the cochairperson, this is a helper, this is a helper. That hurts some people's self-esteem, for one. Not only that, it isn't an ego boost. (Interview by author, Doris, Dec. 1, 1994)

This tenant spoke of her understanding that "on paper you can put down that your a chairperson, because your asking for a donation," but she is quite clear that in the tenant community, such labels can be damaging. When one tenant tries to be more than another, in any way, others feel less worthwhile and may strike back. Self esteem is threatened in this instance but it may not be absent in other areas.

The comment of a community worker about tenants and self-esteem came from
reflecting on a recent program for tenants where participants discussed leadership:

...the tenants who went, I think that every single one of them gained in self-esteem. They felt that they were taken very seriously and as equals by others attending from agencies. (Interview by author, Flo, Nov. 10, 1994)

What is important about this is that, again, she links it to equality and being listened to honestly and sincerely. She does not connect it to personal issues, capabilities or character deficits. By participating on a day to day basis with tenants, one learns how the inequities imposed by tenant life in a public housing complex affect tenants’ ability to act. Low self-esteem is a label that needs closer scrutiny. It has a social context not conveyed by using 'self' to describe esteem.

**On Tenant Voice**

Participatory research affirms the right of the oppressed to speak about their own situation (Hall 1993, xvii). However, the intent must be to resist domination and control, not just to speak for self-gratification. Collins (1990) uses the term “self-definition” to explain how people begin to recognize the power of their own voice

Tenants reiterate how important it is to talk about issues from their perspective. They know their are different and it this way it forms resistance. I call the interpretation they offer 'tenant voice'. Tenants are aware that workers or volunteers in the community cannot take the place of the way tenants' express their concerns. One tenant explains:

They're [tenants] causing waves and the waves we cause, the more notice we get and that's what we want. We want more people to sit up and take notice that we aren't going to sit back and take shit from nobody, whether it's housing or somebody from the outside community. (Interview by author, Kim, Nov. 8, 1994)

Another tenant confirms her conviction that “we should be included when people think of
the city of London, you know” (Interview by author, Shirley, Oct. 4, 1994). She mentioned how others discount tenants when they speak because they are tenants. This is not just neglect or ignoring tenants but indicates there is less worth in tenant voice. When I suggested that she probably meant she wanted tenant voice to be integrated with those of the larger community, she disagreed. She insisted on inclusiveness and emphasized the difference (Interview by author, Francis, Oct. 14, 1994).

I don't want to put too fine a meaning on the correction this tenant made, but the dictionary provides a distinction. Integration means mixed or blended, while inclusion means in addition to. Did Francis know that when voices are mixed it is too easy to silence the voice of those oppressed? I appreciated her distinction it illustrates how the idea of tenant voice can be used. Presently, integrating tenant voices with those of the larger community means that they get lost, subsumed by those more dominant. The voice of authority is heard above and before the tenants. Inclusiveness suggests that their voices are heard in addition to others that may be there. In the interview, I should have probed more to find out how she saw the difference in meaning. I think she was right to correct me, because there is always a danger of looking to the mainstream for answers where tenant voices are well hidden. There are implications for practitioners in the way Francis constructs tenant voice and I will return to the idea in chapter 7.

Because, as one tenant has already said, the association's functions is one of leadership, tenants expect executive members to articulate issues to and for other tenants. For example, if the association receives a letter from Housing regarding transfer policies, the tenant association is expected to interpret the complexity of that to tenants. The tenant association is the translator of official language an restates messages so that tenants
can use their voice to respond. Otherwise, they may not feel comfortable responding. If press reports stereotype and label tenants, the association's members resist by denying it using positive facts about the community. The TA helps to interpret messages:

I think the TA helps to breach the gap between the tenants and Housing. Housing says one thing and you don't know whether you can believe em or no. You can tell the TA what's going on and they can help you decipher. (Interview by author, Shirley, Oct. 4, 1994)

While it is true that the TA acts as a communication vehicle, this quotation illustrates how tenants will construct meaning, will use their voice, if the message is clear to them. Tenants know that Housing has not been honest in telling them what they can and can't do. The language of directives is often complex and bureaucratic. It is up to the association to ferret out the meaning, to collaborate with tenants about what should be done about it. Shirley describes the tenant association like the branches of a tree and every time it reaches out somewhere else to grow, Housing chops it off. It is hard to know whether the tenant who offered these words was thinking about the lack of consistency or the lack of honesty with regard to Housing. I suggest she gained awareness about how others purposely restrict the input of tenant voice.

I have known this tenant for four years when she joined the TA. In the past year, she took the initiative to insert her 'voice' more often. She is more aware of the injustices tenant's experience. In fact, at this writing she is considering running for president.

Summary

Non-hierarchical structures are one way organizations try to eliminate equalities between members and those administrating. A housing administration in Michigan uses a
tenant council to lead the community association. The chairperson is changed often and the governing body less formalized. In an effort to create a non-hierarchical leadership structure, the LTA considered this idea on different occasions. They also thought it may encourage tenants to participate more. Moving from one structure to another is problematic for a TA because tenants demand as much consistency and stability from the association as possible. To change it may only create uncertainty. Their lives contain enough of that. With low participant numbers at meetings, community agreement would be agreement by a critical mass of no more than 25. The discussion and time needed to work through who would form a council, how it would be formed and how it would operate would mean precious time funnelled away from community development. Tenants may see a council as an 'official' structure giving credibility only to leaders association and some clout, but such an important decision must be theirs alone and then it has a chance of surviving.

The discussion about structure and the TA executive might form a council had an effect. Meetings moved noticeably from the formal, where Robert's rules were applied, to the informal where the rules prioritized tenant input from the floor, the door, the kitchen or wherever else there is a tenant with input. This may be why meeting attendance rose in the last eight months I worked with the Longview tenants and why tenants offered more to discussions.

A tenant's journey from "silence to language and action", as Lorde (1984: 43) puts it, does not follow either an incremental or linear process. A tenant who is vocal one day can be quiet, withdrawn and afraid the next. This reflects the uncertainty of their life, the tenuous economic situation under which they live and the fear the restricts tenants from
articulating issues. What influences the return of their silence is not apathy, or lack of motivation, but usually signifies that their energies must be refocussed on an incorrect welfare cheque usually leaving them without food. It may be a family issue, or health concern, but I have never observed a tenant backing off from being involved in the community without having another life issue that had to take precedence.

I experience this ebb and flow too, in my relationship with the TA. One moment there is a lot of activity in which the tenants are working to get community involvement, taking surveys on some community issue or contacting agencies for needed programs. The next moment, all that comes to a halt, sometimes for weeks. They rarely stop all activities completely. They solve their problem and get back to what they were doing. Or they may resign and elect another member of the executive, but in my years of participating with the TA, I have never seen them abandon their vision of making the community a better place to live.

A compatible agency worker describes how the uncertainty affects their function with the result that:

…it's sometimes unfortunate that they have to understand the process, but the tenants' association can make a difference with London Housing, with the City of London, with programs trying to get anything done, innovations, whatever. They have to understand. (Interview by author, Barb, Sept. 8, 1994)

Just how the tenants come to 'understand the process' is not clear (another missed chance on my part), but another worker confirms that there is something they know about it:

…they see themselves more as advocates for the tenants, on the tenants behalf, making the tenants needs known to Housing.........people are very afraid of them because they see them in charge of whether or not they have a roof over their head. (Interview by author, Flo, Nov. 10, 1994)
Agency and community workers, begin to accept the flow of information from the tenants to other locations in the community, and to welcome the inclusion of tenant voices. That after all is how stereotypical notions of tenants as passive and unmotivated begins to change. Tenants on the other hand see information coming to them from the larger community and then they have to translate the intent of it to their community. It seems that people working with the tenants (but not tenants) agree that the tenants' voices should be heard in the larger community, reiterating Lorde's idea of shifting silence to language. That must occur as tenants choose, not at a time when others think it is appropriate.

Tenants, on the other hand, are still very much reactive, testing the waters, finding out what they can say and can't say, but not actually making a lot demands from their community position. When tenants initiate an interpretation of their reality, then that may be a crucial time in the development of their community as actors or agents in the community. I provide evidence for this in Chapter 7.

Because City Housing has guided the formation of tenant associations, tenants have understandably been slow to articulate and learn how the TA can serve them. The role of the housing administration in supporting or repressing tenant activities has been ignored in the literature. In No Way to Live, Baxter (1988) described how some workers support or control individual tenants. However, there has been little describing the particulars of institutional control and the way it sometimes reverts to assistance. Consequently, much of the literature relating to tenant associations affirms that TAs have accomplished what the Housing administration imagined they would or they have not accomplished it and failed. Yet, the purpose and nature that this tenant association pursues, suggests that tenants themselves are expanding their agenda and moving away
from the one intended for them. It is their experience as tenants that assists them in framing how they see the role of the TA, not how others construct that role. As one tenant puts it, "...a body of knowledge doesn't replace one iota of experience" (Interview by author, Kim, Nov. 8, 1994). It is tenant experience that has produced a body of knowledge that expands ideas about how tenant associations function in their community.
CHAPTER 5
FROM BACKDOOR LEARNING TO ACTION

Introduction

Collins (1990) suggested, and I confirmed, the tendency of workers and administrators in institutions to provide information to others about people such as tenants. Many have never met a tenant but often draw conclusions on the basis of their status as welfare recipients. The result is these workers may dehumanize and objectify tenants. The inadequacies of tenants become more important than any capabilities they may have. Chapter 4 adhered to the recommendations of Cairncross, Clapham and Goodlad (1992). It used direct evidence from Longview tenants to better understand how they want their association to function. By comparing their perceptions to those of workers outside their community, I showed that tenant descriptions were different.

Tenant expectations form, in part, from the injustices and poor treatment they experience as welfare recipients. The lack of respect from the bureaucracy that administers welfare, the scorn of the wider London community against tenants as people living willingly off the government purse and the stereotypes maintained in the media influence what tenants see as important when organizing in their community. Tenants in the association spend a lot of time convincing their neighbours that they can and will provide a democratic environment for dialogue and respect everyone’s contribution. They articulate this at community meetings and demonstrate it in their relationships with other tenants. Tenants on the executive of the association take extra time to listen to each other’s complaints and lend assistance without judging either the person or the content of the request.
People from other communities throughout London, may perceive that the association fulfills an instrumental purpose only. They talk about the association as the link to City Housing, the mechanism for starting community programs or the means whereby a recreation unit can be rented. While their input is valuable, it stems from an objective understanding of what tenant’s needs. They do not experience life as the tenants in Longview do although they may understand some tenant problems because they work with tenants. It is not surprising that some workers rarely mention or attempt to address how the association can deal with the issues that result in tenants being belittled and intimidated.

This chapter uses direct tenant evidence again to introduce and clarify backdoor learning. This may be defined as a process in which tenants use the organizing activities of the association for learning. These learning incidents may occur in the community with other tenants, in a tenant meeting, at the City Housing office or wherever the business of the association takes tenants. Backdoor learning is a process in which tenants use the context of their lives to articulate how they perceive their relationship to others in society. Learning occurs because I, as a collaborator, do not accept the role in which I define their needs or the injustices they experience. That is what the tenants must work toward. It is a process in which they gain a deeper understanding of the inequities that have become barriers to their success and they do this, in part, by collaborating with the researcher. They dialogue with other members of the community and implement strategies devised and initiated by tenants to bring improvements to their community. This process assists them to gain new knowledge. These are the products of backdoor learning. As identified in Chapter 2, backdoor learning is unpredictable, unsystematic and unstructured. A tenant
identified "the back door approach" and I borrowed her phrase to describe this process of learning (Interview with author, Francis, Oct. 14, 1994).

Identifying this process requires a closer look at the context of tenant interaction and that is one of the purposes of this study. The knowledge gained can be organized using Park's (1993) theory of knowledge. He describes instrumental, interactive and critical knowledge as products of a learning process that may apply to those involved in participatory research. These categories provide a convenient framework for using context to present evidence of backdoor learning. The use of direct quotations obtained during the interviews with tenants is consistent with the idea that tenant knowledge reveals new understanding. Anecdotal evidence from my journal and my observations at meetings suggest how long-term collaboration assists by surfacing the many different contexts which support new learning. For example, the tenants in this study learned from many interactions how administrative power works to control tenants. Tenants finally articulated it. *Backdoor learning* occurred over a period of four years.

Later in this chapter, I refer to the first phase, second phase and third phase of the development of the association as another way of further organizing the data. The attempt here, is to show that learning is incremental, that knowledge gained predicts some progress from phase to phase. I also suggest that the learning experienced by individuals and the development of the LTA occur together. In my opinion, there is a purposeful progress in the activities of the association as different leaders emerge. *Backdoor learning* occurs at different times for everyone but it can be cumulative and the knowledge learned used as required.
Tenant Identification of Backdoor Learning

The influence for the notion that backdoor learning occurs came from Francis, a president of the association. She guided it through the second phase as the executive worked through the growing pains of gaining the support of the community. A busy mom with four children, she requested a transfer to Longview from another large public housing complex where she had earned a reputation for extensive community activity. She became president at a time when spirits were low, and community involvement close to nil. While she had some community experience working in other tenant groups, she had little exposure outside of tenant communities. When Longview elected her to the new executive, opportunities increased to initiate dialogue with City Housing and to work on committees in the process of identifying tenant concerns. These opportunities were the result of the provincial government initiating a community development project called Planning Together. She thought

It really sounded as if they did want to hear and know how the communities felt. I thought it was Housing's attempt to follow what the Ministry had laid down. I mean they're paid by the Ministry, they have to go by what policies are set forward. ...I also used [Planning Together] to gain some knowledge about [City Housing] some of their procedures, sort of a backdoor approach. (Interview by author, Francis, Oct. 14, 1994)

Her use of the words "backdoor approach" to identify how she learned about City Housing implies learning as a process. The opportunities that surfaced concurrent with her election created a fertile environment for backdoor learning that she did not have before. She had assumed that Housing acted in good faith by following government directives but in a meeting that saw tenants and Housing staff meet together, she learned how some employees can interpret these procedures inconsistently. Her reference to the
way in which knowledge can be obtained through the backdoor, is a useful metaphor because it suggests how knowledge comes to a learner unexpectedly. A door is opened from a previously closed position. Perhaps the opening is the process. The knowledge enters as the product.

The literature on participatory research mentions "creating social knowledge" (Comstock and Fox 1993), "the beginnings of a feeling of power" (Merrifield 1993), and "the process of popular production of the people's knowledge" (Gaventa 1993), to name a few examples. None, in my opinion, has included descriptions of the process of learning, choosing instead to isolate the knowledge itself without explicating the process. The way in which tenants produce the knowledge they need to confront others may reveal alternative, perhaps more productive sites of learning. This chapter investigates the process of knowledge production and suggests how it results in learning.

In the learning environment of a traditional classroom, the teacher frequently guides an interaction to promote learning. In backdoor learning tenants may be talking, watching, listening, engaging in dialogue or just thinking but they guide their own learning. Francis, in the quote above, said "it sounded like". This could mean that she was listening, interpreting, and learning at the same time, but was not necessarily engaged in dialogue. In classrooms the content is guided by curriculum objectives and ministry mandates, but in backdoor learning the process unfolds spontaneously and is not prescribed. The legitimate knowledge of classrooms is knowledge derived mainly from the teacher as expert or by considering the material being used as an authority.

Furthermore, teachers, on most occasions, present knowledge as neutral. When backdoor learning occurs, tenants like Francis, Fred, or Kim begin to realize from the interactions
involved, how they can take ownership of decisions affecting tenants and prove responsible in managing their community. When a significant authority in the tenant's life agrees to engage in dialogue, they perceive a commitment to communication that presumes good will in the minds of tenants even though that is not always the intention of the authority. The outcome is uncertain but tenants start optimistic about this commitment. It is often more profitable for tenants if they suspend this presumption and wait for evidence of the good will.

The learning tenants gain takes place when they assert themselves by responding to others who attempt to articulate the needs of the Longview community. If others accept that as legitimate, tenants begin to realize that others may have based their perceptions on assumptions derived from objective knowledge rather than on the lived experience of tenants. *Backdoor learning* occurs unpredictably because such situation occur haphazardly. This emphasizes the process rather than what is learned and illustrates how tenants' knowledge surfaces in a particular context. In this way, what tenants know and articulate can take precedence over what others outside the community say. The tenant's version is often more descriptive and complete.

This is part of the learning environment provided by the activities of the association. It may be an informal lunch at a tenant's house a car ride to City Housing or a community meeting. Issues do not wait for appropriate moments but emerge spontaneously when someone like myself or another tenant is ready to listen. Unlike the classroom it does not occur just when someone is ready to teach. Tenant reflections will show clearly that in the interaction between themselves and others they learn as much from the interplay of competing interests, for example theirs and those of City Housing, as
from what they may talk about as a positive initiative. When tenants talk and use their
voices to describe issues affecting their community, it is the articulation of their ideas and
perceptions that dislodges the control of others who have dominated the discourse (Code

Before the tenants’ association became active, tenants often accepted the
directions of others without responding. They put up with disparaging descriptions of
their community. Tenants were silent when faced with unwarranted threats of eviction or
unfair media attacks. Today, they are increasingly vocal, using their experiences to decide
themselves what action they need to take to improve conditions in their community. They
talk about how they want to assume management of their community. They confront the
stereotypes of others and display commitment to the motto on the front of their newsletter
"Working Together for Positive Change". Their motto was the most appropriate title for
this study.

Tenants engaged in backdoor learning on a continuum. Some are ready to learn
by participation in the association and others are not, often because they are still fearful
that there will be a backlash from City Housing. Consequently, collective action in tenant
communities is constantly incorporating tenants who have experienced backdoor learning
and influencing others who have not. The idea that collective action occurs
simultaneously as members in a social movement become aware of injustices may be
incomplete. In the first two years of the association, tenants frequently struggled to help
other tenants understand how the association could act as a voice for the community.
Today, tenants spend less time persuading and more time implementing ideas suggesting
that there are positive results from backdoor learning. Sharing in the process that yielded
these results demanded my commitment to a long-term collaboration with tenants that would uncover opportunities and open the door for learning.

My role as participant researcher was to be there with tenants for all stages of the process. During the first two years of the relationship, I became sceptical and on many occasions despondent because of my perceived lack of progress. Tenants seemed unresponsive to me as a participant in the community. I rationalized this as a researcher and counted on time to rectify it but the waiting was painful. Two months of inactivity passed when it seemed there was no forward momentum. Conflict in and out of community meetings was rampant and provided no resolutions. I arrived for a meeting with the executive to find the recreation unit shut and the members nowhere in sight. Charges of fraud against some executive members and internal community strife often suggested to me that events would result in the death of the association. A researcher present in the community as a participant observer, wanting to experience community action at monthly meetings, may have seen in these events the demise of the association or its inability to move forward.

Instead, I recognized and accepted each event as a step toward tenants making their own decisions about things that effect their community. Part of that step is facilitating relationships between those involved. Tenants changed the arrangements for a meeting without informing me, knowing that I was coming to it. I decided that they were experimenting with our relationship, with their authority and with working out control issues. I still believe that it is important for a collaborator/researcher to hang in through these events, to prove solidarity and to prove that he or she prioritizes their authority. This, too, is backdoor learning, the process of discovering who they can count on for
long-term assistance. On my part, I learned that my approach worked.

Similarly, if I interrupt to ameliorate conflict that erupts in community meetings, I dispense with an opportunity for tenants to investigate how they can use this conflict to establish a more stable relationship with each other in the future. They usually do return to stability without intervention. Conflicts always seemed to be a test, but I never experienced it as a barrier to progress except temporarily. This is, perhaps, another context in which tenants engaged in backdoor learning. It was a process of erupting and solving the issue and finding out how a resolution that works can be reached.

While we talked through conflicts, tenants in the association tenaciously kept performing their duties, stopping to process an event, and then going back to the job of organizing. Suddenly, a spontaneous outburst, in the form of a tenant request or complaints, brought the community meeting back to life. This was the impetus for tenants to get going again after a period of minimal involvement. Tenants fill the room, voices intrude to define community issues and action starts up again. What caused the discontinuity.

I reflect on this now as a natural process during which backdoor learning of some tenants caught up with tenants who had already experienced it and were ready to move on to further community action. The purpose it serves is to reinforce and rearticulate their commitment to other community members. Once again, it suggests that a collaborator/researcher may have to establish a long term relationship with communities that are in the early stages of organizing. Events as they are now in Longview substantiate the idea that a period of backdoor learning is essential if communities are to become strong enough to develop and ongoing approach to community improvement and maintain
organizing activities.

As the association matures, learning may take place through more formal methods such as structured learning opportunities in a larger focussed group. However, the informal nature of backdoor learning seemed to accommodate the beginning stages of learning for the LTA when membership was uncertain. This builds on Lovett's (1980) findings that structured learning was less popular even though tutors provided tenants with opportunities for formal classes in tenant-related issues.

Knowledge Production in Backdoor Learning

Backdoor learning results in knowledge that Park describes as instrumental, interactive and critical knowledge (1993). I use these categories to provide a framework for organizing the evidence describes the knowledge produced from backdoor learning. Instrumental knowledge can be thought of as objective knowledge because it may exist independent of human interaction. This kind of knowledge is most often associated with the natural world where cause and effect explain relationships. I use it to mean knowledge dependent on a specific context but which may also exist independently of it. For example, the bookkeeping skills which the tenants learned in order to manage the moneys allocated to the tenant association may be called instrumental knowledge. It allows tenants to learn something about the social world. It gives tenants a sense of the random manipulation of surplus money, a concept they rarely encounter in their lives. The process by which it is learned may be backdoor learning because it is learned unexpectedly, without planning and as a result of TA activities. The conversation that occurs between the tenant and the accountant may also contain backdoor learning that addresses what is
specific about the allocation of money where tenants are concerned. These skills often come to the community through outside experts. Tenants often pick up some aspects of teaching that will enable them to transfer these skills to other tenants who fill the elected position of treasurer. This is literacy in the context of their experience but literacy that involves not just reading and writing but a sense of ownership. They begin to understand how the association can legitimate how they manage and make decisions about the money they receive from government funding and how they handle the money they raise in the community.

Park uses the term instrumental social knowledge to describe what someone may learn about how their social world unfolds. For example, there are specific social skills that tenants learn why organizing can benefit the community. I will attempt to explicate this aspect of instrumental knowledge although it seems that such knowledge must also be critical if it is learned by tenants who apply it to their own situation. The oppression and degradation they experience because they are welfare recipients and live in subsidized housing means they learn about social structures to expose that oppression. This enables them to respond appropriately. This study uses instrumental knowledge as knowledge that can be objective but takes on additional meaning because tenants use it. I will categorize social knowledge as critical.

Interactive knowledge, Park's second product, takes meaning from the relationships tenants develop with others, both satisfactory relationships and those that frustrate them or create tensions. I explicate this knowledge, not by restricting it to the products of conversation and listening as Park notes, but by suggesting it can be learned by watching, by tenants being included and present at social gatherings as representative
of the tenant community or by taking advantage of leadership opportunities that legitimize tenant voices. Park provides the example of the women's movement and the way in which it allows women a collective experience for sharing knowledge, I want to use interactive knowledge more broadly because tenants are in the beginning stages of organizing. When tenants sit in a meeting with community workers who are planning programs with them, learning occurs that will encourage them to risk doing it again and to work towards what they want. They observe successful interactions and, in so doing, learn influential behaviours. It may be how to meet and greet someone who can provide funding, or how to be part of a collaborative community meeting. They may learn how to disagree with people in authority sometimes by watching me. They may see others complain about some government office and realize the possibilities for doing that themselves. This process is backdoor learning because it occurs at random and unexpectedly. There are many examples of the way in which backdoor learning produces interactive knowledge in and out of the community.

The third product, critical knowledge, suggests raised consciousness. Critical knowledge is the product of reflection and action, as Park notes, but it may also be learned from everyday events as they repeatedly occur in the tenant association. Some of these events play out the unequal relationship between tenants and other members of the wider London community. A tenant has critical knowledge when he or she is constantly asking questions about the social restrictions which limit the potential of tenants. For example, when tenant leaders make demands for control over the design of a playground, they have learned two things. First, that making such a demand is possible for them and second that they have the ability to provide meaningful input where the administrators of City Housing
may have assumed tenants have no ability.

Critical knowledge is demanding privileges that have already been awarded to other citizens in the community because tenants learn through backdoor learning that they do not need to expect different attitudes from others. It is tenants speaking out in contexts where they have previously been absent or silent because they now know their language describes it better. There is a process of *backdoor learning* that accompanies critical knowledge. For example, when City Housing directed association members to monitor backyard cleanliness, tenants refused. Instead, they bought a lawnmower and loaned it out on the honour system so that tenants would be able to keep their properties in shape. For tenants, this process may involve experimenting and looking for the reaction of people in positions of authority. One tenant identified risk taking. Tenants may legitimize an angry reaction by measuring my response to their claim for justice. When I support them, I affirm their critical knowledge and they may use it without affirmation next time. This process is *backdoor learning*.

Identifying these three categories in a theory of knowledge accepts that they overlap in some instances. For example, when they are learning bookkeeping tenants may gain interactive knowledge, particularly if the person teaching them is an expert who accepts they have ability and treats them equitably. When they are learning about funding applications, they are learning critical knowledge because of the legitimacy the wider London community awards the organization that provides the money. If tenants use only the funding supplied by City Housing, critical knowledge will be less than if they work out a process to solicit other community agencies.

As I apply Park's theory of knowledge to the evidence, overlaps occur. However,
the main significance is to identify the convergence between the process that identifies 
backdoor learning and the knowledge it produces. What may surface from examining the 
process and the product together are suggestions for the way in which practitioners can 
assist communities in their own development.

**Backdoor learning and LTA Activities**

The Longview Tenant Association (LTA) is typical of most associations in that, 
initially, the activities members find most productive are recreational programs for children 
and teens. As more people risk membership, and as issues start to surface from the floor 
at community meetings, the association encourages dialogue to address unanswered 
questions that may result in planning strategies for improvement. As a collaborator, I 
supported these issues and questions whether or not I saw them as priority. Sometimes I 
reframed them to provide an alternative direction, but I always acknowledged the 
necessity of tenants arriving themselves at the final decision. Surfacing these issues, 
making them available for discussion by community members, as Bunch (1988) agrees, 
moves directly into questions of "changing reality" (245). The evidence I present in this 
chapter illustrates how tenants change hopelessness to hopefulness and suggests that they 
acquire knowledge incrementally through the association. They articulate issues more 
critically as time goes on. My role was to be consistent with that and continually affirm 
with tenants that they controlled the action. I am not suggesting permission granted or 
allowed. Instead, I am emphasizing that the process of supporting them is as much 
reinforcing the value of their capabilities and collaborating on decisions in a way that 
prioritizes their position. I interact as I would with other community workers of equal
status but acknowledge that the self-defining nature of tenant interpretations is essential to their progress. This process contains the potential for backdoor learning.

In *A Tenant Association in Public Housing: Is it a Model of Community Organizing*, I argued that the Longview Tenant Association went through three stages of development. During the first phase, the LTA developed an infrastructure, in this case the executive body, to communicate with the community. It considered the purpose of an association, activities it may undertake and who might want to be involved in the activities, in the association itself or just in activities. It was like an assessment phase for the LTA and for community members. Some tenants willingly assumed leadership in one of the executive positions but others preferred working behind the scenes or what Freda described as “not outfrowned”. As I mentioned, most support for this phase came from the community worker from City Housing although it could have benefited from the input of a volunteer activist willing to wait out the long process of acceptance in the tenant community.

The next phase is what, Francis, the same president who mentioned the backdoor approach, called the public relations phase. During this time, the elected executive worked toward maximum community participation, a simplistic notion but a difficult transition for Longview. This involved bringing the community on line as the tenants experience the association accepting and hearing that their concerns are important. LTA executive members recorded the issues to be worked on later but they chose a small but doable task that the community immediately approved and supported. Specific strategies included inviting outside resources, such as the youth division of the police, to a community meeting for the first time. By accessing some grant money to hire multilingual
interpreters from the community, tenants knocked on every door to invite people to join the association and expressed publicly the associations commitment to community accountability.

The progress I observed and that tenants experienced during the second phase influenced my suggestion that the third phase occurred as a social action part (Geddis 1992). For this write-up, I renamed the third phase the community development phase for this to better reflect the idea that some activities followed from the communities stated needs resulted in a new initiative to encourage community involvement. Other actions confronted the power structure. Whether or not social action is part of any strategy needs to be framed by the evidence provided by the tenants. In my opinion, association members penetrate the extreme authority imposed by the institutions that manage them, like City Housing, specifically when they initiate their own development, regardless of what the hurdles that entails. Articulating their needs and wishes often began the process of implementation. Previously, others, both in the community and outside restricted their ability to initiate their own improvements and their willingness to be agents of their own development. Today, they collaborate with City Housing, using the LTA as an umbrella, to name their concerns, and to devise an action plan that promotes decision making and decision sharing opportunities for the community in conjunction with the Housing office.

While I would not want to make too much of these stages as distinct and clearly identifiable, tenants state that the association changes as it grows and becomes "more what the tenants want". (Author's journal, 1994) In the next section, entitled Evidence for Backdoor learning, I try to show how backdoor learning occurs at all three levels.

Backdoor learning fuels the development of the association and occurs as the
association grows. This learning is continually experienced by individuals because they hold positions as executive members but also because of the activities that brings them into contact with others. Some community members were active in community projects but not on the LTA. They experience backdoor learning because their activities extend tenant efforts to use the community infrastructure to benefit the community. I believe the LTA acts as a model for them to initiate projects just as I can act as a model for the LTA to speak out against injustice. For example, some tenants not interested in being active in the LTA organized a food cupboard and fund raised for a children’s party without the leadership of the LTA but with support from it. Some conflict results but this too can provide opportunities for learning and they work through it.

Tenants live with barriers that impose daily restrictions on their ability to achieve a satisfactory life. Nevertheless, they commit many hours a day to community business and drink countless cups of coffee at kitchen tables to advance the association as a means of community development. In their reflections, tenants in the LTA focussed on the association as if the problems they rose above did not display any particular courage or commitment and they did not see themselves as a motivating force gaining the support of tenants for the association. A collaborator/researcher can observe this and record it. Their evidence as individuals is more important, however, because it may be the overcoming of their personal problems that, through backdoor learning, gives them the leadership skills or contributes to the growth of the association and the well being of the community.

This study presents new evidence illustrating how individual tenants experience backdoor learning to produce instrumental, interactive and critical knowledge. The stages of the tenant association suggest, and only suggest, that instrumental knowledge is
more consistent with the beginning stages of the association and that critical knowledge occurs more frequently in the third stage. In my opinion, this framework allows a presentation of the evidence so that the growth of the association is compatible with the developing ability of tenants. There is no association without them. The tenants themselves must always be in the forefront to direct the action and promote community solidarity.

**Evidence for Backdoor learning**

**Backdoor learning in the Formation Stage of the Association**

Instrumental knowledge from *backdoor learning*. The formation stage of the LTA was the beginning of the activities that introduced the possibility for *backdoor learning* to occur. Those in other community organizations might assume that everyone understands the complexities of membership in a community tenant association. Tenants did not automatically gravitate to the association or immediately accept it could benefit them. They did express a desire for change in their relationship with City Housing and in the way other community agencies handled the concerns of their community. The reasons for their reticence to support the LTA were many. Up to this point, tenants had no suggestion from City Housing that the latter wanted to establish a working relationship even though issues had been identified. Tenant feelings of rejection and antagonism, as I described in chapter I, had been conveyed by City Housing's paternalistic and excessively authoritarian management style. In addition, tenants internalized the hate hurled their way in the media and from others unfamiliar with the conditions in their community. This hate is manifest in the bitter community relationships as they accuse each other of
treachery, lying or trying to be better than the rest of them. For these reasons, the

*backdoor learning* occurring at community meetings in the first year or two dealt with
transforming this antagonism into a collective understanding of how control and
domination stifled community development. Tenants who have lived together in silence
for years learned to stand in the same room together and talk face to face about how
working together may benefit them.

*Backdoor learning* occurred from listening, watching other tenants and
experimenting with dialogue. I observed very little input from tenants during this
formation stage, unless it was to agree by responding positively to the executive reports.
This did not mean that no learning occurred, only that it was harder to observe and record.
The president reported scheduled meetings or mentioned funding applications submitted.
The treasurer's report created a subtle opportunity for *backdoor learning*. Tenants heard
that their association had money to manage on behalf of the community. That was a new
notion for them. To have money freely given was unusual. Community organizers will
recognize this resource allocation strategy originating from a belief that people in low
income communities mainly lack the buying power to put in place resources to empower
their members. Because access to the money came with the start-up of the LTA, it was
difficult to separate the effect each had on gaining community support. However, I would
agree that the allocation of money to tenant associations affects how tenants relate to and
perceive equality and justice in the larger society.

Reflecting now, I can also see why the report of the adult learning centre I opened
and the job search assistance it offered, did not capture the attention of tenants. This was
*backdoor learning* for me. I hadn’t connected to their needs but put in place another
control mechanism to manipulate people's supposed bad attitudes. The money that funded
the centre, once received, came with few strings attached and was controlled by the LTA
executive who paid me. Bob, the first appointed president, no longer a resident of
Longview, saw the presidency as a position of influence enabling him to placate City
Housing and inject improved attitudes into other tenants. His insistence that tenants
needed to "quit buying booze and cigs and get back to work" suggested to me that he
bought into stereotypical descriptions of tenants imposed by outsiders. By mimicking the
attitudes of the larger society, Bob divorced himself from the reality of the tenant's life.
He wanted out, to live in another community and so articulated like a non-tenant.

On one hand, tenants themselves must have felt that they were still passive
recipients of just another strategy for improving their inadequate selves. On the other,
LTA control of their own community money may have been that glimmer of hope
legitimizing the community association itself. Yet, tenants rarely made reference to the
money they received as funding during this stage of development, only to the money they
raised themselves.

Because, during this phase, there was little interaction at meetings with the
community and because Bob saw the association as responsible only for recreational
events in the community, most of the backdoor learning opportunities the association
provided during this time encourages instrumental knowledge. The tenant association
learned bookkeeping, to set up appropriate banking practices, to hold a meeting using an
agenda and to administer the on-site literacy teacher. Having stipulated what I would do,
I had little contact with the executive in the first four months of my placement in the
recreation unit. I assured tenants I worked for them. They paid me, and it was up to them
what I would teacher. I endured an empty room during most of that time. Patience and faith saw me through this period.

*Backdoor learning and interactive knowledge.* In the beginning phase, *backdoor learning* was slow and arduous just as, in traditional schooling, the early years introduce class activities that become more structured with time. There was little interactive knowledge gained from community meetings because there was little interaction with other members of the community at this time. However, one tenant during the reflective interviews, shed light on the early stage of the association and why tenant relationships produce interactive knowledge so slowly.

Doris became involved in community work on an individual basis outside of the activities of the tenant association. She indicates, by the following insight, a possible reason.

You need to go one on one before you can actually go into a group. To go from not having nobody to being in a group situation that could be detrimental, because their fears could keep them away. (Interview by author, Doris, Dec. 1994)

Doris knows the lonely, isolated life of many Longview women and how fear deters them from becoming involved outside the safety of their own home. Here, she describes how the meetings she had in her kitchen were *backdoor learning* providing interactive knowledge on a smaller scale than a community meeting. Inviting two to five tenants to come together, she created a safe environment that allowed them to begin risking interacting with others. Perhaps they had talked less formally on previous occasions. Doris used the analogy of a couple of kids who start out by themselves and then "go out and group more in". These people who originally attended Doris’s small group are solid
A large group meeting is often encouraged by many community educators and organizers to initiate community participation. Skilled in group dynamics that foster successful interactions, organizers often focus on the process as participants employ egalitarian principles. Group leaders use group building activities to promote solidarity and establish a collective focus. Yet, tenants articulated their fear and mistrust of being heard publicly time and again. I, too, assumed that as they were in a homogeneous group at community meetings, members would automatically replace their fears with a sense of solidarity, that tenants would naturally feel it because of their common problems. Doris's insight should influence the efforts of local educators attempting to organize in communities such as hers.

When working with tenants who have been in groups because of abuse or other problems, they isolate themselves from others in their social community having unburdened themselves among other abused people. It is here they feel safe. The process of reintegration to everyday groups and activities takes backdoor learning and extra time. The process of learning that results in a group finding out their joint efforts may have collective benefits is a difficult one. "To go from not having nobody" means to take a risk and suspend the threat from outside criticism, rejection and alienation and trust other members of the group. In Longview, fear, mistrust and hate comes from other members of the tenant community. Freire noted, people internalize their oppression and turn on others who are experiencing the same alienation (Freire 1971). The group setting is highly problematic and Doris's insight prompts me to advocate using other means of communication with tenants such as one on one meetings or smaller in home groups. This
can be the beginning of larger organizing activities.

When I was marketing the adult learning centre, I visited a math class in the tenant recreation centre sponsored by the local college. As I told the five women present about the centre, one asked if I did anything else. She said that the police were not responding to Longview women adequately and could I help. Another complained that City Housing suddenly wanted everything in writing, could I help with that. These issues did not surface immediately at meetings, although I encouraged these tenants to take them there. I suggest that Doris's comments above suggest why.

Community organizers may assume that tenants automatically understand that an association can benefit them but these tenant's past experiences cloud visions of hope through collective action. Recognizing the importance of introducing interactive knowledge produced by backdoor learning suggests how tenants can acquire the skills needed to pull other tenants into the association.

**Backdoor learning and critical knowledge.** Critical knowledge does not surface up front in the early stages of the association because of the concern with instrumentality. The nuts and bolts of structuring the executive, assigning responsibilities and learning meeting procedures takes priority. Tenants may not be sure that they have a right to confront the belittling interactive style of City Housing described earlier in this study and have to learn that right. They may know they have a right at some level of consciousness but they do not articulate it. I decided to move with the association and its members through this development so I consciously waited for their definitions and perceptions of injustice to emerge. The comments from the women in the math group suggested that there were a number of issues brewing under the surface of community meetings. The
women did not articulate them publicly again for a couple of years, although I attended every monthly meeting and was on site one afternoon a week and on call as tenants needed assistance.

I have no recorded evidence to show specifically whether critical knowledge was present before tenants took over leadership of the tenant association. What the evidence can illustrate, in my opinion, is that the association provided opportunities for the development of critical knowledge. Other factors may have influenced its development. Lockhart (1982) identifies the difficulty native groups experience as they combine "outside opportunity structures" with insider knowledge. Tenants have adopted a tenant association structure from City Housing as an opportunity for community development. The insider knowledge from tenants that will influence how the association proceeds may not surface until tenants make public statements and accept them from the association, statements that express the oppression so many live with. The process that promotes this is backdoor learning. There is no agenda for it to happen or no intention, but it occurs as time provides perspective on the possibilities of the association.

During the second phase, insider control of community produced knowledge and external knowledge began to occur. Lockhart (1982) identifies a process in which community members begin to reject the perceptions of others and, at the same time, become motivated to articulate community needs themselves. During the initial stage of the tenant association, backdoor learning occurred when tenants experiment with comments in a community meetings and dialogue but only with the LTA executive present at the meeting. At first, learning seems to be restricted. The president says everything. Then, tenants respond to the president's questions but offer very little. Finally, as the
association prepares to move on to the second phase, an incident may propel them forward. In the case of Longview, the president resigned following accusations of misuse of funding from the tenants at a community meeting. Although I was not privy to tenant negotiations behind the scenes at this point, tenants, in pressing publicly at a community meeting for his resignation and the vice president's, showed other tenants that the tenant association could act without permission from City Housing. It was City Housing who had encouraged the first president to take office and tenants can be reticent to reject that person. They had taken the association on as their own, in my view. This occurred as backdoor learning and tenant indictment of what they saw as the fraudulent practices of the executive suggest some critical knowledge. In my opinion, it is more likely a moral stance. Tenants demand exemplary behaviour from their elected executive and have asked for resignations on occasions since then.

The new president elect was an articulate single mother of two, with a good understanding of how poverty holds back community and individual development. This had been left unspoken. While, my involvement with the TA during the early stages was minimal, I had many conversations with this second president and she was the motivation behind my efforts to collaborate with the TA as the second stage unfolded. By this time I had started doctoral work with a view to investigating the potential of the tenant association as a site of learning for us both.

*Backdoor Learning and the Public Relations Phase*

Instrumental knowledge from *backdoor learning*. The idea of a public relations' phase came from Francis, the LTA president whose perceptions form a large
part of the evidence presented in this section. She was the same tenant who saw "the backdoor approach" as being the way learning occurred as she carried out the duties of the tenant association (Interview with author, Francis, Oct. 14, 1994). Having had little exposure to activities outside of the tenant communities in which she had previously lived, the opportunity to serve as president with the LTA came at a time when governments recognized the need for more tenant input. I saw her the first time she came to a meeting in Longview, sitting on the floor, saying that she would like to become involved in the tenant association and that she had lots of ideas. Eight months later, she was president, a common course of events for Longview where a tenant's decision to serve as an executive member emerged literally overnight.

Shortly after the election, she became part of a community development project called Planning Together initiated by City Housing. The strategy resulted from the comprehensive survey of tenant needs mentioned in chapter I. The survey solicited the opinions of very few tenants, many community workers and several community agency representatives. City Housing compiled a manual to accompany activities. Francis chaired one of six committees established as part of the project. She also co-chaired the steering committee for the entire project. The focus issue for the committee that she chaired was "tenant participation in decision making" as identified in the manual. Activities listed there required participants to identify relevant issues and a strategy for improvement. Francis attended every meeting of this committee and I accompanied her as advisor to the LTA.

The Ministry of Housing had designed Planning Together as a community development project to bring tenants and housing employees together to explore how relations between City Housing and tenant communities could be improved. Some weekly
meetings and some monthly meetings resulted because meetings are frequently used in institutional settings to disperse information. Funding for the project paid tenant transportation costs, but it was still difficult to interest tenants in attending the meetings usually held in one of the housing complexes. Francis, unlike many other tenants, attended meetings enthusiastically. In the following section, she reflects on the initial meetings that brought senior Housing administrators, workers and some tenants together.

These meetings provided the possibility for both instrumental and interactive learning to occur through the “back door”, as she would say, but this example considers instrumental learning. I suspected City Housing had planned these meetings with the intention that tenants learn the language of negotiation. They may even have expected tenants to learn it the way City Housing used it. While I accept that language is the means by which we organize our experience and understand others, tenants need to gain instrumental knowledge about the way in which others use language to confront the reality of their lives. When the expertise is in a position of control such as City Housing is in relation to tenants, the language Housing administrators use becomes something tenants learn slowly. The process is backdoor learning because it occurs in a previously unaccessible context where now tenants are legitimate participants. Just as a doctoral student, I struggled to learn the language that enabled me to manipulate the academic environment, tenants learn how they can mesh their knowledge with that of Housing and ask for what they want. Francis articulated her insight.

...because the Housing staff are used to dealing with business and the Ministry and high muckity mucks....I caught on real quick that if I wanted to be there I had to learn their language. Otherwise they don't hear you. You learn to play the game by their rules, but at the same time, their learning by yours. (Interview by author, Francis, Oct. 14, 1994)
These were key lessons in backdoor learning. Francis was learning new words but she also recognized it was not the same language the tenants used to communicate with each other. She began to understand how seductive it was and that it carried more weight. More than once, she mentioned that she became willing to hear and accept what Housing had to say, but when she went back into her community, she realized the tenants had a different version. (Interview by author, Francis, Oct. 14, 1994) For example, at one meeting I attended, participants at the Planning Together committee spent a lot of time working out how tenants would do their own repairs using the supplies from the repair hut in each tenant community, but when "you have to hear how that would work in the complex, the problems appear differently." There are people who are disabled, there are single mothers with four children and little time to do repairs. There are folks who are developmentally and physically challenged who need assistance.

The simple frame constructed by Housing is more complex in the minds of tenants and tenants have to be able to switch from the way City Housing describes issues to how tenants hear the issue, will implement it or will want to. Tenants learn this is through the back door, by sharing perceptions with Housing employees and then returning to their communities. They recognize tenants have different and more limited language available to them. This is instrumental knowledge, in my opinion. Francis learned how to use specific language well enough to incorporate it in funding proposals that successfully won her program money. She learned this language to argue for tenants mistreated by City Housing. She used it in complex letters of request to City Housing and others, yet Francis had a grade 8 education. This was literacy as I could never have taught it.

Francis continued to learn confrontational skills in a facilitator's training course
made available when seven tenant association put accessed funding together. The result was a ten week course. The way in which Francis used these skills suggests backdoor learning because the course itself set up scenarios and real life situations to practice them. Then, she took them into her job as president. Recognizing that the rules imposed by City Housing can sometimes be arbitrary, Francis looked for opportunities to employ her confrontation skills and consequently found out

this rule can be bent, this doesn't always apply. And sure they tried double talk, they tried fancy talk, they're going to, but you have to know how to get around it and how to recognize it when it's happening. (Interview by author, Francis, Oct 14, 1994)

Her ability to override rules and argue against unreasonable ones became more and more obvious when she advocated to secure a procedures manual for the tenant office although City Housing had told her that it wasn't meant for tenants. She was able to obtain one for all tenant associations to use and frequently consulted it when City Housing tried to dictate rules to tenants that she didn't think existed. Her instrumental knowledge from this learning was not only that rules could be bent but that they could be used to protect tenants. She advised tenants to do minimal repairs and fix up their units before they moved so that they wouldn't have to be charged a fix up fee. Buried in the legalese of lease language, it is an item that tenants often miss. Francis helped tenants distinguish rules that could benefit them and those that did not.

Other tenants have identified how organizing assists their communication skills. It is not in dealing only with other individual tenants that an opportunity allows a process of backdoor learning but it is also in negotiating with City Housing. For Doris, she "had to learn to make things work". She organized a committee, apart from the tenant
association, to fund raise in and out of the community, to put on a children's Christmas party. The instrumental knowledge she gained was communication skills but the back door process was the organizing she did by bringing other tenants into the process and the soliciting she did to request help from community organizations. Her experience is backdoor learning because she from this she starts to participate in other situations where language can be used not just to express her feelings, but as she says "to make things work". I suggest this distinction is important and shows how the process of backdoor learning promotes the use of specific skills tenants may have learned previously, such as in group counselling, to benefit the community and not just the individual.

Francis also used her skills to encourage backdoor learning in others that was her way of making things work, convincing tenants that participation in the tenant association would benefit them:

...to get involved, that they had a say, because they needed to be heard and the only way to do that was to speak up. ....the more people heard me saying that, the more comfortable they were {with speaking up}.
(Interview by author, Francis, Oct. 14, 1994)

She herself identifies the process of backdoor learning when she says "the more people heard me say that" indicating that watching and listening can itself promote learning. I observed Francis, at community meetings, articulating this commitment, encouraging people to define their own issues many times. I am arguing that tenants must learn the possibility of this before the do it. It is not surprising that instrumental learning resulted from backdoor learning or that Francis connected it to issues that would eventually benefit tenants. This gave tenants more clout in their dealings with City Housing because the tenants voice began to be heard collectively.
**Backdoor learning and interactive knowledge.** In this public relation's phase of the association, *backdoor learning* produces a lot of interactive knowledge as might be expected. Francis's commitment to draw tenants into the association as well as to make use of the opportunities presented by *Planning Together* meant that backdoor learning could occur as new tenants came to community meetings and in meetings organized by City Housing. From these, tenants gained interactive knowledge, as illustrated in the following:

I found that at first, I really didn't trust them too well..... I simply watched and listened to what [Housing employees] said and oh, this person hasn't met this person yet and ten minutes later, you'd see this person talking to that person as if they'd had lunch the day before. (Interview by author, Francis, Oct. 14, 1994)

Her amazement, that people can be overtly friendly without the element of trust between them influenced how she might interact with City Housing employees after that. She came to communicate directly with the property manager because she perceived that it would help her work for tenants better than maintaining distance or treating him in a hostile manner. I would never have advised her do that but it seemed to work. I witnessed her learning to use meetings for her purpose of gathering information by asking tenants direct questions, by being collaborative and inclusive when talking to administrators. Then, she thanked tenants for their input and their smile seemed to say that she had added value to what they had said. This interaction was a valuable process and legitimized tenant definitions as they presented them.

Francis seemed aware of the way in which *backdoor learning* occurs in contact with powerful others when she said "you can either learn from them or you can let them
take you.” (Interview by author, Francis, Oct. 14, 1994) An interviewer on television, questioning a welfare recipient about programs that benefited her, asked about the one she liked the most. That woman, who also lived in public housing, said that the most beneficial aspect was talking and interacting with people who were not on welfare because she could understand other behaviours and points of view. The comment is relevant to what Francis expresses in the following quote, an example of backdoor learning that provided interactive knowledge. She reports:

I met with Irene Matheson and Evelyn Gigantes. Some people looked [and said] you met the minister of housing, what was she like. She squats on the toilet the same as I do, I mean what do you want me to say. (Interview by author, Francis, Oct. 14, 1994)

Here, the content of what transpired between the government officials and Francis who met them is not of interest but what this tenant is really asking Francis is did they even recognize you when they met you. They are asking, did they accept you, would they talk to you, and how were they different. The meeting allowed for backdoor learning and Francis leaves the interaction thinking that important people can accept her, can behave the way she can. They can relate. What separated the Minister and Francis was social barriers and this was a process for learning that they could be broken down. The people that Francis imagined so different and unwilling to meet her changed how she thought about influence and power. She transferred that to other situations and became one of the few members of a tenant association to march into City Housing to see the property manager unannounced.

A year after the Planning Together meetings started, seven tenant associations collaborated to use funding allocated to their associations. They established a
leadership course for anyone acting as a worker in the community. In their minds, that meant paid and unpaid workers including tenants. This was an opportunity for backdoor learning. Members of tenant associations and some paid community workers worked together in a learning group which focussed mainly on group dynamics and personal growth. A few weeks into the course, being held at the local community college, a government representative from Tenant Support Services with the Ontario Housing Ministry demanded a meeting of organizers and participants. On the table was whether paid community workers could attend a program funded by tenant development money. The representative contended that the paid workers were attending a program funded by the government body that also paid their wage. Tenants by this time put in place a close working relationship with all participants and were angry that the Ministry could stipulate program enrollment. The confrontation and resistance that tenants illustrated in the meeting suggested that a process of backdoor learning had resulted in new knowledge. The skills they learned by interacting with other community workers encouraged tenants to speak for their point of view and interact as equals. Using their anger productively, tenants expressed how they felt isolated and ignored, saying that the paid workers seemed to be regarded as the property of the government and were not to be touched by tenants. I attended the meeting and observed tenant anger gaining momentum. My role was to affirm their declarations and to support their anger. The community workers who had taken the course with tenants were equally adamant but let tenants state the case. This ‘letting’ is a process too. This in itself seemed to unite tenants and the paid workers attending the course. This is backdoor learning and it occurred because tenants shared an issue with people they had previously thought unreachable but with whom they had
established a connection. The representative said she would take it back to her boss, and eventually the government let the situation drop.

The importance of the dialogue that took place speaks to what Lockhart (1982) calls the emerging of growing trust and mutual appreciation. The emergent process, I would say is *backdoor learning*. The trust developing recognizes how insider and outsider knowledge informs and respects each other's position. They learned how they can unite to present a collective voice as I did. What they learn involves some instrumental knowledge such as hearing about the unwritten guidelines that drive government funding or the way in which tenants are expected to learn alone because of who they are. Most of the knowledge gained was interactive because tenants learned to argue for their point of view, to counter arguments, to establish rights using their situation and to question intelligently.

I cannot connect later actions taken by tenants as a direct product gained at that meeting with the Ministry representative, but Francis' efforts to invite all 5 tenant association executives to Longview to discuss common issues may have been prompted by the unity she saw demonstrated at that meeting. Possibly, she imagined was might be possible for tenants.

Francis was one of the few presidents to stay in office for most of the two year period and during that time interacted a great deal with me. While this suggests an opportunity for *backdoor learning*, I have little evidence of the knowledge she took away from these dialogues. There were many issues we confronted together. We discussed and completed funding applications together, final reports for City Housing and wrote letters of complaint. We attended meetings for *Planning Together*, where she chaired and I took
minutes. I detailed the minutes writing down who interacted and how providing all
present with a complete picture of the process the meeting experienced. I also attended
LTA executive meetings to redesign the constitution while Francis was president. We
discussed new projects, community issues and met often two or three times a week to talk
community business but at no time was I able to see for myself, Lockhart's "information
in"--the meshing of outsider and insider knowledge for collective growth.

In reflection, I suspect that although a tenant takes part in many interactions, she
still feels alone in the world outside the tenant community. For many tenants, there is still
more safety, first identified by Doris earlier, in solitary actions performed in a small group,
then transferring it to the community meeting, and later to occasions outside the
community. It may have been necessary for Francis herself to appear to act unilaterally
and without input from anyone. That was her choice. Francis came to office not
knowing that she could exercise choice for herself and that other tenants had that option
too. It was important to her that those choices became clear to her with no implication
that anyone had convinced, assisted or coerced her into a decision.

This suggests how a collaborator/researcher must work with groups, such as
tenants, to organize and build community solidarity. There are times to have faith, to look
for signs of progress without knowing how you, as researcher and collaborator may have
contributed to that progress. I know that the community experienced a forward
momentum in its effort to organize during this second phase but it is not always clear to
me why. Backdoor learning did occur in the dialogue that we took part in but both
tenants and I have some difficulty pinpointing what form my contribution took. Francis
did touch upon it when we were discussing my contribution to the community:
These communities can't remain in their bubbles...you have to have an objective opinion and point of view. You can't just fumble through everything assuming that you have all the answers because you don't especially when it comes to something for the community. In order to make things better in the community, you've probably got to go outside of it, you've got to deal with other people. (Interview by author, Francis, Oct. 14, 1994)

This comes as close as I ever came to getting at the way in which the interactions and dialogues we had constituted further opportunities for backdoor learning. At this point in my collaboration, I somehow felt successful in not knowing how I was contributing. As the next section will illustrate, tenants gained critical knowledge as learning increased and that in itself suggests evidence that I assisted somehow.

**Backdoor learning and critical knowledge.** Francis's critical learning came from what she affectionately called the mould initiative which she planned and implemented and used as backdoor learning. Having listened to tenant complaints that their children were coming down with asthma and having tests showing that many were allergic to mould, Francis decided the time had come for action. Mould covered the windows in many tenant units. She worked slowly but methodically, first doing a survey to find out how many kids were effected in the complex, how many had been diagnosed with asthma caused by an allergy to mould. Over half the community’s children were affected. She contacted the department of health and met with them. She surveyed tenants to ask if mould was collecting in their houses, giving them tips as to where to look. She had tenants ask their doctors about it and had contractors evaluate tenants houses. It looked like a good case and she decided it was time to approach the property manager. Her letters were ignored, so she went in to see them. They said they couldn't possibly replace
anything on that scale, meaning the windows covered with mould, and to forget it. The final barrier to resolution of the issue came governmentally:

I mean individual people getting help from their doctors about it, but when it came to any ministry different government services wouldn't get involved because it was Housing property, managed by another section of government. (Interview by author, Francis, Oct. 14, 1994)

The department of health would consult with her and even confirm that it could be a problem, but they would not approach Housing with her.

A group of student nurses doing a practicum on community nursing thought they would take up the flag. When they went to Housing they were asked who had let them into the complex in the first place, that they had no business there without asking Housing first. Francis and the nurses shared this critical knowledge. Six months later, the nurses themselves received a letter stating that the reason the tenants had a problem in the first place was that they put their furniture right up against the wall. They needed to put it in the centre of the room. This was backdoor learning in that the steps she followed to fight this issue resulted in the same rebuke from City Housing received by the nurses.

Francis knew that "they're not that powerful if they're landlords. They're only as powerful as you allow them to be" (Interview by author, Francis, Oct. 14, 1994). She learned that from other experiences with the tenant association. Although the mould issue did not result in action for tenants, the lack of cooperation from the Ministry of Health and the irresponsible response from City Housing resulted in backdoor learning. The critical knowledge she gained was that bureaucratic structures reinforce the powerlessness of tenants and it isn't just tenants who cannot penetrate those structures. She learned, as she told me, that power has a giver and a receiver, that power is rarely given by those in
authority, and, although you don't chose to give it, those in positions of authority take it anyway. In my opinion, Francis worked harder after that because of the consciousness she had gained but began to see the limitations in her struggle.

When Paul and Freda worked with the police department to offer a basketball program for children in seven tenant communities they had worked on the tenant association a year and a half. They had learned to spot unfairness and to speak about it. The police volunteers thought that the troublemakers of the community, those kids with the worst history of antisocial behaviour, would be the best candidates for the program. Paul took tenant complaints to a meeting. Two issues surfaced. First, kids who showed good behaviour might feel they were being punished. Second, identifying bad kids would divide the community and label kids who might otherwise be trying to get their act together. This would pit families against families at a time when the tenant association was trying to mend fences. Tenants asked for a wider age group specification and to let the tenant associations have control of the selection. They got it. Paul, who lacked experience with bureaucracies, learned that control is negotiable and that tenants can speak up and prioritize their needs. Francis, too, learned that "rules can be bent" as I noted earlier in this section.

Freda illustrates how the public relations phase of the tenant association promotes tenant involvement and backdoor learning for critical knowledge. The critical knowledge in this case, is knowing that:

You don't have to sit back and take whatever anybody gives you. You can question at any given moment what is said to you or given to you.

(Interview by author, Freda, Oct. 4, 1994)
Freda would never have said this two years before we shared this reflection. I see this as one tenant learning, albeit slowly, to reject controlling images of passivity and lethargy which have stereotyped people on welfare. The process that results in this understanding is I suggest, backdoor learning. It is not learned at one sitting as it might be in a classroom. Finding a safe space is part of the process of learning and watching, listening, experimenting with self definition.

Freda and Paul have since worked with the police to organize a baseball team in the community and committed a lot of their time to serve on the tenant executive. They try to fit tenant needs, articulated, into the program planning and consult with members of the community as it unfolds. I noticed that Freda listened to Francis, talked more with her and started to speak at meetings. One day I heard Freda say tenants in Longview are like the branches of a tree and every time one of them tries to grow, City Housing comes along and cuts them down (Author's journal, 1993). Long-term collaboration allows a researcher to see this kind of critical consciousness grow from silence to self definition.

Another tenant, Paul, refused to believe that City Housing would not want tenants to take control of their own lives as much as they could. This process was gained through a continual process of dialogue and negotiation and the realization he reached was critical knowledge from backdoor learning. Paul and his wife are new to public housing and previously lived in the private housing market. When a picture of tenants appeared in the paper praising City Housing for providing money to run a program to train group leaders, Paul heard other tenants talk. They said the money had been directed to tenant groups, who had met repeatedly with the local college to plan and implement the program, but Housing was taking the praise for it. The London Free Press reported "a $45,000 grant to
London and Middlesex Housing Authority to improve community leadership skills and apply them to landlord tenant issues. This supports the suggestion in chapter 4 that City Housing and its employees perceive the LTA as serving an instrument purpose, one which accommodates City Housing. The newspaper, in the same article, reports a tenant saying "tenants are treated like numbers and receive little or no response when they approach City Housing with issues". The author of the article made it sound as if the tenants were victims of a neglectful system but the tenants were pointing the finger directly at City Housing administration and the workers suggesting they had to change to acknowledge tenant capability. The tenants saw the program as their achievement and, in fact, they had met for several months with program planners to put it together. That was glossed over and replaced by the benevolence of City Housing.

*Backdoor learning* occurred when Paul learned to suspend his belief in the honest intention of Housing. He replaced it with critical knowledge. In conversation with three other tenants, we talked about maintaining power structures and official control. He began to think of other situations when he thought Housing knew best but when others in the association pointed out how they controlled tenants. What happened was unpredictable and it illustrated how tenant knowledge confronts the knowledge that the institution presents. I was hopeful because the tenants confronted the intention of City Housing to present a benevolent face to the community and had recognized it. The tenants wanted to prove their community was working to improve itself, that the association planned and designed the program to meet their needs. They had to fight for that recognition but it is the fight itself that provides an opportunity for *backdoor learning*. The end result, their ability to analyse and confront injustice I critical
knowledge that can be used again and again.

Both Doris and Paul make use of backdoor learning a lot in their community work. They are just beginning to understand the controlling forces that restrict community progress. For tenants who are new to public housing, who have experienced a recent trauma in their lives and this applies to many, or tenants who have little or no experience with community organizing experience, backdoor learning occurs as the association grows. At any one time, the majority of the community falls into one of these categories. It is essential to provide time for backdoor learning to occur. As much as I would like them to understand power and control faster, this process of learning proceeds in unexpected ways. It may occur in a conversation with someone like myself, through self analysis or it may be a insight generated by a group tenants. It may be an individual’s private consciousness that radiates out to inform others, but it frequently follows backdoor learning, a process that allows for new insights on tenant terms.

When a collaborator works with tenants, she can observe and record these contexts and return to them. Tenants can use them on other occasions if, as collaborator, she acts as their memory. This develops a pattern of interaction that tenants recognize. They, too, start to look for similar examples that can guide their actions in the future. This is the start of a growing critical consciousness for the community.

Backdoor learning and the Third Phase of the Tenant Association

Backdoor learning produces instrumental learning. The paper that proposed three phases in the growth of a tenant association (Geddis, 1994) hypothesized a third social action phase. At the time of writing, the LTA was still in the middle of the second
phase. The evidence presented in the following section will provide further evidence for that claim and direct tenant evidence that suggest some social action occurred. While critical learning is the most important and the most frequent in the third phase, there are still some products of backdoor learning that yield instrumental knowledge.

Less instrumental learning is evident in this phase for many reasons. The mechanism for receiving funding has worked for tenants on several occasions and community providers know that tenant associations are active and advocating for their own members. Because tenants themselves gained confidence in their association, as evidenced by more consistent and regular attendance at meetings, tenants can learn using the formal structures that were less likely previously. That is, an intentional event can be planned in which tenants can learn how to establish partnerships with community agencies that can benefit them. For example, to put in place an ESL program, they began by phoning around to solicit support from larger community agencies. They can plan and design community programs according to their needs rather than wait for someone to approach them with an idea formed without an awareness of the real people it will serve.

The idea that the tenant association will initiate their own contact with community agencies is not characteristic of the way in which London agencies have done business in the past. Tenants, beginning to articulate the needs of their community and receiving input at community meetings pursue program providers who will fill these gaps in community service appropriately, not according to the expressed views of those outside the community. Ironically, they are finally fulfilling one of the original purposes for which government promoted tenant associations as discussed in chapter 4, that is an instrumental purpose. Some tenants with leadership capabilities provide classes in the tenant recreation
unit for parent problem solving. Others work with teens doing homework. Some provide structured babysitting for community programs while others co-ordinate the programs earning the co-ordinator’s stipend which in the past has been awarded to an outside expert.

One incident at the end of Francis’s term of office implied that tenant capabilities begin to predict less instrumental learning. She had to present a three minute speech in support of a funding application to a committee of London councillors who oversaw the distribution of $500,000 to various community services. Seeking money to continue a teen club on site, Francis and I passed the first interview with the director of social planning. Our time slot for the second presentation to the councillors was 15 minutes squashed between the London Symphony Orchestra and the local Variety Club. Their presence, either side of her presentation, seemed not to both Francis at all although she recognized their prominence in the London community, compared to the LTA. She asked me to type up a four page speech saying the appropriate things. We met at the council chambers, Francis well dressed, briefcase in hand, and perfectly presented. I arrived in jeans with no thought of outward dress or presentation, but determined to lend silent support. Francis thanked me for the speech, sat down outside the chamber and proceeded to scratch out vast sections of it, insert the words she liked better and assess the appropriateness of the ending. What she presented was her own thoughts and aspirations for her community. In retrospect, her request to put together the speech reflected her nervousness and not her literacy level.

The language she used, her physical presentation and the content of the speech she had altered to her liking kept precisely to the time limit and ended with a rational appeal
for funding. We both knew the program reduced vandalism and encouraged education for
teens on the complex. One council member immediately questioned the city recreation
manager why there were no arrangements for teen programs in the area and the manager
responded that they had no money for programs in tenant recreation units. Other
councillors looked embarrassed. They had rarely been confronted by a tenant and were in
the habit of establishing recreational services from a city office. Francis answered
questions competently and reminded them she spoke for over 600 tenants in London
including children. About a year later, after Francis had already resigned, the city granted
permanent and continued funding to Longview for the teen program.

City councillors had never heard a tenant association present a plea for funding in
this context, although the $500,000 is available every year. On one hand, I suggest
council had a strong dose of backdoor learning that day and may have realized that tenant
communities who live far away from city services will not remain silent forever. On the
other hand, Francis demonstrated how many incidences of backdoor learning supplied her
with the instrumental knowledge to be persuasive and to speak confidently using her
words on behalf of tenants. Moreover, she realized she belonged in that setting and her
presence served to educate others.

The literacy skills Francis demonstrated both in the corrections she made to what I
had written and in her capable handling of the presentation suggested that these had been
gained through the back door. The occasions when we worked on proposals together,
poured over funding applications, fought with City Housing may have all come together
that day. Several incidents of instrumental knowledge put into practice.

Backdoor learning and interactive knowledge. Tenants’ interactive knowledge,
by this time is obvious. They are comfortable arranging interactions with outside experts on their own, changing dates to suit them, phoning to set up meetings, or inviting political candidates into the community. Interactive knowledge can occur as the result of backdoor learning because tenants are still unsure of the response they will receive from people in positions of authority even thought they will to risk interaction. They will follow the protocol that accompanies community work but seldom lead the arrangements. They are still affirming their legitimacy in community interactions. Tenants gain interactive knowledge because each time they interact in any context they assess their own success, speak more about the needs of their community, become more willing to identify injustice, disrespect and rejection. They may ask me for feedback or confirmation of a step they took. In my opinion, tenants have to come to this point from self-learning through the back door. It occurs not because someone like myself feeds them critical information and says okay, now you are ready to act but because they are ready to accept, to learn and to act.

One role I assumed was to introduce them to people at events in the larger London community whenever I could. If an agency invited me to a brown bag meeting or to some information session, I took a tenant with me so that the community could get exposure, be seen in the larger London community and interact with unknown others. In addition, I scheduled some of the executive meetings at my house over lunch. Tenants had been generous with me often, never hesitating to serve me a coffee, lunch or supper. I reciprocated by inviting them to my house to make it clear that I respected and appreciated them as they had me. We were friends both ways. I can only hope they understood it that way. During those occasions, they disclosed feelings about events in
their community and shared their insider view in my context. Accustomed to dealing with tenants mainly in the recreation unit, I sensed that here they learned to take the association and its intent outside of the community, perhaps to look objectively at what they were trying to do. It may have had been more back door learning that produced interactive knowledge as they found out their views on the LTA could be discussed on the front porch of a middle class neighbourhood and be heard.

Francis invited all tenant executives to Longview for lunch and discussion. It was the first time an association initiated such a large collaborative effort. I attended, and at the time, I questioned whether my presence would intrude on the process but I admit to having been anxious to watch the result and admitted it to her. A half dozen members of the community catered lunch, for a small fee that went to the women fundraising for the Christmas party. Francis acted as host. Griping came from every corner of the room and out of that some discussion about how tenant associations could continue to communicate. There was little concrete achieved and nothing lasting, but I suggest that Longview may have sewed the seeds of collaborative social action. This was interactive knowledge that confirmed their common cause and allowed public discussion without the conflict ever present with meetings in their communities. They learned that all associations were having the same problems and working through the same conflicts. Associations met on one other occasion but there has been no permanent move to establish a coalition. Tenant associations frequently design and plan joint programs now. That may be the first step.

Kim took the president's position when Francis resigned due to family problems. Having lived in the community for 14 years, I would have expected Kim to join the
association before she did. She is an example, in my opinion, of a community leader who had already gone through a lot of *backdoor learning* personally and applied a useful social analysis to her community. Kim rarely came back to personal issues in the reflective interviews, the way Francis often did. This did not make Francis’s contribution any less vital but it did affect the time she could give to community considerations. Kim pointed out that community leaders need to have their "household shit in order" and Francis experienced numerous difficult personal issues just before she left office through no fault of her own. Nevertheless, both Francis and Kim's ability to share life issues with me meant that I had a glimpse into the struggle of those living on welfare at the same time as I collaborated with them about how individual and public life intersect. While I had ongoing information about both their personal lives, I rarely heard from Kim about the horrendous personal woes that plagued Francis.

Kim has a relatively stable marriage with two school age children. Since, she spoke five languages to varying degrees, before joining the association she worked extensively with the non-English speaking tenants, befriending them, helping them access resources or just problem solving. She worked to give neighbourhood kids a sense of well-being and assured them that there was a place to come when they need to talk, the LTA office. She frequently illustrated her commitment to the community in this way. She, like Doris, was able to recognizing the need of an individual or include many.

When she joined the LTA, the interactive knowledge she had gained by advocating in the community led her to conclude that a suitable candidate for the job was, in fact, someone with adequate skills interacting with many people. She suggested a good president was:
Somebody that's had experience dealing with bureaucrats, somebody that's had experience dealing in a community setting, that doesn't have trouble...somebody with backbone, somebody physically willing to back themselves up. (Interview by author, Kim, Nov. 8, 1994)

Her ability to, as she put it, "segregate my little house and the qualities of life inside it" suggested to me that she has good control of her public and personal life. This left her available to consider larger community issues. When Kim and I reflected together on the tenant association, she consistently maintained her focus and attention on the association and how it could gain influence while promoting tenant well being. While Francis moved back and forth between her personal issues and how they generalize to larger issues in the community, Kim is very community centred and aware of the necessity of moving forward.

She had never worked with someone such as myself. She accepted me implicitly from the beginning of her term of office and said she would be happy for the assistance. In the first three weeks, she phoned daily and I suggest my affirmation of her capabilities reinforced those she had and gave her confidence in her competence. The process of our conversations was backdoor learning that produces all three kinds of knowledge, but I wonder if she was gaining interactive knowledge over the phone. I must have given her the right response because we continued to work closely and are still in touch.

**Backdoor learning and critical knowledge.** During the reflective interviews, Kim described unsolicited, the role she thought the tenant association should fill. Her comments illustrated in my opinion, how doing the work of the association provided opportunity for backdoor learning. She is familiar with the structures of domination and control that outsiders impose on the tenant community, but is constantly testing her own
critical knowledge to see how it applies:

One of the things that I have come across since the last time we spoke is how redundant this TA is. We are cosmetic, we have no say in policy, like the bureaucrats set the policy we have no say, but we're supposed to work in that framework and do whatever it is that we can do. I mean it's window dressing. (Interview by author, Kim, Nov. 8, 1994)

Having lived in Longview so long, this was not something Kim took office to discover nor something she wanted to find out so soon after her election. Kim had worked with tenants in Longview for many years and knew, in detail, the activities of the tenant association. Becoming president now increased her learning through the back door. She related to Housing as one administrator to another, not just as a tenant but as a representative of the whole community. The above comment came from Kim's attempt to inform City Housing that they would be dealing with Longview's new president. She never got through to the manager, left several phone messages and gave up.

Why Kim did not step down at this point suggests that she gained critical knowledge about the potential powerlessness of the TA, that could direct her actions in the future. Five months after Kim said this, she had clearly set about to strengthen the position of the tenant association in the community and to confront others in positions of authority. The comment above may have surfaced from continual frustration in getting demands met at City Housing during the first few months of her term of office. Nevertheless, she moved away from this position and on to action.

She expanded the newsletter and included activities for kids, tenant birthdays, anniversaries and tenant of the month columns. The last newsletter contained a Housing directive translated in three different languages which tenants from different ethnic backgrounds contributed. She has twice refused to seek volunteers in the community for
jobs demanded by City Housing because her community "is working hard enough for its own benefit". She has quadrupled attendance at meetings by sticking to issues of concern to tenants, by limiting meetings to one hour and by auctioning off some donated item at the end of every meeting. This ends the meeting with a collaborative and non-conflictual tone even though more serious issues erupted during the course of the meeting. This has done a lot to encourage positive feelings at the end of a community meeting and brought tenants back to the next monthly meeting. She raised substantial amounts of funds for program use, put in place ESL for non-English speaking tenants and a parent sharing program. She assisted tenants with benefit claims and safeguarded the respect and dignity of tenants by using interactive knowledge as she negotiated with those still learning to accept the LTA in the community. This in no way trivializes the positive influence of the previous tenant executive, but it illustrates that progress is invested both in the community leader and in the degree of growth the community association has attained previously.

In spite of many innovative activities, Kim often speaks about people setting policy who have little or no experience of the people they are setting policy for. When she says "a body of knowledge doesn't replace one iota of experience", she connects knowledge to claims that people make and how they are presented as facts with little evidence to back them up. In her view, facts don't talk unless they are based on experience. This attitude is the foundation for her relationship with tenants in the community. She articulates it further in the following comment:

...the TA will continue it's good and charitable works......It promotes charity in the neighbourhood and that's what it's always done. We have no right to speak in policy decisions, we don't get to prioritize our own needs, our own auspices, we all fall under the bureaucratic bylaws and have no power except good and charitable works. (Interview by author, Kim, Nov.
In this case, *backdoor learning* produced critical knowledge in the intersection between 'doing' in the community and 'knowing' about the community. Kim's insight is an important one in that she is producing critical knowledge while she continues to work on the 'daily humiliations' that Buchbinder identified (Buchbinder, 1979). After reading the thesis, Kim echoed Buchbinder's description of these “daily humiliations” faced everyday by tenants.

There is a danger, when a collaborator/researcher works in a community such as Longview, of negative messages becoming scripts. Humiliation, for example, may paralyse tenant efforts and focus energy on describing those rather than acting on them. Another hazard is my describing tenants and the association in ways that betray what I hope they will become but that does not support their efforts as they grow. Because I am affected by their experience, I sometimes have to hope instead of act. The bigger questions is: what will make hope become real progress? I may have to accept that tenants may never get relief if I am continually either pessimistic or hopeful about progress, lament the lack of socially conscious tenants, or reinforce that there are injustices meted out by City Housing. These are not useful strategies and organizers or activists may want to guard against leaving tenants behind in the rush to have them understand their oppression.

Tenants must deliver that message and devise the plan to overcome barriers if they are to experience progress otherwise a plan may take root the way a homework assignment does, at the insistence of the teacher.

In the past, when I talked about social justice issues, I talked about social change without a clear idea of what it entails, who its for, when it comes about, but it had a feel
good ring to it. Kim brought me back to being clear about what is happening in Longview and what the LTA is actually changing. She articulated the strategy with which she approached the community. Everyday work, the programs, the meetings, the activities, exist and are compatible with her understanding the oppression of her community. She relates:

Our membership....don't need to hear "well, we've got a board meeting in 3 or 4 months. That means nothing to these people....six months, six years, six generations. Immediacy, concrete in black and white. Things that are being done with them, to enhance their daily life to enhance what little they have. (Interview by author, Kim, Nov. 8, 1994)

For Longview, this is how change began, with the recognition of the need for concrete strategies backed up by a critical knowledge. She recognized that it is often something small and insignificant that you can change, something that "bureaucrats would not perceive to be a large issue". (Interview by author, Kim, Nov. 8, 1994) She identified that community issues and the issues of bureaucratic institutions seldom change oppression, but people do. She follows her convictions with action.

Kim continually used backdoor learning in her community to find out more about the issues effecting tenants. She has a talking relationship with many children in the community and even uses them to gain more critical knowledge:

I've noticed this from the kids. They know they're treated differently from someone in the subdivision with three bedroom houses....{Other say} oh, you're one of those kind. (Interview with author, Kim, Nov. 8, 1994)

Kim uses dialogue and face-to-face contact with tenants often to hear more from them. Monthly meetings are more open from what I have observed and contain fewer interactions that lead to conflict. Tenants have learned through backdoor learning that
they are free to present community issues publicly. They complain about City Housing, about a program leader who seems to demonstrate a disrespect toward tenants and about maintenance issues. They suggest ideas, volunteer to take part in community events or show their support by coming to events held by the association. Emphasis should be given to the fact that while Kim is a solid community leader with good ideas, she is also benefiting from all the growth and development that went on before she came to office. I was there to see the transition from Francis to Kim. Francis laid the foundation and Kim had the critical knowledge to assist the LTA to move to the third phase.

As I was about to leave Longview in June of 1995, Doris, the same women who expressed the fear inherent in group meetings, stood up at a community meeting to state that the LTA needed to consult more community members before it made a decision on issues. Later in the evening, she approached me to say, "Did you see, I spoke for myself. I'm tired of just listening to other people's opinions". She went on to point out that she was tired of sitting quietly saying nothing and that she was ready to let them know what she thought. It had taken Doris four years to reach that degree of comfort in a group. She needed the words, but more than that she needed backdoor learning—informal opportunities for reshaping her understanding of her capabilities and finding that what she says is as worthwhile as what the next person has to contribute.

Although I asked each tenant several times, they always returned to talk about the tenant association and what it had done, avoiding articulating how my collaborative efforts may have been valuable. I consider that a positive sign. It may indicate that they feel in control of their community. I feel connected by small acts that acknowledge me such as the tenant above who came up to me after the meeting to tell me about her new
found confidence. She came to me to tell me that she had acted differently, that she had
learned something that encouraged her to become more active publicly and more vocal.
Why did she assume that as her goal? Other tenants report their or their child’s progress
in education and I consider that a sign that I am still the teacher that entered the
community 4 years previously.

For adult educators choosing to join the efforts of a community trying to seek
recognition and involvement in the wider community, satisfaction is knowing that tenants
have more confidence in risking further education. There is not always clear evidence
that one has been part of the change process. That is another characteristic of *backdoor
learning*. The educator is present in a more subtle way. If the intent of participatory
research is to “bring about better conditions for life. Period.” as Heaney (1993) contends,
then I suggest there is evidence from tenants quoted in this chapter that this has occurred
for Longview tenants.

**Conclusions**

The difficulties with any framework such as Park’s three knowledge products is
that it is difficult to describe evidence of each without some repetition. Because the focus
is on *backdoor learning* as a process, knowledge production can infer that tenants
participated in such a process. It is in the incidents that community organizers themselves
can learn how people, oppressed and silenced by the those who have authority over them,
may change relationships that have rendered them powerless.

The failure of the educational system to accommodate the different needs of the
oppressed, such as their ability to understand and manipulate the system to improve their
lives, has precipitated advocating alternative learning opportunities (Welton 1991). Tenants, now seem aware that one of these opportunities may be involvement in the tenant association and provided evidence that learning occurs as activities unfold. In increasing numbers, the community chooses to align with the executive as it struggles for management of Longview. Backdoor learning occurs unpredictably as tenants confront the control imposed by the system, as they work out better relationships with others and as they begin to understand how they can take part in larger social movements. Before this research with tenants, I was unaware how significant it was for them to chair a meeting, to attend a City Housing luncheon as an equal with those employees. This process of inclusive community interaction, where tenants collaborate to make decision in matters concerning their community, is backdoor learning. This may be how tenants can learn to accept themselves as capable. The wider community supports that initiative when they agree to promote opportunities for interaction with the larger community. The final chapter will present an incident to assess tenant learning and how one tenant has applied it in the larger London community. It is there that tenants integrate their lives with the lives of other making using of the products of backdoor learning.
CHAPTER 6
REFLECTIONS ON TENANT KNOWLEDGE

Introduction

In this chapter, I trace the way in which my understanding of the tenant community changed by collaborating with the tenant association. I start by illustrating the model I developed three ago to explain my relationship not only to the Longview community and but to other agency workers who work with them. Since roles are the device by which institutional control is exercised (Smith, 1990), my perceptions at the time developed from socially established descriptions which contained conventional characteristics and traditional notions of community relationships. Researcher and teacher, for example, encourage for many an image of authority, as well as some notion of knowledge based practice. That is, the way in which teacher or researcher behaves and relate to the community is guided by generalizations determined from cross context studies. By looking at specific situations in which tenant knowledge confronts my perceptions, I begin to see how the roles, as I defined them, were inadequate. Not only did they not allow a collaborative relationship with tenants, they maintained traditional ways of interacting. The teacher is still the informer, the knower. The researcher has the knowledge and investigates how the subjects operationalize it. Establishing solidarity with tenants demands an adult educator who is willing to listen to and accept the authority of what tenants know. In this chapter, I investigate situations in which that happens. I end by suggesting guidelines for practitioners, many of which may reflect the means by which
successful communication can be established with any oppressed community. Although they may seem self-evident to conscientious practitioners, the guidelines emphasize these as the difficult issues because they contribute to the way in which the formal roles conscripted by social institutions can be assigned to tenants.

From Role Playing to a Collaboration

Roles as Social Maintenance

It was during the second year of my relationship with the Longview community that I first tried to illustrate how I conceptualized my connection to the community. (See Figure 1.) I was trying to be clearer in my mind what I was actually doing in the

![Figure 1. Initial View of Researcher in Community](image-url)
community. Reflecting on this now, I notice that most of the roles I selected to describe what I do stipulate a function that assigns a learning role to the recipients and a teaching role to myself.

I separated the activities with tenants into four roles. Each circular part of the diagram explains how different parts of the community relate to the tenant association. The LTA is at the centre because they hired me and also because they establish a voice for Longview in the wider community. I continued to work with them throughout the four years. The most compelling role was ‘community involvement worker’ and this role interacted with the inner circle of the model. This name is borrowed from the Doone Avenue Project in Fredericton, New Brunswick, where collaborative research was being done with another tenant group. In Longview, this role allowed me to work with what I called the critical mass of tenants represented by the inner circle. These tenants were continuously active in association activities and openly supported them. We conversed regularly at association meetings as they expressed interest in supporting LTA efforts to organize the community and improve conditions. Most attending meetings were adults with about one-fifth being men and the rest women. The inside circle is what I called a critical mass of tenants because they demonstrated their involvement in the tenant association by attending meetings, helping out with activities and being around the recreation unit where members of the association worked. About one-fifth were men and the rest women. In the last year, this has included older teens. The second circle, next to the inside one, includes members of the community who liked the idea of the tenant association and expressed support outside of meetings or just talked about it but were less visible. Because the LTA hired me as an adult educator, I assumed that these tenants
might be anxious to access my services as a teacher or to become involved with some educational initiative I planned. The third circle identified a larger number of tenants because of my role as a student and the work I undertook to understand the mechanism of a growing tenant association and see how it could be a learning process for all tenants. The outside circle is the whole community and I concluded that this was attached to my role as an academic.

My academic role, concerned itself with the whole community, some 700 adults and children represented by this circle. I was inquiring into issues related to low income families and the potential for improving the living conditions of such a community. I surveyed and investigated literature relating past experiences or social analyses that could be incorporated into practice and I dialogued with other like minded students and then professors who could assist my studies. The box to the left contains all the agency workers who influence members of the community, and with whom I come in contact as I develop my relationship with tenants. Some are interested in me as a student, others as a teacher and a few in my academic interests, but many are wary of my role as a community development worker. The model can't really show this. Most of the other community workers could not relate to an unpaid collaborator and found it even harder to imagine what use that would be.

When I first constructed the model, I thought what a comprehensive explanatory piece of work it was. In another context, it might have been. It was the tenants who questioned openly how I fit in to Longview. Was I hired by Housing? If I was a teacher, did I work in a school? Did I get money for whatever I did for them. What was I there for? Why did I choose Longview? In addition, as time passed, I assisted individual
tenants with problems with their benefits and became a co-advocate with tenants. As an adult educator, I worked with small groups of children on a program set up by the association. I worked with the LTA to complete funding applications but only as much as they requested. Sometimes, I baked for fund raising events and last fall initiated chili night when tenants could purchase a cheap supper once a month. The roles I had chosen for myself kept getting blurred and filled with responsibilities I had not allocated to that role. I couldn't clearly identify a teaching moment but somehow, the community was making progress. Traditional notions of what a student was or should do were not compatible with my role in Longview. I was learning, but I was learning about my privilege from our relationship, not just about them.

Separating the role definition from the activities of the person who fills that role allows the role itself to control the individual (Smith 1990). Such definitions are necessarily narrow to make them manageable, but they control the relationship between the people involved and can award authority to me. For example, a teacher status may limit the way in which I see knowledge being produced. Roles can be the conceptual mechanism of institutions in that they maintain the social relations within them. In a conference paper, I discussed issues concerning a tenant experiencing a problem with UIC benefits. I pointed out how the welfare worker from City Housing worked through her role as defined by guidelines and procedures. She articulated the eligibility criteria for receiving benefits, told the tenant about the crackdown on families who owned late model cars (his was not) and the tougher approach of city hall, requiring low income recipients to work if possible. He was but it seemed irrelevant to her. All this before she had even heard the issue the tenant had called her about. The man involved worked part time...
whenever he could and the lapse between his receiving welfare benefits, when UIC benefits were finished, had resulted in economic disaster for the family. Assisting in this instance meant stepping outside the roles I chose for myself.

My role as adult educator, in the college was played as a relationship between teacher and student, which assumes the teacher to have knowledge which the student seeks or more correctly lacks. For tenants, teachers often arbitrate their child's success. Duplicating this role in the community restricts the relationship in that the teacher has a position of power that tenants could never see as acting in solidarity with them. Would I continue to see them as needing education and myself as delivering it? Rather than emphasize my privilege, it allows me to keep distant from our differences and ignore the privilege labels confer. Expanding the role of the educator can be accomplished by inserting listening, watching, reacting empathetically or just being there while tenants work through conflicts imposed by systemic oppression.

When Smith (1990) points out the way in which concepts attached to roles act as a boundary to inquiry, she suggests role definitions make relationships of power invisible. Roles can prevent practitioners, in my opinion, from acknowledging the differences privilege makes in our life experiences, the tenants and I, and how these differences might inform the way I need to behave to develop productive collaborative ties with tenants. The researcher's role is often distant from the reality of her subject's lives and it can be maintained by the demands and expectations afforded the researcher. The requirements for objectivity demand distance from the subjects so that emotional issues and contextual variability don't cloud conclusions.

The collection of data and the interpretation of results fulfills the demands of the
researcher's role as set out by the university but it doesn't address the different social positions that researcher and subject occupy. Conforming to the rigour imposed by research discipline can mean restricting and maintaining that difference. Once I start to think about the data as people's lives with economic insecurity built in, as being more than data, then I begin to sense the inadequacy even of the term 'data collection'. For example, a record can show how many tenants receive a cheque for $2.50 because of a screw up with their benefits at the end of the month, but there is no room to record the chaos resulting, or the psychological effects of a cheque short changed. Children scream, partners act with irrational anger and a futile atmosphere characterizes the family. Figures provide no connection to life, to what happens every day when tenants or their families are put down, degraded or short changed by housing or some other institution. This is far more than 'data' and I note some discomfort when, as researcher, I am required to talk about 'data collection'. Some literature gives and account of the process involved moving from UIC to welfare but there is little discussion of the hardship caused by that process. Expanding the role of researcher into one of advocate and empathetic listener allowed me to get a life information.

Similar connections could be made for the other roles. Who I am is as perplexing for the tenants because we talk together about how they will introduce me. Sometimes they call me their adult educator, sometimes their community involvement worker, sometimes just Sue depending on what fits the context for them. I am more aware now of the limitations in the model I devised and the way it hides a reality that my relationship with them has explicated. This reality is a political one in which personal politics, the privilege conferred on me by social class, and my learning by collaborating with tenants,
intersect. As practitioners (even this role is problematic), language struggles to accommodate the learning experiences of people like myself in the community. The part it plays in research data is seldom seen as significant. The literature focuses on community organizers as more central to social change than I believe this study does. The model surfaces the way in which the research process undertaken by the tenants and I changes how I would no describe who I am to their community. The following section returns to the compelling message of Narayan (1988) and presents some incidents to show how one’s personal knowledge meshes with tenant knowledge to construct a more accurate picture.

Affirming the Epistemic Privilege of Tenant Knowledge

Whether educator, researcher or community worker, there is a tendency to talk about learning, regardless of the context, as a one way street. As a community college teacher, the women who lacked literacy skills learned reading, writing and mathematics to increase their employment prospects or to gain entrance to other college programs which would give them a better future. For two years before starting doctoral work, I researched adults in literacy classes, inquiring how these students learn. Our conclusions frequently seemed to derive from us as researchers, during which time those individuals who had supplied the information for the study disappeared in the data. Learning seemed not to be affected by life events, but only classroom events. Yet, it was events in my own life that provided the motivation to keep learning.

On the different occasions I worked in communities other than Longview, whether voluntary or in the public sector, learning occurred for the person across from me. I
seldom thought concretely about how that person was influential in assisting me to form conclusions about people who were immigrants, who were disabled or who were unemployed and living on the street. A better picture of the issues facing these types of people may have been gained, but it didn’t connect to what went on in the classroom.

My inability to change my perspective when it comes to thinking about who is learning or who I am teaching rather than what, is, in my opinion, a product of both the privileged life I lead and culture I am embedded in. It is privilege because as an upwardly mobile middle class white women from a stable marriage with 2 children, I am viewed as having made it. The tenants know me this way. Add to that a slightly greying head of hair and a degree of assertiveness and, in many situations, I can attain the status of speaker of the house. It is culture too, although women from the developing world keep reminding us, just because we are white, from the north and have all the money does not mean we know what will benefit them and can speak for them. My membership in both the privileged class and the privileged culture means that I experience some anguish accepting what I must learn in order to work effectively in a community such as Longview although not unwillingly.

It should come as no surprise then, that I was not prepared to accept Narayan's (1988) claim that marginal people have epistemic privilege, that the knowledge they have about their experience as tenants in public housing and about living on welfare is more critical than mine. My original reasoning was sound it seemed to me, derived from an objective view of privilege and a static view of learning. In the beginning stages of my doctoral work, I still thought everyone's words had equal value and privilege, in itself, had to be avoided. If one had privilege over another, then I couldn’t agree with the resulting
inequality. What I had neglected to take into account, was that I already had privilege. Although I didn’t live there, community agencies would phone me about program issues rather than talk directly to tenants. When I asked tenants what was going on, they smiled as if they expected it?

Reflecting on Narayan's claim that the oppressed be given epistemic privilege, I first wrote that it was up to the oppressed to confront my incorrect assumptions and to correct them. It was not up to me to solicit their interpretations of their experiences and to learn from it. Why wouldn't I think that? To think otherwise would dislodge my privileged speech. Social position often decrees whose voice is dominant. I would have to be able to see that I could learn from what they know and live, and not the other way around. The idea that experience can construct knowledge can be a subversive one for anyone revering authority or expert knowledge, especially when the experience brought to light involves people who are politically and economically threatened with survival.

Previously, I used Kolb's (1982) well known theory of experiential learning. I accept the model, but I never thought about how who articulates the definition of experience could be an act of resistance. When tenants insist on their definition of experience, this is a form of resistance. The police implement a rookie baseball program from assumptions about what is good for the kids or how the kids will learn new skills. Tenants as parents want to be able to say what is important to their kids and what kids need to learn in that experience, but what results is a confrontation of who knows best.

Theories are derived from knowledge that is well ordered and authoritative but experience is haphazard and unpredictable (Code 1990: 243). The knowledge that leads to theory established power priority over what an actual experience can tell us, just as my
model could have stood as a theory of the role of community educator. Such theories are compelling pictures of reality that are regarded as absolute and sure because of the comfort derived from that attitude. How useful is a theory that might be subject to a lot of fragmentation and require adaptability dependent on context involving consideration of who it applies to or who is advancing it. I accepted theories of community organizing in a similar way. As a student, you learn to confront your misgivings about Buchbinder or Gaventa's ideas but the way they perceive community action still seems to be immutable.

The remainder of this chapter illustrates that the teacher-learner dichotomy is continuously shifting. While I am a teacher one day, in one context, the next I am listening and making use of a tenant experience to change my perceptions of learning. I am clear now that it is my responsibility to make sure that shift takes place. I need to understand how I can make use of critical moments when what I learn is more important than what they learn.

The following situations describe starting points for an inquiry into the way in which my consciousness changed, confronted with tenant knowledge and the way they construct their experience.

Learning from Tenants

Weiser (1990) discusses personal learning processes and talks about how the learning of others is encouraged when, as an educator, I act as the catalyst. However, he reveals little about our own learning as educators. Thinking of oneself as a learner, as a researcher, or as a teacher in the presence of others whose knowledge is different, creates tension especially when another's knowledge has traditionally been discounted. In the
following section, I will try to show how tenants' knowledge has affected my consciousness and how I have blended that with what I have learned from some of my course work. I will present some of their examples and some journal entries in an attempt to be more explicit about how I used tenant knowledge to change my assumptions.

The Politics of Program Planning

My five years in the community college as instructor had left me with the idea that program planning was a relatively simple matter, apolitical and needs based. You looked at a community and then filled in the gaps with appropriate program components. Sork (1988) admonished that adult education must occupy the "high moral ground" by incorporating ethical issues and mentions that defining needs from a deficiency model is problematic (49). While he sees a need for values to be considered in the planning process, that, in my opinion, would be no guaranteed that programs would better suit the needs of the learners. I am more convinced that it is necessary to be conscious and mindful of who takes part in the decision making process about programs. If it is only people who have authority and privilege, then some crucial program elements may be lost.

The following example also illustrates that the mere presence of tenants does not guarantee collaboration.

It seemed a progressive step when representatives from tenant associations were brought together to plan what was billed as a popular education course to provide leadership training to tenants from associations. The course would be delivered by community college teachers but its form and content would be stipulated by tenants. I became prematurely optimistic but was already aware that tenant experience in this kind of
collaboration was almost non-existent. Program planners forget that this is a role which is also embedded in certain institutional authorities and thus it predicts a conventional relationship between the community and the college. I had also made assumptions about what the course would contain. At that time, I was taking a course in popular education, based on using the group to analyse how oppression comes from the way in which people relate socially and what the oppressed can do to confront that. The program being suggested by the college used a multi media approach with many options for expressing oppression. Great! I thought I knew how that would work and it seemed a good direction to pursue.

Five different tenant associations applied for the funding and the idea was that they would now collaborate, their voices and their funding, to devise a course for tenants in all seven communities. I imagined recognition for tenants, kudos for association presidents and an opportunity for tenants to construct a social analysis of the oppression they experienced daily. The first planning meeting involved myself and our president and vice president. Two other presidents were there as well as three chaplains who provide invaluable support to tenant communities, the community college representative who offered to fill out the application and coordinate staffing, and several community relations workers from City Housing. The room was stacked with power and privilege already. While I wondered how the three tenants present would get their voices heard, I didn't say anything.

At the first planning meeting, the majority of input came from everyone but the tenants who were clearly overwhelmed by this initial exposure to collaborative program planning. College personnel threw the dollar figures out like candy, a behaviour of those
in authority. When some tenants receive a cheque for $500 a month to live on, the $10,000 to $40,000 that programs use, take awhile to digest. The chairperson was not a tenant and tenants have since learned that this is the first requirement when they are called in to collaborate on anything. Although the idea of popular education was explained briefly, it must have sounded good, although there was no way tenants could have known what it actually entailed. There were no books, no visual materials, no discussion just a five minute description. The method was defined as "the group defines the problem and then works together to solve it" (Author's journal, January, 1994). There was no talk of examining oppression or illustrating social location using psycho drama or any other devices. Educators talk about social action and other concepts the literature associates with popular education, but there was no discussion by tenants or planners to incorporate this into the program. The ideas were an enigma to tenants not just because they couldn't understand the language of the professionals but equally because their experience gives them no reason to use words like social action. Women's issues become the dreaded feminism and transformation conveys the meaning to tenants of having to something other than what they are. Even education has a derogatory connotation. Furthermore, they don't believe it. I'm not even sure how tenants knew empowerment would result from the program but they seemed to accept it would be good for them. Educators can easily dress words in importance and package ideas as beneficial to the clients.

In this context, my privilege set me apart from them on several levels even though I assumed they would be part of the dialogue during the process. I knew the college people, I had talked to one of the instructors in the program and I thought I knew about popular education, although this was dissimilar to the one I knew about. Reflecting on
that first meeting, I think I saw their discomfort or sensed it, but I didn't probe my feelings with them after the meeting. Tenants didn't say anything at the time because either the money or the program encouraged their enthusiasm. When the flow of the discussion consistently went between the professionals and not the tenants, I remained silent and a little uncomfortable. If they noticed my discomfort, they didn't mention it. What I was not focussing on was how to promote them articulating tenant concerns. As the process evolved over the coming weeks, the social service and college workers were well informed of meetings and I wasn't although I was on the mailing list. Tenants had constant trouble with transportation to meetings each time. Nevertheless, the one or two tenants present talked excitedly about their program, their initiative, and their participation in making the decisions.

I don't want to dwell on what happened or didn't happen when the program was implemented, but to move instead to how the program was reported afterwards in the media. It followed the program planning process. City Housing engineered a press release for the local paper by eliciting the words of Francis who took the course and Shirley who was not even involved. Shirley was to say she was and they were both instructed to point out that the class was entirely made up of tenants in public housing. That would secure funding for next time. In fact, about half were tenants and the rest were workers with City Housing or other community workers. I don't object to the presence of the workers but I object to a picture that only reports tenants involved when their were others. The article accompanying a picture of Francis and Shirley holding their diplomas pointed out that City Housing had put in place this program to help tenants handle life better.
I was working with Francis at the time. She helped me see the issues more clearly when I might have bought into the conclusion that tenants had learned leadership skills. For one thing, when the article stated that the program had been funded by a $45,000 grant to City Housing, Francis protested. The funding had been given to tenants by the province for program development and not to City Housing. Suddenly, the latter took credit for an initiative tenants made possible. I hadn't made this distinction but she did. The facilitator of the course had construed the tenant participants as "developing the abilities that allow them to change". Francis wondered what exactly was wrong with her that the group leader had been able to identify she should change. The tenants thought they were learning new skills to change the responses they often received from Housing, not to change her.

Although I had been unhappy with the organization of the course design, I did not interpret from the *London Free Press* report of its completion in October of 1992, what the tenants did. From Francis's emotional response to the article, I became conscious that I could react in future collaborations at the planning stage and speak out for tenant recognition at every opportunity. By watching who talks, who questions, who gives input and monitoring that I could have assured tenant input. Press releases too should be tenant driven, initiated early by tenants before City Housing or some other authority reports from their perspective. This seems like a small incident, with very little significance but it is crucial. In communities where institutional authority consistently takes precedence over tenant capabilities, I am part of the process that can reveal this power structure. Yet, I can't always see it. I'm part of it.
The Politics of Public Discourse

Funding applications generated by the City of London council require that the applicant, in this case the tenant association, present a proposal first to the Director of social planning for the city and his assistant. The next level was to present to Community Assistance Programs committee, where several councillors, the mayor or his assistant and other relevant officials from local government reside. On this occasion, I was prepared to stand beside the association's president when questioned as a community leader at both levels. I accompanied her at her request on both occasions.

Unfortunately, as it happened I had met the Director on another occasion. When Francis, the tenant representative and I entered his board room, I was wearing my working jeans and she had a skirt on suitable for a high powered interview. Because the tenant with me looked so much better than I did, I thought it would automatically put her up front in the conversation. I wasn't going to speak unless she asked me a question or directed a comment my way. What actually occurred was the director made eye contact with me first when he asked a question about the funding application and even seemed to expect that the tenant either didn't know the answer or would tell me the answer and then I communicate it to him. This had happened once before when I accompanied my aging but articulate sick father to hospital. It seems that those in positions of authority have strict perceptions of who is dependent and who needs assistance.

This was not an isolated incident. When a tenant and I go together to collaborate with an official where I may have met that official somewhere previously, that person frequently talks about the tenant's community to me and not the tenant who is sitting right next to me. In such situations my privilege may not be obvious but it acts in a subtle way
to prioritize my discourse over a tenants. I have got to the point where I find it embarrassing. The outsider may only know that I work with the Longview community but that is enough to privilege my words over hers in discussion because I am not a tenant. Furthermore, the person Francis and I spoke to may assumes that literacy or rather illiteracy is rampant among welfare recipients, making coherent conversation with her impossible. They further assume, in my view, that this person as a recipient of welfare is incapable of articulating or knowing her community needs and one who probably hasn't dealt personally with the intricacies of a funding application. Both assumptions are wrong. Lack of literacy skills is not over represented among those on welfare and in my experience, if the subject of the application concerns their community, they are more articulate than I am if not more so. Moreover, if they can wade through the documentation required to put welfare or UIC benefits in place, a funding application looks easy in comparison.

What I learned from this incident comes from my connection one tenant in a very specific situation and not any evaluation required by me as an adult educator. Tenants know a lot about their communities. They can better articulate why programs should be funded but the assumptions that outsiders make can have the effect of keeping their ideas and their experiences out of the conversation. Narayan points out that it is up to me to scrutinize the attitudes I have and the assumptions I make about anyone who is different from me. Dealing with other people's prejudicial and stereotypical attitudes, often made on the basis of assumption, means showing others than you respect and accept tenant opinions and capabilities. Doing it in situations that have traditionally excluded tenants rattles the system but is a worthwhile strategy to further the tenant agenda.
I used silence in this case and it proved useful. When the director kept looking at me, I kept making eye contact with Francis and consulting her whenever he addressed me. I made sure that she appeared as she was—knowledgable about her community.

The Politics of Regulatory Procedures

Many tenants work part or full time at seasonal or yearly employment. Any sporadic work they take on requires they apply for unemployment insurance (UIC) when that is finished, and return to the welfare rolls until they get another job. On each occasion, there is a six-week lapse between the time UIC stops and welfare starts. For a number of reasons, I have never used UIC but always assumed that it provided a safety net for anyone unemployed. The tenant I assisted in the following matter was on the tenant executive. He also assumed that UIC would protect him in times of unemployment.

The system is not set up to accommodate recipients who move in and out of employment spontaneously while maintaining an adequate income for the family. Charlie works as a driver ten months of the year. He is required to apply for UIC in the other months and to redirect his welfare cheque to UIC. In this way, he is not a welfare statistic drawing from provincial coffers but an unemployment insurance statistic drawing from federal accounts. I was in this tenant's kitchen on labour day, discussing some association issues. He was to return to bus driving in two or three days. It is the end of August and his welfare cheque arrives. It totals $1.25 and the holiday weekend is ahead for this family of four and the fridge is empty. The husband swears, mother starts to cry, the children get upset, and start to scream. I stood there with my mouth open, but I
remember to this day my sweaty palms and my own feelings of helplessness. During the time I was raising a family, I had the privilege never to have to worry that a cheque would arrive that would leave us hungry.

The welfare and UIC system is set up for organizational efficiency. The rules and procedures satisfy internal demands with little consideration of the effect on people's lives. When the tenant and I approached the UIC office to see what he might do about this (after experiencing it three years in a row), the counter clerk advised him next time to apply for an overpayment. Overpayment, I thought? Aren't overpayments causing all the accusations of welfare fraud and deceit?

Even more revealing was the response of his case worker, the tenant's last resort in trying to get this mess straightened out. We met in the tenant's kitchen at 8:30 a.m. I thought the family would be struggling to get the day started, another assumption born of privilege. The house had been tidied, the kids were off to school and Charlie was prepared to state his case. The case worker came in, sat down and immediately warned the tenant and his wife that future would be tougher for them, that they shouldn't expect all these handouts and that they'd have to work. This is the same tenant I introduced in the introduction above. Satisfied that this tenant would comply, she took a few details and made some quick calculations, phoned UIC and then phoned the welfare office to get a new check made out. The process took 10 minutes. She said the cheque would be ready in a week. My silence had met its limit. I pointed out that recent media reports about the health concerns of children should prompt a quicker response for the family. The tenant picked his check up the next day.

A newspaper article from the Star published in Malaysia confirmed the view that
government directives, or laws are instrumentally defined, and do not consider the people
to whom the laws apply:

...laws remote from reality, detached from specific content are laws for laws
sake and embody the predominance of strong over the weak. (March 7,
1995)
I learned how control is exercised by the laws which govern welfare and UIC and how
tenants are powerless to fight back. I always assumed that once the government office
had the right information, it would correct the wrong. Not so simple.

The incident had other important aspects. Community work with any group
struggling for some control over decisions affecting their community cannot be restricted
to group issues. Tenant workers on the executive of the association, committed to filling
important leadership roles, must be assisted when their quality of life is threatened by such
institutional harassment. Then tenant leadership has a better chance of being sustained.
This is a critical point, in my opinion.

Politics of the Giver and the Receiver

Although I started working with Longview as an educator/tutor hired by the
association with a small $500 funding grant, as I extended our relationship into different
areas, I worked on a non-paid basis. As a volunteer, I moved into the position that made
me eligible to be viewed as a giver. Becoming more deeply involved in tenant issues
through the association, they came to trust me with more details of their experiences. I
started to feel that I was gaining more insights about them than they were receiving, but
this was never articulated. For example, because of their willingness to invite me to
community meetings, I took from those experiences a truer picture of tenant life and how
it fuelled the activities of the association itself. The interviews I did as part of our research added even more to that picture. One incident in particular emphasises the troublesome notions inherent in the terms giver and receiver..

When the police first announced, through City Housing, that they would run a rookie baseball league for 9-11 year olds in the summer, the tenants welcomed the opportunity. It is often tenants connected to the association that become involved in such initiatives because they form the link between Housing and the community. It would be a volunteer effort for the cops, a kind of community service initiative mirroring a similar program in Toronto’s Regent Park. I was pessimistic. Longview was not Toronto’s Regent Park, as the tenants pointed out, and the experience the tenants and I shared in program planning suggested that outsiders often make a clear distinction between giver and receiver to privilege their giving. One gives and the other receives with no blurring of these well defined roles. The police and Longview had not developed a productive working relationship in other areas of tenant concern. Public housing complexes such as Regent Park were no doubt seen by the police as being duplicated in London and perpetrating the social ills they try to prevent even though there was no evidence to substantiate stamping Longview with this description. Longview’s experience with the police had not been favourable. The police often dragged their heels answering calls in Longview. Recently, a man, repeatedly being beaten by his wife waited 30 minutes for the police to appear, with his kids still in the home. Other complaints have been voiced but the police in no way see the tenants as able to collaborate in solving the problem.

What interests me about the baseball experience is what the tenants saw as issues compared to what the police thought were important. I alluded to the incident in an
earlier chapter. At the first meeting, the police asked each association to identify their community trouble makers for the team. Most tenant associations flatly and blatantly refused on the grounds that such an act would create animosity in the community and discriminate against kids who could benefit and now exhibited good behaviour. Both the police and the tenants finally agreed that they would extend the age limit to include 9-12 year olds and leave the selection to the discretion of the individual associations. I believe Longview had permission to choose 4 kids, keeping in mind we have about 100 kids in that age level in the community.

It was not until we were doing the tenant interviews that other issues came to light. These are things that the association takes up on behalf of the community at large. For example, as part of the program, the kids go to Toronto to see a game at Skydome and adults accompany them. The police selected the Housing staff and paid summer recreational workers to go with the kids, completely ignoring parental involvement. The tenant’s opinion was that the police had actually said "that we don't know how to treat our kids and that's why they (the police) were going" (Interview by author, Shirley, Oct. 4, 1994). Although I pressed them twice to find out if those were the words, all three tenants agreed that they were. The tenants confronted the police and got them to agree that next time the parents would go. That trip occurred without incident.

Other tenants complained that the "coach policeman weren't listening to the parents or the kids" and I connected to other situations when I had seen other workers ignore the tenants. As an interviewer and outsider, I am socially located in a similar position to the police and that may be what prompted me to ask a group of three tenants "so what did you learn from the experience?" Without missing a beat, one tenant said
"what the police learned is to include the parents in what they are trying to do". Nothing about how the police handled the kids or how their kids reacted. That this tenant should automatically switch their learning into a statement about what the police learned is some indication of our different perspectives. I made the assumption that they had something to learn about the interaction with police but they maintained just the opposite.

This wasn't the only suggestion that parents had placed the onus of learning on the people assuming to be the givers. Another tenant talked about how "the parents opened the eyes of the organizers" (Interview by author, Charlie, Oct. 4, 1994). They put their concerns on the table but according to the tenant "they took it and filed it to read it after" (Interview by author, Charlie, Oct. 4, 1994) because they didn't want to show, in front of tenants, that they were listening to tenants.

A positive aspect of giving money is that you don't really have to confront how the giving of services, time and involvement takes place. When volunteers interact with a community that receives some form of benefit from them, those receiving the benefit should not automatically be expected to stay out of decisions about how their community will participate. In my opinion, we have too often divided giver and receiver, again as a role definition, thereby constraining how we might involve people like tenants as part of the giving process.

**Guidelines for Practising Solidarity**

One of the hardest things I encountered during our collaboration was having to discuss with tenants my participation at university. Because I wanted our work to be part of a growing cadre of participatory research literature, I wanted them to know how their
experiences formed the basis for the work and how it would be used. On the other hand, I didn't want to alienate them, but wanted to continue working alongside the association. About two years after I met the tenant executive, somebody asked me what I was going to do with the things I was learning. Why did I want to know about the tenant association and how it worked? It was an opening and I made use of talk about what I hoped would be significant about our relationship.

Reflecting on that moment, I wondered if it would be so far from their experiences that it would have no meaning for them. Research? Participatory research? What they knew? What excited them was that I would be trying to find out from them what they knew about community work. They would be consulted. They were the expertise that could inform other community educators or organizers. They seldom mention it anymore. It's was part of what we did together and they accept their contribution to that because in other activities, I work collaboratively with them.

I put together a short list of some things that are rarely mentioned by educators or organizers who work in communities with people who, traditionally, have been neglected and discounted in social interactions. I have tried to emphasize that the onus is on the educator/organizer to put out the effort to deal with her privilege..

1. I have a responsibility to question, encourage and develop their self-definitions, not to provide it for them. They know the experience of people in their community. Their silence does not signal that they don't understand, only that they aren't talking.

2. I must publicly confront and change the language that describes tenants as having a personal deficit as part of the collaboration. I can do that in any situation and if I am consciously involved in their struggle, then I must do it.

3. I use language that describes their specific capabilities, not just as praise but to mirror for them exactly what that capability is.
4. I am present at all community meetings and generally whenever they are at the other end of the phone saying "Can you come ..". Because they are often expected to wait until a worker finds it convenient to come to them, my coming at their convenience is a small attempt to dislodge those traditional roles.

5. I spend more time listening than talking. I monitor myself. Watch their faces, when they start to look into outer space, it usually means your talking too much.

6. I model and act respectfully in their community as I would in the community where I live. That means walking comfortably through the community, saying hello, sharing a moment, being part of the scenery.

7. I share more than their time. I also share their families, their lunches and their problems. They share mine. How can you drop into their townhouse on association business repeatedly without inviting them to do the same to you. They do.

   These guidelines are not comprehensive. They are merely a start at understanding that the collaborative relationship with tenants is made up of more than social analysis, program planning and confrontations with those in power.

Conclusion

Narayan points out that trust, between people previously locked into "historically constituted networks of distrust" can grow but that old patterns must be revived each time communication takes place (34). One tenant asked me if I would come to a meeting with the police, but he never followed up the invitation even though I agreed. Did he think I would add some credibility to the presentation then realize that tenants needed to present their own version? It illustrates how tenants work back and forth between being able to confront powerful others and wanting support while they do that. I don't think he really needed me to be there, but I was his safety mechanism. As an outsider, he knew which side I was on and it was the tenants. The fact that I never did go was, in my opinion, a sign of progress, with the tenants becoming ever more confident that their voice is the
right one.

Where Narayan has not been emphatic enough is in articulating the difficulty that less privileged groups have in demanding respect from the privileged. While she suggests that outsiders can learn by probing the emotional responses that insiders offer when they articulate their position, it is not just ‘insensitivities’ that prevent an outsider from digging further to understand an angry response. It is, in my opinion, a conscious denial of insider knowledge that manifests itself when an outsider ignores what tenants say, filing away tenant comments for later and not addressing them directly when the tenants are present. This is bypassing tenants completely in the presence of a more respected outsider. To call them insensitivities weakens the meaning of ‘epistemic privilege’ in my view. For an outsider to deny ‘epistemic privilege, they must claim control of the communication. For me to relinquish control means a willingness to accept alternative ways of seeing a situation and to accept that regardless of social class.

This relinquishing must be purposeful and deliberate. As Narayan says, it must be the burden of the outsider to exercise care and caution not to offend. This provides the opportunity for a collaborator like myself to learn from tenants. It is that critical moment when learning shifts direction.
CHAPTER 7
LESSONS FROM TENANT ORGANIZING

Summary

Adult education opportunities are usually planned and developed in the sometimes formal setting of an institution such as a community college. These programs may be designed to answer a need in the community. However, I have pointed out why some learners do not gain full benefit from these programs. The content of the classroom curriculum may not be relevant to the learner's life experiences. There may be problems in the learner's life that are more pressing than the activities of that classroom. Teachers may approach each learner in the same way and fail to consider the special needs of people such as those on welfare who are labelled as apathetic and lazy.

Learning outside of classrooms may be backdoor learning, as it occurred in the Longview Tenant Association. As a community organization grows and develops, the process allows many opportunities for participants to articulate what they need to know, how they describe their community and what they see as strategies to improve the place where they live. I have illustrated how self-definition is part of the process of learning and working for change.

The context informed this participatory project. Longview is a low income housing community administered by workers from City Housing. Some of these workers and some representatives from other social agencies in the community approach Longview residents assuming that they lack the skills to live productive lives. In establishing a
collaborative relationship with Longview, I began with the assumption that the tenants were capable and knowledgeable about their community. I also assumed that tenants were equally able to learn what they needed to know to organize their community for a better future. My role was to support tenants in their efforts and to convince them that their abilities could be developed through backdoor learning.

Tenant views of the role of the Longview Tenant Association proved different from workers connected to City Housing and from representatives of social agencies. The latter stated that the tenant association served an instrumental purpose. They thought the association’s goal was to manage the recreation unit and to provide programs. Tenants themselves rarely mentioned that although it is a function that tenants perform. Tenants viewed the Longview association as acting as a voice for tenant concerns, advocating when tenants identify something they need for the community or communicating with City Housing in a more effective way. While community practitioners may be tempted to spend more time on tangible results such as program development, tenants clearly express the need for advocacy and support from practitioners, particularly in the beginning years of the association.

This thesis has identified backdoor learning. This is learning that takes place unpredictably and in many situations as tenants organize in their community and as they interact with important others outside of their community. Backdoor learning produces instrumental, interactive and critical knowledge at a different point in the development of the association. While tenants gained instrumental knowledge in the early years, they began to benefit from critical knowledge as the association matured. Practitioners understand the importance of critical knowledge for tenants to grasp a social analysis that
explains why they are neglected and intimidated. However, in their rush to put that in place, they may forget that tenants also have to learn the mechanics of association building. This can be done by *backdoor learning* but it takes more time, patience and participation that some practitioners may have available. *Backdoor learning* is the process through which many of the demands of a classroom curriculum can be realized. Writing, reading, verbal presentations or an understanding of local government can be gained. However, the instrumental, interactive and critical knowledge is also possible and is as important because tenants are constantly confronting institutions that assist them. *Backdoor learning* provides a context for that.

The collaborative relationship the tenants and I set up was the context for my learning. I came to Longview to investigate how an on-site literacy program might work better than a classroom-delivered one. The program I brought in still did not attract tenants. By offering to support association activities, I chose an alternative opportunity to engage in learning. This resulted in learning for me as well as for tenants because I was constantly participating in dialogue to solve problems that affected their lives. I gained insights because they allowed me into the process for solving these problems. If I had just attended monthly community meetings and delivered a program in the recreation unit, I would never have learned what I did by collaborating with the association’s executive and with individual families in Longview. Our relationship enabled me to deepen my understanding of the way in which a community such as Longview is always perceived first as incapable. It is the voices of tenants and the activities they undertook that changed this. These voices assisted my learning and provided a different picture of the way in which tenants see themselves as capable and knowledgeable about their community.
This chapter also provides evidence for the continuation of backdoor learning and for a tenant association whose influence is still growing. In my opinion, the following incident suggests the results of backdoor learning and may be seen as an evaluation of how the knowledge gained was put into practice.

The Persistence of Backdoor Learning

Indications that tenant learning had increased the influence tenants have in articulating and managing the needs of their own communities occurred as I was about to leave Longview in June of 1995. A community worker gave me a flyer announcing a presentation about a study of critical issues for service planning and social agency coordination. Noting that several city and agency directors, and managers of institutional services would be present, I suggested to the tenant president, Kim, that we go together. I assumed that Kim might seize this unusual opportunity to question them about the funding she could expect for the 1995-96 year. Administrators expected Ontario's new premier to put community programs on the chopping block and the Longview association executive began to express their concern. Kim would be able to witness interaction between community providers, see how they talked about Kim's community. I thought she may have been able to give input to its needs. While I assumed that backdoor learning would occur in this context, that assumption was not predictable. This is typical of learning that occurs through the back door--either nothing is learned or more than can be envisioned by a practitioner such as myself. This was to be the last collaborative activity for the tenants and myself for a year. Kim's involvement in the question period and the impact she had on those listening suggest that she did influence the way others
think about tenants and that she had learned from our collaboration.

The meeting was held in a wood panelled room of the old county building, an environment which spoke of established wealth and authority. It was attended by a formidable array of suits and dresses. There were directors from the City’s social planning department and some front-line community workers or agency representatives and me. The occasion reminded me of the comment Francis’s made about people talking as if they’d just had lunch the day before when, in fact, they’d only just met. Greetings were more reserved when I introduced Kim as the tenant president. Kim and I were dressed in jeans and T-shirts with little thought of needing to impress anyone or of needing to approach them for funding.

The presenters summarized a study that they said proved that a drop in the economy increased the demand for social services. By showing that economic hardships endured by people most severely affected by the economic downturn caused social problems, those in positions of authority hoped to be able to legitimize increasing front line workers in the agencies and in social assistance offices.

Kim frantically scribbled notes throughout the presentation. I whispered that she might want to wait for one or two questions before she got up. I knew my work at Longview had come to a satisfactory end, when Kim took matters into her own hands and waved her hand immediately the moderator asked for questions. As the first responder to the presenters, Kim gave a fifteen-minute speech naming specifically the trials of living on welfare from her experience and suggested how the study could be changed to better reflect community needs.

*Backdoor learning* was part of a process that enabled Kim to articulate her
community's needs and be critical about the study. Kim had also read through an earlier draft of this thesis and commented on the language and descriptions used in it. In the following section I draw on her comments to show how Kim used the knowledge gained from backdoor learning. Where possible, I use examples from other tenant experiences to show how backdoor learning results in tenants self-definition and in deciding what action is best for their community.

**Self-Articulating Supports a Tenant’s Self-Confidence**

When I collaborated at a public meeting with tenants previous to this, I often observed them being reactive rather than active in interactions. They would respond to questions and give input if asked, but they were reticent to initiative dialogue. Kim gained confidence through backdoor learning, to use a public meeting to be critical of the study and to articulate her community's needs. She asked why agencies would want to increase their personnel to administer services from their office when her community would be trying to feed itself and help families stay together. She said that tenants know the effect of economic change but nobody asks them. Instead they ask workers who ultimately gain more money because her community is less able to look after themselves.

Near the end of her term of office, another tenant president, Francis had gained enough self-confidence through backdoor learning to evaluate and respond to outside influence. When administrators at City Housing learned that Longview was working for funding to set up a resource centre in the Longview tenant office, Francis was asked to resubmit a funding application for a resource centre that, instead, could be housed at the City Housing office. She could have complied. By then, however, Francis had
experienced enough backdoor learning to know that institutional requests come attached with conditions. She remembered how the leadership course, discussed under Politics of Program Planning in chapter 6, had already been described in a news release as a gift from Housing to tenants that had resulted in unequalled learning. Consequently, when City Housing tried to involve her in the resource centre initiative, she called a meeting of her executive to meet with the City Housing representative, at which I was present. Tenants confronted him with the possibility that tenants may not receive either the benefit or the credit for establishing the resource centre. Refusing complicity with City Housing was an act of resistance which showed tenants had gained enough confidence to take control of the interaction. Tenants seemed determined to establish themselves as initiators and not passive recipients of charity. Instead, they use their knowledge to confront the stereotypes with which they have been inscribed and formulate their own plan for action.

**Backdoor Learning Promotes Useful Language**

Kim is an articulate and informed community worker and president with a good sense of the power structures that form social controls and the "daily humiliations" of the tenants she works with. She used Buchbinder's words in her response and explained what they meant. She agreed, after the meeting, that one thing our collaboration did was give her an understanding of the language that she could use outside of her community and that others use to describe her community. In a sense, backdoor learning occurred for her during our conversations and when she read the thesis. This is unpredictable. I never knew when she would be picking up something I said or when she would use it. It becomes part of tenant knowledge and is communicated to others as tenants as they...
become capable of presenting themselves in many situations.

Community workers and activists often use the word marginalized to describe the oppressed and the way in which they are located on the periphery of mainstream forces. In class discussions, students and professors use it as a convenient descriptor to talk about communities of people who are invisible and who may experience oppression. Tenants learned through the back door, that they can appropriate my language and use it creatively.

Tenants gave me a surprise party before I left the community. Immediately after I entered the room full of people and saw the banquet tenants had prepared, Kim said "how's that for a bunch of marginals." She confronted me with language which often maintains privilege and stereotyping and which may work against a practitioner seeking to act in solidarity with tenants. A focus on tenants as marginalized is frequently articulated by someone other than tenants. Social workers, city employees, researchers and students may accept a view of people such as tenants that in its own way stereotypes and labels. The idea that mainstream institutions maintain marginalization through control and intimidation can be lost and the marginalization becomes a tenant characteristic, not the result of powerful authority structures dependent on tenant passivity. A practitioner's language can easily slip into the terms that evidence privilege and authority and I suggest some language use prolongs this privilege. Kim's pointing this out and having the confidence to do so, suggests the valuable role tenants play in making collaborators/researchers exercise caution and support them legitimately.

Tenants modified other labels which make them feel controlled and manipulated by an external authority. As a result of a recent community meeting with tenants, this paper
has been revised to change London Housing Authority to City Housing. The word Authority has long been a thorn in the side of tenants who, as this study has shown, consistently confront the abuse of authority by City Housing. At a meeting of tenants with City Housing administrators in 1993, the change had been agreed to by a vote, but the change had never been implemented. Then, early in 1995, a small group of tenants and community workers of which I was one, met to set up a program proposal when suddenly a tenant suggested dropping the word Authority from the entire proposal. They did and I knew of no other tenant association at the time that has taken this step. It suggested, in my opinion, that tenants are ready to assume leadership for change in their communities. They are using their language to name those who affect their lives.

**Backdoor Learning Confirms Research Concepts**

Kim's belief in herself as an organic intellectual worked to legitimize the public dialogue she engaged in to convey tenant issues. Translators of Gramsci’s prison notes, used the term “organic intellectuals” to refer to the means by which a people's knowledge finds a voice from among the oppressed group. His contention was that leaders chosen from among the workers were best suited to provide well-reasoned arguments to fight the oppression of the capitalist bureaucracy. In chapter 3, I agreed with his idea that the people's knowledge must achieve the hegemony previously held by the controlling forces of the corporate elite, I suggested that the use of the term organic intellectual may seem more pretentious than useful to tenants. I thought perhaps tenants might view employees of City Housing or the researcher as intellectuals and would not want to transfer the label, often applied to powerful others, to themselves. I suggested to
Kim that the burden of being intellectual might be too pretentious a position for them to assume even in their community.

Kim came across an explanation of an organic intellectual when she read my thesis to check some of my assumptions and to question some of the terms I used in developing ideas to describe tenant activities. In the following reflection, Kim illustrates how reading about Gramsci's organic intellectuals strengthened her perception that tenant knowledge can be objective and that she can relate her problems to larger societal ones.

After having read that particular paragraph, I sort of envisioned myself as an organic intellectual. That's reiterated for me by my own personal standing. I've always firmly believed that I have a capacity for thinking above my problems, above my lack of income...that gave me perceptions of understanding that I would not have taken for my own had I accepted the fact that I was just a poor person. (Interview by author, Kim, Oct, 1995)

Her comments contrasted with my attitude which was that intellectual is an academic term that may turn tenants off rather than legitimize what they know. Yet, I don't construct myself as an intellectual even though doctoral work is supposedly an intellectual activity. Because of this perception about myself, I may impose on others restrictions or limitations that may not be either justifiable or legitimate. Kim illustrated that she could accept this concept and I suggest it helped her understand and legitimize her confronting others with tenant knowledge.

What this implies for practitioners, especially those who choose to combine collaborative practice with research, is that we cannot ever completely distance ourselves from the experiences which have influenced our own perceptions. Conclusion about what is useful language for tenants and what is not should not determined either by the researcher, or by theories or notions of appropriation in participatory research.
Researchers like to think they have set aside personal values to deal with the values generated in the research environment. However, I had to take up these concepts with tenants. In that way, we could both work out the language that used to describe them.

If Kim had never read my thesis, I may have protected Gramsci’s term as one that is fine for theory but not for practice. Kim illustrated how theories can produce terms that are meaningful for people to whom they apply. Her grasp of the term was backdoor learning for us both. The result was critical action in that she used it to represent her community.

Other language may restrain tenants but Kim is aware of how language can have power. The category welfare recipient contains within it the essence of passivity and unquestioned benevolence that forms the basis for the oppression of tenants. Kim accepts neither the control of City Housing workers nor of Community Social Services nor the terms that reduce her capabilities by their meaning. Recently, she could have obeyed the directive set out by Housing that tenant associations should monitor the external tidiness of tenants' townhouses. She illustrated her ability to think as a tenant and for tenants. Instead, she bought a lawn mower that tenants could borrow and return, refusing to intimidate members of the community and impose Housing's directive.

Research concepts have the power to inform and advance the position of the oppressed or to restrict and narrow points of view. Participatory research, when the researcher collaborates in and out of community, during the writing of the thesis and after, allows the language to be considered as insider/outsider conversations continue to take place. Involving tenants in these processes is backdoor learning and the results benefit tenants and researcher.
Tenants Take Control

I observed Kim to have complete control over the audience during her speech at the community meeting. Her ability to speak passionately about her community's needs garnered the attention of everyone. Her insistence that participatory research should be done to accompany the facts and figures presented illustrated her grasp of what the presenters had argued. Another tenant, Doris, commented in the transcript that members of the community must learn to be givers as well as receivers. She was grappling with one of the controlling images that the Longview community endures.

This thesis has presented evidence to show how the Longview community took control of strategies to improve the life of tenants, both economically and physically. When tenants opened a food bank, for example, they walked the complex with a wagon shortly after tenants received their benefit cheques to build up the food cupboard for those down times. After I left the community, they expanded the own food bank and now even monitor its use so that the most needy can take advantage of it. Beer bottles are collected at fund raisers, in lieu of money, because they can be replaced for money. The Longview Tenant Association is assisting the multilingual community by developing a new program for non-English speaking tenants on site. These ideas recognize individual initiative and creativity originating in the faith and knowledge tenants have that their community wants to foster independence and respect. This may not be a strategy an activist would articulate because of the depressed economic situation in which most families on welfare currently live. However, that is now a decision dominated by the participation of tenants willing to serve on the tenants' executive. These initiatives, while seemingly small, reinforce and strengthen tenant resolve to attack larger issues.
Tenant Conclusions

A media report solicited the reaction to the presentation described above. Agency directors and social service managers spoke of the "very valuable research," of the "need to focus on prevention" and declared "the proof was in the pudding." (Reich, London Free Press, June 17, 1995). Alongside the generic comments provided by them, it appeared that Kim had done some critical listening of her own. She urged researchers not to lose sight that the numbers they refer to are people. Much of the stress faced by families, she said is created by the welfare system, not the poor economy. People will live on the money they have, but when the system doesn't give you dignity, when you're considered data, when you're looked at as having a deficit, as being marginal, that creates stress. She concluded by saying that we need to put humanity into the system. Today, the Longview Tenant Association continues to insist on that.

Participatory Research and Back Door Learning

As the researcher establishing a collaborative relationship with tenants, I took the responsibility for making sure tenants maintained control of the process. A researcher cannot assume a democratic process simply because it is called a participatory research project. Many times, academic procedures demand the write-up focus on outcomes and results. There is little evidence in the literature for potential students of participatory research to illustrate how a democratic process may be established, yet there is plenty of rhetoric to support the idea. (Heany 1993; Jackson 1993) A commitment to participatory research must be a commitment to social justice conveyed and practised through the relationships we establish in the community. Van der Eyken (1991) refers to
critical listening as a tool of administrators working with the oppressed. It involves comparing how different interests articulate an issue by seeking clarification, questioning, going for understanding of how people experience life. I believe that this is a key component of backdoor learning.

The process involved in completing participatory research is long and arduous. Unlike some action research which involves researcher and those managing the context being researched, participatory research requires that the researcher stand side by side with people oppressed and argue for the rights they need to improve life. This cannot be completed in two weeks, two months or even a year but often covers a period longer than most researchers can afford. This commitment involves taking on a way of life that can result in isolation and exclusion from friends, colleagues and sometimes family members who disagree with the research being undertaken. It is safe to say, then, that participatory research is a way of life that does not stop at the end of the research period. It continues to be the motive and the commitment in any future work the researcher undertakes. Nevertheless, I would take the same position in any further research I undertake because I can see no other means by which people regulated in the way that tenants have been regulated, can take control of their lives.

This research probes into learning, knowledge production and change--terms that occur frequently in the participatory research literature. Unlike previous studies, the evidence attempts to articulate the complexities embodied in these terms. By so doing, I hope it will encourage other participatory researchers to do the same.
Limitation of the Study

While an important aspect of this study has been the inclusion of direct tenant evidence on issues relevant to community organizing, this should not be seen as having universal application to all tenant associations in any public housing community. For one thing, it is unlikely that there are two communities that are similar in any way except that the residents may receive a shelter allowance. Even this is variable. Some communities exist within a larger urban area and some are in smaller towns throughout Ontario. Some have twelve townhouse units and some have 2000 townhouse units. In addition, some City Housing employees support associations and some don't. Because of all these differences, it is difficult to apply what has happened in Longview to other communities. Other tenants may relate to some ideas recorded here and realize that they are not alone in feeling the way they do. The road they follow in developing an association may be completely different.

This study is also limited by the fact that the researcher, in acting in solidarity with tenants, may be less objective than if the researcher had acted as participant observer. Learning in participatory research applies to both the researcher and those with whom the researcher is working. The researcher learns and feels the anger and hostility of the community as much as that same researcher feels satisfaction when the community lodges a successful protest. Yet, the success does not affect the researcher, only the thesis. This is the strength of the methodology but also its weakness. There is a danger that the researcher may identify with the oppression of the community to the extent that she or he forgets at times that she is not of the community, only in it. This forgetting may result in a subjectivity that was not intended, but is nevertheless, present. While I have tried to look
objectively at the issues raised by tenants, I acted with them on many of them. The reader should keep this in mind when reviewing the evidence.

**Future Considerations**

The purpose of this project was to collaborate with tenants and act in solidarity with them for community improvement. record what they know about community organizing. A natural extension of this work would be a follow up with tenants who have worked with the association to determine how those activities might have influenced other events in their lives. Another line of enquiry might be to determine if an association or any of its members that experienced back door learning move on to fight for welfare reform at the legislated level. As the leaders in the Winnipeg Strike of 1919 became political members some years later, do tenants who have acted as leaders in their community become activists in their community at a later date?

This study has avoided referring to ‘social change’. The literature on social movements frequently uses the word social change or social action without being specific about what that involves. Is social change linked to individual change as I have argued it does? What does a community of tenants regard as social change and what do workers from outside the community regard as social change or social action? Is it a notion coined by middle class activists to legitimate their community involvement? Is the term useful or should researchers be referring to change in terms articulated by communities? Would that expand our idea of change and what can be called social change?
Conclusions

Longview is only one example of a learning site that Welton describes as part of the new social movement (Welton 1993). Recently, social movement theorists have moved away from structural change as a requirement of practice for activists (Touraine 1992; Welton 1993). They hypothesize, instead, the need for grassroots development in which local groups exercise power and control by decisions that are determined by people affected by oppression. Although Welton suggests a learning process in which individual struggle unites to develop shared concerns, he does not expand on that process. I would argue the process starts with backdoor learning. It takes place as the community learns how to deal with a diversity of issues among its members using a democratic organization such as a tenant association. It is the process itself which makes it democratic. Some initiatives mentioned in this thesis may seem small, but they were the beginning of tenant control over some local issues. Kim’s comments provided one piece of evidence that our collaboration had ended in a way that suggested she had learned the language of privilege enough to quote it knowledgeably. She had learned the value of participatory research and how it uses the knowledge tenants produce. When she stood up to talk, she referred specifically to it. By communicating clearly how experience can inform practice, she touched on how backdoor learning can be used.

Learning for people who confront injustice daily must be learning that gives them tools to do just that. It must also work to affirm their right to do so. Adult educators can act as catalysts in that process and renew the historical priority of adult education to promote the people’s knowledge. This is the starting point for change that promotes collaborative decision making and involvement for all members of the community.
APPENDIX 2

Structure of London City Housing
SOURCES CONSULTED


Repo, M. 1977. Organizing the 'poor'--against the working class. *Community or Class Struggle*, Stage 1, 65-151.


