Looking at how adult educators see adult learning, we would expect to see family and housework front and center as an area of utmost importance. Consider the following: Informal learning is the truly lifelong process whereby every individual acquires attitudes, values, skills and knowledge from daily experience and the educative influences and resources in his or her environment – from family and neighbours, from work and play, from the market place, the library and the mass media (Garrick, 1996).

It involves “[l]earning to love the world and make it more human; learning to develop in and through creative work” (Williams as quoted in Collins, 1998).

Indeed, adult educators agree that civil society itself depends critically on lifelong learning.

In sociological language, we can speak of the cultural, social and personal reproductive tasks of civil society. This rather flat language does not fully communicate what is at stake. If the reproductive tasks are interfered with, or cannot be carried out for systematically rooted reasons, then the spiritual, moral and social infrastructure of the economy and state will be imperiled. (Welton, 1998)

In considering various perspectives on informal learning, Garrick (1996) sums up the overall understanding as follows: “... people engaged in day to day situations and interventions; people trying to make sense of their lives.” Much of contemporary adult education is influenced by Habermas’ notion of a life-world, who himself derived the concept from Alfred Schutz (Williamson, 1998). Collins (1998) notes that “The concept also accounts for how in social relations we blend our individual experiences with the life-world of others. Thus, the lifeworld incorporates community-forming processes that actively and passively shape it into a social world.”

One would expect that such a conception of lifelong learning has generated a
great wealth of information about what is learned in the family and the home. After all, this is the generally acknowledged place where biological and social reproduction occurs, where “attitudes, values, skills and knowledge” are acquired from daily experience of interacting in a social context, where people’s character and citizenship are shaped, an essential part of our lifeworld.

Canadian adult education, in particular, has a “historic commitment to helping Canadians ‘live a life’ and ‘earn a living’ (Coady’s metaphor of the ‘good and abundant life’” (Welton, 1998). However, it seems that only the second part of this commitment is actually undertaken: a concern with earning a living, and definitely not with living a life if the work involved is carried out within the home and is unpaid. When I was invited to write this chapter on unpaid housework and lifelong learning, I eagerly went to the literature to enjoy and learn from the surely abundant reflections of adult educators on this important topic. Three computer searches, conducted by three different people, using a variety of synonyms such as housework, domestic labour, caring work, etc., resulted in zero references. In some panic, I asked knowledgeable colleagues: what had I done wrong? Would they guide me to the important works in this area? At the end of this process I still had only two references. There are, of course, two huge literatures on lifelong learning and on housework but it seems that they almost never cross paths. The two exceptions are Livingstone’s 1999 NALL survey, which did ask questions about housework and learning and at least demonstrated that this is an area in which much learning occurs, and the other a set of German studies on worker-self-managers that will be discussed below (Frey, 2003).

The first question that arises, then, is why is there such a monumental oversight of this topic within adult education? The second issue that follows is: what are some of the questions that we might profitably investigate with respect to lifelong learning and unpaid housework, and of what relevance might they be to the larger understanding of adult education? I will address both of these questions in the following, and in the second section draw on some preliminary findings of an empirical study on lifelong learning and unpaid housework. I will here briefly introduce the study to set the context.

**Study on Lifelong Learning and Unpaid Housework**

This study is one of a series of studies of the WALL project (Work and Lifelong Learning, see http://wall.oise.utoronto.ca/ for a description of the complete project). The housework study consists of four phases, and at the time of writing this we are at phase 2. The first phase involved sending questionnaires to members of various women’s groups, asking about the nature of their unpaid housework as well as community work and the learning attached to it. The second phase involves focus groups that follow up on some of the findings of the questionnaires. To date, four focus groups have been held. The intent is not to determine how much housework individuals perform. Instead, our intent is to discover what category of work is mentioned when questions are posed in an