ADULT STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS

OF

THEIR OWN LEARNING PROCESSES

by

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Adult Students' Perceptions of their own Learning Processes

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Abstract

A major purpose of education is the development of independent, informed people who can adapt to changing social conditions. Thus, learning facts has become less important than acquiring learning skills that can be applied in different contexts. Awareness of one's own learning is essential because it enriches the process of learning how to learn.

All learning is influenced by context, learning style, developmental stage, and perceptions of what learning means. Perceptions of learning and the learning event will determine whether the learner adopts a superficial "surface approach" or a meaningful "deep approach." Approaches to learning and self-awareness have been tied to self-direction, critical thinking, and perspective transformation, which are seen as desirable goals by adult education theorists and practitioners.

This study is an exploratory, qualitative analysis of adult students' awareness of their own learning processes. Interviews, observations and a group discussion were used to gain insights into the experiences of eleven adult basic education English students. The results of this study may be useful to educators who wish to help their students become independent, self-reflective learners, and to the learners themselves who may gain insights into their own mental processes.

Most participants had problems in grade school because of learning disabilities, family difficulties, or both. After the initial fear and anxiety, most felt comfortable about being in school again. They liked the relaxed, noncompetitive environment and patient, supportive teachers. A connection was seen among enjoyment, readiness, purpose, persistence, support, positive feedback, confidence, and success. Most students were aware that different problems require different approaches, and they had a repertoire of techniques at their disposal. Most are self-directed; they have undertaken their own learning projects and have a sense

of when and where to seek help. Their greatest gain has been an increase in confidence and self-awareness which they can apply outside the classroom.

The original conceptualization of self-awareness in the context of learning how to learn is useful, but self-awareness is complex, personal, contextual and changeable over time. We must be careful about making judgements about a student's level of self-awareness.

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* * * * *

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Introduction

Background to the Study

Much has been made of education's role in the development of people who are autonomous, capable of making informed decisions, and able to function effectively in a changing world. "The success of any democratic system depends on individuals' ability to analyze problems and make thoughtful decisions" (Marzano, 1988, p. 4). Therefore, "the goal of education, if we are to survive, is the facilitation of change and learning. The only man [sic] who is educated is the man who has learned how to learn" (Rogers, in Betts, 1985, p. 2).

I see the idea of learning how to learn as a key concept in a process that begins with self-reflection and leads to personal and educational goals such as self-direction, critical thinking, and perspective transformation (which are introduced in the next section and examined in detail in Chapter 2). Figure 1 shows self-reflection leading to self-awareness in general and awareness of one's own learning processes (or cognitive self-awareness) in particular. This is the first component of metacognition, which sets the stage for self-direction, critical thinking and perspective transformation. Learning how to learn could occur anywhere on the continuum, but anything beyond rote learning would require some degree of metacognition. Candy (1990) sees learning to learn as closely related to metacognition and self-direction.

Metacognition has been described differently by different authors. Some view it as equivalent to cognitive self-awareness, but I see it including control, monitoring, and evaluation of thinking processes (Marzano, 1988). Comments

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made in a preliminary study (Herd, 1991) by Brian, a student who also took part in this study, may illustrate the difference. He discovered that, although he understood what teachers were saying and took notes effectively, he occasionally switched words or letters when copying from a blackboard, particularly when he was copying mathematical formulas. By talking to counsellors and psychologists, he discovered he had a minor learning disability. This is cognitive self-awareness. To deal with his problem, he checks what he copies with another student or has someone go over his work. He also asks for verbal explanations to supplement what he has read in textbooks or from the board, and then he checks his understanding by rephrasing what he's been told and asking for feedback. This is metacognition. Thinking of metacognition in this way ties it closely to learning how to learn.
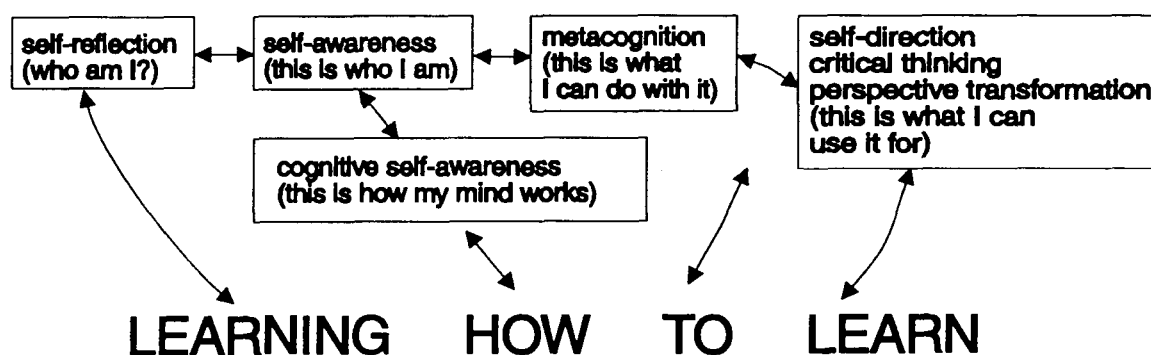
Figure 1 - Learning How to Learn (I)

The continuum illustrated in Figure 1 is not a linear process. The various components will interact with each other, as illustrated by the arrows, and develop together. However the transition from one component to the next may not be a smooth one. Students may need assistance or they may not be ready to proceed because of their background experience or developmental stage. Although there is some order implied (e.g. self-reflection must precede self-awareness), it is not a case of completing one stage and moving on to the next.

For example, in most people self-reflection will continue, even after a high level of self-awareness has been reached. Perhaps it would make more sense to view the process as a spiral in which one continually returns with a new and deeper understanding (Figure 2).

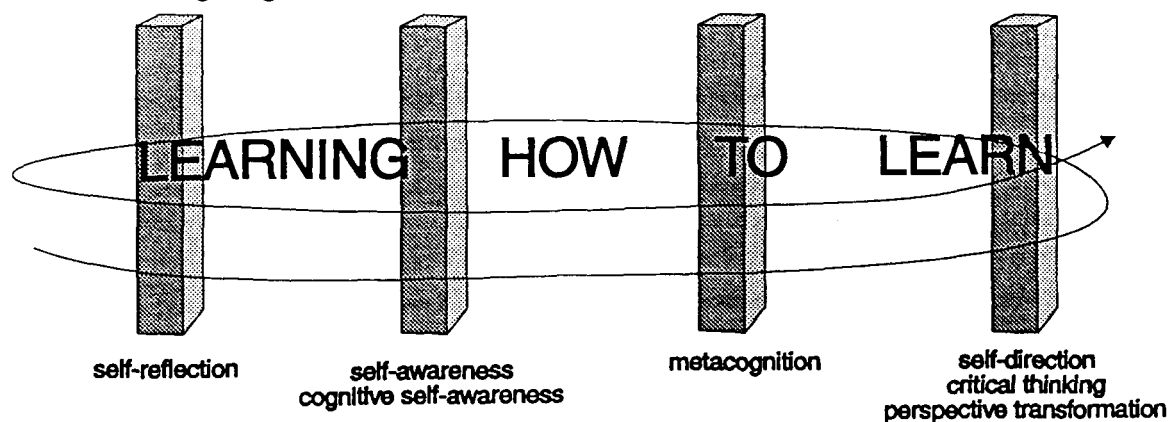| self-reflection | self-awareness cognitive self-awareness | metacognition | self-direction critical thinking perspective transformation |

Figure 2 - Learning How to Learn (II)

The Problem

Since cognitive self-awareness has an important relationship to the acquisition of higher order thinking and learning skills, it would be useful to know more about it. This study will investigate adult basic education (ABE) students' perceptions of their own learning processes (or cognitive self-awareness) in the context of a self-paced English program and describe those perceptions. Is cognitive self-awareness related to age? Is it developmental? How does it influence behaviour, approach to learning, and performance in an ABE program? The results of the study may be useful to educators who wish to help their students become independent, self-reflective learners. They may also be helpful to the learners themselves, as suggested by Griffin (1988, p. 210) in her description of a study conducted by Boyd and Fales:

> They report that highly effective reflective learners had not thought about how they reflected; once they became aware of their natural learning processes they named those processes - a significant aid in their use of reflective learning. They also found they had more control over their learning, and also experienced a surge of energy in their learning.

The Importance of Self-Awareness

Self-Awareness and Learning How to Learn

"The most important learning of all - for both children and adults - is learning how to learn" (Knowles, 1980, p. 41). Merriam (1987, p. 2) says,

> This concept involves becoming aware of one's own ways of learning and then learning how to become more effective at learning in whatever situation one encounters (Smith, 1982). Candy (1980) attributes the recent interest in learning to learn to four factors: (a) a shift in education away from teaching towards helping people to learn; (b) self-development as an educational goal; (c) a growing interest in experiential modes of learning; and (d) the recognition that learning is a personal and idiosyncratic phenomenon.

Lately, the term "critical thinking" has become common in the literature on adult learning, reflecting "the increased emphasis that educators place upon cognitive processes in knowledge development and problem solving as opposed to simple information acquisition" (Garrison, 1988, p. 1). It is not just educators who value this skill. "Employers and society at large are focusing attention on developing the skills needed to be productive and informed members of a fast-changing and highly technical society" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991, p. 20). "Few adults on the job or as citizens are ever told what they need to know or where the answers will be found" (Cross, 1981). Candy (1991) sees awareness of one's own learning as an essential component of critical thinking, which itself is inseparable from self-direction, and Mezirow (1990a) stresses the importance of self-reflection in his descriptions of perspective transformation and emancipatory learning. Self-awareness "involves an interest in the way one's history and biography has expressed itself in the way one sees oneself, one's roles and social expectations" (Mezirow, 1981, p. 5). In other words, it is coloured by one's past experiences and current context. Self-awareness can help a learner become more self-directed, acquire critical thinking skills, assess a learning environment, and develop a strategy for success in that environment.

Although there are suggestions that self-direction and critical thinking skills may not be valued goals of all people and all cultures, Merriam and Caffarella

(1991) claim that almost everyone participates in some form of self-directed learning. In any case, it seems reasonable to assume that learning how to learn is an important skill for learners to acquire. If an awareness of one's learning processes is the first step in acquiring this skill, then it is essential for educators to help learners develop that awareness. It is unethical and ineffective to force educational outcomes on people; willingness to be self-directed and to think critically must come from within. However, we can certainly encourage students to become aware of and reflect on their individual characteristics, strengths, and weaknesses.

Smith (1990b, p. 22) provides a summary of these arguments:

> Awareness, reflection, and self-monitoring, then, interact to make critical contributions in the learning process. They help us identify and cope with barriers to learning and make satisfactory resolution of issues of self-direction and control. They allow us to extract meaning from everyday experience as well as from schooling and other deliberate efforts to learn. They are essential to successful deployment of our personal repertoire of learning strategies. They play a part in making successful applications of what is learned, and they enable us to examine and modify the ingrained rules and principles that govern our learning. And they often produce insights that fuel the desire to become more effective at learning and the motivation for further learning.

Learning in a Changing Society

In the past, when the time-span of cultural change was greater than the life-span of individuals, it was appropriate for education to be primarily the transmission of information and ideas from mature, experienced members of a society to its younger, inexperienced members (Knowles, 1980, Candy, 1991). "Under this condition, what people learn in their youth will remain valid and useful for the rest of their lives" (Knowles, 1980, p. 40). "Up to the early part of the twentieth century the time-span of major cultural change...extended over several generations, whereas in the twentieth century several cultural revolutions have already occurred and the pace is accelerating....Under this new condition, knowledge gained at any point of time is largely obsolete within a matter of years" (p. 41).

Thus, adults are no longer in a position of being able to function effectively with what they learned in grade school. For example, computer illiteracy, which was not an issue a generation ago, may now be defined as a deficiency (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991). "The world we live in demands self-starting, self-directing citizens capable of independent action. The world is changing so fast we cannot hope to teach each person what he/she will need to know in twenty years. Our only hope to meet the demands of the future is the production of intelligent, independent people" (Combs, in Candy, 1991, p. 47) who have acquired a set of learning skills that can be applied in a variety of contexts. Mezirow (1991, p. 2) feels,

> Adults in such a society face an urgent need to keep from being overwhelmed by change....Rather than merely adapting to changing circumstances by more diligently applying old ways of knowing, they discover a need to acquire new perspectives in order to gain a more complete understanding of changing events and a higher degree of control over their lives.

While the claim that knowledge becomes obsolete could be challenged as a generalization, there is truth in it. Certainly the lessons of history and literature are timeless, but this may not be true of other knowledge, such as rote problem solving strategies or dealing with technology. For example, I learned to program computers using punch cards that were fed into a card reader and processed by a mainframe machine I never saw. With the arrival of microcomputers a few years later, my training was obsolete, but my understanding of how computers worked enabled me quickly to become proficient in the use of word processing and spreadsheet packages and to write programs in languages I'd never used before. The point is that rapid social change implies the need to continue learning in adulthood which implies that learning how to learn is a useful pursuit. Awareness of our own learning processes can only help us accomplish these goals.

The Study of Cognitive Self-Awareness

Theoretical Orientation

Awareness of one's learning processes is a complex issue, with many variables which may affect it. A learner's perception of what learning is will influence self-awareness, metacognition, self-direction, and critical thinking, and these in turn will influence each other. An event and the representation of the event will not be the same thing, so learners' stated interpretations of their behaviour and cognitive processes may be incomplete or inaccurate. Also, self-awareness could be influenced by culture, prior educational experiences, and stage of development, and it might depend on the subject matter and context of any learning activity.

Library shelves are full of literature on adult education (what the educators do) but substantial studies on adult learning (what the learners do) are more recent. This shift in emphasis from the teacher to the learner is healthy, but we must now shift the perspective on learning from that of the researcher to that of the learner. If we claim to respect the experience of adults, then we must value their thoughts and ideas, and take advantage of them as primary sources of information about their own perceptions, motives, and behaviours.

The complexity and contextual nature of the problem and the use of research participants as primary sources of information are both elements of a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology, an epistemological orientation concerned with the nature and meaning of experience, attempts "to enter people's interpretive frames of reference and to explore their structures of understanding" (Brookfield, 1990a, p. 331). It is particularly suited to "investigating an area of concern where no accepted and established research paradigm exists, as is the case with learning to learn" (p. 331).

Methodological Orientation

This study focused on the experience of learning from the learners' perspectives, recognizing that learners construct their own meanings and interpretations. This is in line with the recommendations made by Candy (1991) for further research in adult learning. He suggests that researchers

- investigate with learners their orientation to new learning tasks,
- enquire into the changing nature of learning tasks as learners engage more fully and enter more deeply into the material,
- find out what learners already know and how they attempt to reconcile new learning with existing forms of knowledge,
- explore with learners how they construe various forms of assistance and learning resources, and,
- examine learners' concepts of themselves as learners.

Specifically, it was the intention of the study to examine adult basic education students' awareness of their own learning processes. It attempted to elicit from students their perceptions of what learning is and what they mean when they say they have learned something. An attempt was also made to determine personal perceptions of strengths and weaknesses in different learning activities; preferred learning styles; approaches to learning and studying; appropriate forms of assistance; and the process through which new information is received, assimilated, organized, and tested. Of particular interest are students' perceptions of the requirements of various learning activities. Do they think about appropriate strategies and possibly try different ones, or do they automatically resort to the same techniques in all cases? Do they try to determine general principles within the material and make connections to prior knowledge, or do they try to memorize facts?

My previous experience suggested the best way to obtain information in this study would be through interviews, which provide personal contact that is not possible with questionnaires. The importance of an interactive encounter cannot be overestimated. Because of the complexity of adult learning and the

uniqueness of adult learners, some of the questions the interviewer will want to ask may not be apparent until part way through the interview.

Each respondent was treated as an individual. Creating a warm, relaxed, supportive environment is as important in this setting as it is in a learning environment. Respondents must feel that the interviewer is interested in them, and their ideas are valued. Questions must be framed in a non-threatening, inoffensive way, and sensitive topics must be approached carefully, without invading anyone's sense of privacy or forbidden topics. In this way, mutual trust can be established and the interview questions will be addressed honestly and carefully.

Throughout the interview process, it was considered important to be aware of the distinctions among a learner's beliefs (about learning and self as learner), intentions (purposes, what the learner intends to do when faced with a learning situation), and actions (what the learner actually does) (Pratt, 1992). If a good relationship has been established between the interviewer and the respondent, this should not be difficult to do.

To provide different perspectives and as a check on the material collected through interviews, other methods were used as well. Since I was working in the classroom with the students to be interviewed, it was easy to make observations over the course of the study. Students were also invited to participate in a forum to discuss their ideas with each other.

Once students' perceptions of their own learning processes were recorded, an attempt was made to find elements in common among them and categorize them in a way that might shed light on the problem in general. "Accounts of the specific often have the generic embedded within them" (Brookfield, 1990a, p. 328). For example, it may be possible to connect cognitive self-awareness to successful performance in adult basic education programs.

A Preliminary Study

A small study done with ABE students at King Edward Campus of Vancouver Community College (KEC) suggested a high degree of reflection and cognitive self-awareness (Herd, 1991). Although the importance of test results was recognized, the focus of most students was on understanding the concepts rather than getting good grades. They believed that, if the concepts were understood, the grades would follow. Most were aware of the techniques that worked for them, but they also knew that what worked in one context might not work in another. These understandings appeared to develop through an interaction of instructional style, classroom comfort, the support of other students, and the students' own interest and maturity.

Some of the students were keenly aware of their weaknesses and attempted to do something about them. There was a willingness to explore different forms of assistance, such as other students, tutors, study groups, and taped lectures. One student discovered that he learned more effectively if he sought out lab partners who had different strengths and weaknesses and who viewed the material differently than he did. Trying to explain concepts to his partner made him a better learner. This idea is endorsed by Bonham (1989), who claims that students with similar profiles may enjoy working together, but they may also reinforce each other's weaknesses.

Another student distinguished between "learning at the surface level", or the memory of facts, which was the way she learned in high school, and the understanding of concepts, which is the way she approaches material now. This distinction is apparently identical to the one suggested by Ramsden (1984), who uses the terms "surface approach" and "deep approach" to learning.

Not everyone interviewed was operating at the same level of sophistication. For example, one student still saw learning as the memory of information and solutions, and studying as simply reading over the text. She had learned the futility of sitting down with the text the night before an exam and skimming it

over while watching television, but she still hadn't learned to examine the material carefully and consider a more effective approach.

Most of the students interviewed appeared to be aware of their own learning processes and how their approaches to learning had changed since returning to school. Perhaps the development of this awareness began before they returned to school. Perhaps interest, maturity, motivation, and self-awareness brought them back in the first place. A more complete explanation would probably view self-awareness as a continuous process which was originally a product of personal development but which was nurtured by the students' interaction with the material, the instructors, the classroom, and other students - in short the context of the learning activities.

One implication for this study is that the context of a learning activity is so rich that students will be unable to restrict their perceptions of their own learning to cognitive processes. They may also talk about physical setting, administrative problems, assessment procedures, access to learning resources, and interaction with instructors, tutors, staff, and other students, as these features relate to their experience of learning. Such observations will only serve to enrich the interviews and subsequent analysis.

Summary

A major purpose of education is the development of independent, informed people who can adapt to changing social conditions. Thus, learning facts has become less important than acquiring learning skills that can be applied in a variety of contexts. In this study I begin with the premise that awareness of one's own learning, or cognitive self-awareness, is essential because it enriches the process of learning how to learn. The study examines adult basic education students' perceptions of their own learning processes in the context of a self-paced

English program. A conceptualization of cognitive self-awareness is developed, based on my own experiences and a review of the literature on adult learning.

Chapter 2 examines these themes in more detail, first by looking at adult learning and development, and then by connecting the idea of learning how to learn to self-direction, critical thinking, and perspective transformation.

Chapter 3 explores the development of interpretive research approaches as a response to the inadequacy of positivism. The principles underlying phenomenography and constructivism are outlined to provide a framework for identifying and interacting with the research participants, making observations, and analyzing the results.

Chapter 4 presents a summary of the transcripts from interviews and a group discussion with eleven adult basic education English students. This summary is supplemented by observations of the students' behaviour in the classroom.

Chapter 5 looks at implications of the study. An attempt is made to provide insights into the nature of cognitive self-awareness in adult learners and to re-examine the original conceptualization of cognitive self-awareness in the light of these findings.

Chapter II - The Nature of Adult Learning

Theory Building in Adult Learning

Approaches to Theory Building

According to Merriam and Caffarella (1991), attempts to develop theory in adult learning can be divided into three categories: those that focus on adults' characteristics, those that focus on adults' life situations, and those that focus on changes in consciousness.

The classic example of the first type is the theory of andragogy, defined by Knowles as "the art and science of helping adults learn" (1980, p. 43). It was originally based on four assumptions, with the fifth added later:

- Adults are independent and self-directed.
- Adults have a wide range of experience which can be used as a learning resource.
- Readiness to learn is a function of developmental tasks related to social roles.
- Adults are problem-centred and are interested in immediate applications.
- Adults are motivated to learn by internal rather than external factors (Knowles, 1984).

In spite of criticisms, "andragogy has gained popularity with adult educators to the extent that, for some, it is synonymous with the education of adults" (Pratt, 1988, p. 160).

Theories that focus on adults' life situations stress elements such as adult responsibilities which may interfere with learning, motivation to achieve particular goals, learners' characteristics and prior experiences, the learning activity, the environment, and the teacher's role (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991). In

general, these theories address elements that affect the learner within the context of the learning activity.

The most developed "theory" to do with change in consciousness is Mezirow's idea of perspective transformation (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991). He feels that self-awareness through critical thinking and self-reflection may be the most important goal of adult learning (Mezirow, 1990a). Popular education, originally developed as a model for literacy, comes from a similar philosophical tradition. The goal is for participants to develop a critical consciousness, an awareness of themselves and their position in society (Freire, 1970). The ultimate goal of popular education is social change.

None of these theories is supported by a substantial body of research, and none is comprehensive enough to explain all aspects of adult learning (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991). Echoing the sentiments of earlier authors (Cross, 1981; Brookfield, 1986), Merriam & Caffarella (1991, p. 264) said, "A phenomenon as complex as adult learning will probably never be adequately explained by a single theory." We will have to work with "many theories useful in improving our understanding of adults as learners" (Cross, 1981, p. 112).

While this may be the case, there are recurring themes in the study of adult learning. Self-direction, autonomy, the importance of life experiences, reflection, and action are all prominent in the literature (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991). These themes and others will be addressed in the remainder of the chapter.

A Contemporary Perspective on Learning

"Learning is the major process of human adaptation. It occurs in all human settings....It encompasses more limited adaptive concepts such as creativity, problem-solving, decision-making, and attitude change..." (Kolb, 1983, p. 102). It "leads to a change in the meaning of experience" (Novak & Gowin, 1984, p. xi). "Once learning has taken place, the learner can never view the phenomenon in exactly the same way again. Learning therefore entails an interactive relationship

between new ideas, experiences, and insights and existing frames of reference, where each interacts with and mutually modifies the other" (Ramsden, in Candy, 1991, p. 295). A construction metaphor offers a revealing perspective on learning. A traditional view might see learning as building a house, starting from the foundation and adding the building blocks (bits of knowledge) in a precise order. A more contemporary view, and one supported by the authors cited here, would see learning as building a steel-framed structure in outer space, with no size or shape restrictions. Pieces could be added in any order as long as they interconnected and formed a pattern which made sense to the builder (Cornwall, in Candy, 1991, p. 284).

Novak and Gowin (1984, p. 5) draw a distinction between learning and knowing: "Learning is personal and idiosyncratic; knowledge is public and shared." "Because no two people have had identical experiences, each person constructs a more-or-less idiosyncratic explanatory system" (Candy, 1991, p. 251). On the other hand, knowledge in a field of study is subject to the norms and criteria of that field. "In order for someone to claim to have learned something of social value or to have acquired some skill, he or she must, sooner or later, subject this newly acquired insight or behaviour to the critical scrutiny of others" (p. 39). Knowing is not the memory of facts or results. It is an ability to understand and participate in the process that makes possible the establishment of knowledge in a given field. "Knowing is a process, not a product" (Bruner, in Candy, 1991, p. 282).

Goals of learning may include the ability to solve unfamiliar problems, recognize the power and elegance of concepts, apply learning to problems outside class, and interpret the world (Ramsden, 1988). Obviously the learner must be an active participant in this process. "Learning must be *caused* by the learner" (Novak & Gowin, 1984, p. xii). For meaningful learning (as opposed to rote learning) to take place, learners must choose to relate new knowledge to relevant concepts they already know (Novak & Gowin, 1984). The role of the instructor is to provide an environment in which learners are encouraged to take an active role in their own learning, and to ensure that all learning events have "ecological validity", in other words "that the tasks being studied are meaningful to the

person and accurately reflect real-life adult experiences" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991, p. 165).

The Importance of Context

Learning rarely occurs "in splendid isolation from the world in which the learner lives" (Jarvis, in Merriam & Caffarella, 1991, p. 5). Changes in demographic base, economics, and technology influence the context of adult life, which shapes what an adult needs and wants to learn (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991).

The context of a learning endeavour may include elements such as physical setting, presentation of material, classroom dynamics, student-student and instructor-student relationships, administrative support, and assessment procedures. In the preliminary study (Herd, 1991), one student suggested it should also include external concerns and responsibilities as well as the support of family and friends. These features will interact to varying degrees with each other and with the thoughts, feelings, and actions of each student in the class. The result will be a variety of individual perceptions of context which will influence the way each student interacts with the program.

The contextual features that are important will vary from course to course and from student to student; they may also vary within an individual student over the duration of a course. In addition, there may be subtle elements of context at work that we don't recognize and may not be able to recognize. With this dynamic process at work, it is impossible to define and evaluate the effect of elements of context in isolation. "The content and context of learning are inseparable from the process and outcome of learning..." (Bowden, 1988, p. 256).

Adult Learners and Adult Learning

Adults' Conceptions of Learning

In 1979, Saljo (in Candy, 1991, p. 408) published two studies which asked people for their understanding of the term "learning." When he asked a variety of people ranging in age from fifteen to seventy-three, "he found that, even though many people had given relatively little conscious or systematic thought to learning in general, or their own learning in particular, they nevertheless commonly made three important distinctions:"

- the importance of context - learners become aware of rules and expectations and may adjust their learning to the perceived demands of the teacher or tests.
- the value of learning - subjects distinguished between learning and understanding, going beyond facts to an appreciation of general principles.
- the purpose of learning - a distinction was made between "learning for life" (relevant, meaningful) and "learning in school" (stereotyped and routine).

In the other study, Saljo asked the same question of Swedish university students and identified five different underlying conceptions:

- learning as the increase of knowledge - learning was described in terms of outcomes, and knowledge was viewed as discrete units that could be accumulated.
- learning as memorizing - there is some cognitive process involved in learning, but knowledge is still seen as units of information.
- learning as the acquisition of facts and procedures - knowledge can be applied and information can be compared to what is already known, evaluated, and classified.
- learning as the abstraction of meaning - learning is seen as reconstructive rather than reproductive; events and information are the raw materials from which learning can be extracted.

- learning as an interpretive process - an emphasis is placed on the interpretive nature of learning and the relationship between the learner and the outside world.

Beaty et al. (in Pratt, 1991) confirmed these five conceptions and added a sixth, effectively dividing learning as the abstraction of meaning into understanding phenomena from a given perspective and understanding phenomena from multiple perspectives.

Using the same method but a different audience, Pratt (1991) evaluated Chinese conceptions of learning and teaching. Learning was understood in four different ways:

- the acquisition of knowledge and skill from others.
- fulfilment of responsibility to society.
- a change in understanding.
- a change in perspective on self.

In spite of different educational, cultural, social, and political contexts, the Chinese and Swedish conceptions are similar. The main difference can be seen in terms of fulfilment of responsibility to society, which addresses the purpose of learning rather than an outcome, expressing a different cultural perspective on social responsibility.

Characteristics of Adult Learners

Although there are obvious differences between adults and children, and work has been done to develop descriptions of adults as learners, it is still not clear whether adults do in fact learn any differently from children (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991). For example, although the rich and varied experience of adults is recognized, it is not clear what effect this experience has on approaches to learning. Many adults do not behave autonomously in a learning situation and express a preference for directed instruction. This preference may be caused by past experiences and assessments which contribute to unsubstantiated myths about a learner's abilities and inabilities (Candy, 1991), with a resulting effect on

self-confidence. Also, claims about the distinctiveness of adult education may be ideological rather than empirical (Keddie, in Candy, 1991).

There is also no clear connection between experience and self-awareness, or between self-awareness and the ability to articulate it. It would be a mistake to assume "a high degree of self-knowledge and critical awareness on the part of adult learners." They may be "unaware of belief systems, bodies of knowledge, or behavioral possibilities other than those they have uncritically assimilated since childhood....Needs often will be perceived and articulated from within a narrow and constrained paradigm." To accept these expressed needs may be to "condemn such adults to remaining within existing paradigms of thought and action" (Brookfield, 1986, p. 124).

Effective Learners

Sternberg (1991) distinguishes among three types of learners. The first type is good at memory and analysis but poor at synthesis, good at exams but ineffective at solving real-world problems. The second type is insightful, inventive, and creative, but does poorly on tests. The third type is able to evaluate an environment, decide how best to function in it, and do it. The strengths and weaknesses of these three types may be debated but, in all cases, their value depends on the context in which they are used. "We have to look at people in context to understand how smart they are. If you don't understand the context, you don't understand the intelligence" (Sternberg, 1991, p. 10).

Each of these three types has its merits, but an ideal learner will be able to function in all contexts. To approach this ideal, it is necessary to develop an awareness of the myths surrounding our abilities and inabilities in order to deal with them effectively. This is not an easy process, since some unlearning may be involved. However, self-awareness is important, as it is the first step in the development of effective learners, which Smith (1991, p. 11) describes as "active, confident, self-aware learners who carefully monitor learning-related activities and continually reflect on outcomes and possible adjustments in tactics." Effective

learners are flexible and know when to apply a variety of strategies, regardless of the context. They are skilled at transferring what is learned to other situations, thinking critically, and reviewing assumptions about learning and knowledge. The goal is for learners to gradually become more efficient in managing all types of learning activities (Smith, 1991).

Approaches to Learning

The approach adopted by a learner is a function of learning style, subject matter, and the learner's perception of the demands of the situation (Svensson, in Candy, 1991). Research indicates that most learners, most of the time, adapt to teaching methods in ways that reflect their preferences or strengths (Bonham, 1989), but this may not be universally true. Children and adults tend to lean on their preferred style but, in mid-life for many individuals, "developmental energy seems to be concentrated in the expression of nondominant learning orientations" (Kolb, 1983, p. 110). A more important consideration may be how learning is viewed by the learner (Candy, 1991). "Less sophisticated learners often regard learning as an automatic process, something that 'just happens' and that is accordingly beyond the reach of deliberate personal intervention" (p. 389).

Perceptions of learning and the significance of the learning event will determine whether a learner adopts a questioning, critical stance or simply memorizes the material (Candy, 1991). These two attitudes have been described by Marton and Saljo (1984) as deep and surface approaches to learning. Deep approaches are characterized by an intention to understand, a critical examination of the author's argument, and an attempt to relate new ideas to previous knowledge. Surface approaches are characterized by an intention to complete the requirements of some task, a focus on the discrete elements of the text, and an inability to distinguish concepts from facts and principles from evidence (Ramsden, 1988). Marton and Saljo (1984) acknowledge that a surface approach may be effective in some circumstances, but they go on to say that a deep approach is the only way to really understand the material.

Although many learning style instruments tend to label a person with a particular style, learning styles are not fixed; they may vary according to context (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991). In fact, Ramsden (1984) claims that a student's perception of the learning context is an integral part of that student's experience of learning. A student's perception of context and subsequent approach to learning depends on interest and prior experiences. Interest in a course will lead to a deeper, more thorough approach to learning, whereas lack of interest will lead to a surface approach.

A similar distinction can be made between novice and expert knowledge. Novice knowledge is organized around literal objects; expert knowledge is organized around principles, abstractions, and applications (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991). Experts are better able to monitor their comprehension than novices because they have more systematic knowledge and more detailed and organized knowledge structures (Candy, 1991). Most novices are unaware of this distinction. There is a general misconception that subject experts are experts because they know a lot of facts. Unfortunately, this idea is often reinforced by our assessment methods which reward the recall of information, and students will "react to the requirements *they* perceive, not always the ones we define" (Ramsden, 1988, p. 24).

There is an intimate relationship between approach to learning and learning outcome. "The students who did not get 'the point' failed to do so simply because they were not looking for it" (Marton & Saljo, 1984, p. 39). These students "need to recognize a contingent relationship between the strategies they use and their learning outcomes" (Candy, 1991, p. 389), and the first step toward gaining control over these strategies is to develop an awareness of one's cognitive processes and motives (Biggs, in Candy, 1991). In some cases, students may have a repertoire of skills but be unable to decide which approach is preferable. Their motives and strategies may be dissonant (Candy, 1991). Other students may need to change their conception of learning before they can adopt a deep approach (Marton & Saljo, 1984).

Adult Development

Perspectives on Adult Development

The study of adult development has been approached from "three major perspectives: physical aging, psychological changes, and sociocultural factors" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991, p. 97). The literature on physical aging suggests that experience helps adults compensate for deteriorating physical capabilities. On the other hand, sociocultural context appears to influence adult development at least as much as individual maturation (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991).

Psychological changes can be further divided into personal, intellectual, and cognitive. Personal changes are most often seen in terms of sequential patterns of development, life events (which can be individual or cultural), and transitions (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991). Levinson (1986) and others claim that most adults go through a fairly predictable series of life cycles. It is also thought that transitions, or passages between life's stages, can precipitate learning, and a mentor can help an adult learner come to terms with a new transition (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991).

Change in intellectual capacity is hard to assess, partly because of the complexity of intelligence and uncertainty about how to measure it. For example Gardner (1983) has proposed the existence of seven different forms of intelligence, covering areas such as language, music, and vision. Each intelligence has its own form of perception, processing, and memory, and a person may be highly skilled in one area but average or weak in others. A useful perspective on intelligence is Catell's distinction between fluid and crystallized intelligence (Cross, 1981). Fluid intelligence is connected to speed, spatial perception, and adaptation; it declines with age. Crystallized intelligence is associated with judgement, knowledge, and experience; it increases with age. It's not clear whether age affects general intellectual abilities. "Adult intelligence appears relatively stable, at least until the sixth or seventh decade" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991, p. 158).

Much of the work on adult cognitive development is based on extensions to Piaget's theory about children. Two contemporary perspectives are those offered by Perry (1988) and Belenky et al. (1986). Perry identified nine developmental stages. The first stage is characterized by a belief that there are right and wrong answers and authorities know the right answers. In the ninth stage, learners have developed a strong sense of their personal values, a respect for others' values, and a realization that learning is a continuous process. Belenky et al., observing that studies done by Perry and others focused on white, middle-class males, interviewed women from different sociocultural backgrounds and identified five stages ranging from silence to constructed knowledge. In general, they characterize women's knowing as non-judgemental, patient, collaborative, and cooperative, unlike the male model which is more personal and competitive.

Learning and Development

Developmental stages have been linked to learning activities through what Havighurst called the "teachable moment" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991, p. 119). "We can ask questions about *what* adults are ready to learn at various times in their lives and *how* they can be helped to accomplish various developmental tasks" (Cross, 1981, p. 153). "The ability to make reflective judgements is an outcome of a developmental sequence that both limits learning and can be influenced by learning" (Kitchener & King, 1990, p. 160). Therefore, learning activities should be chosen to reflect the developmental stage of the learner. Identification of a learner's stage is important, since "individuals are quite consistent in their reasoning across different tasks [and] seldom able to produce reasoning more than one stage above their typical response" (p. 166).

Awareness of one's learning processes may also be a product of one's developmental stage. A person may not be capable of self-reflection until a certain age or level has been reached. Perhaps older, more mature learners will be more self-aware than younger students. Perhaps we should not even expect self-awareness from younger adults. Perhaps students reach the necessary developmental stage at radically different times, while some never reach it.

Under these circumstances, two questions regarding education need to be asked: can self-awareness be learned as a result of direct instruction and, if so, when is the best time to try teaching it?

Self-Direction

Components of Self-Direction

Self-direction has been "a recurrent concern of educators in all ages, in most cultures, and for all levels" (Candy, 1991, p. xiv). The reason it continues to attract attention "is that it embodies two of education's most noble aims and most enduring mandates: individual fulfilment and societal transformation" (p. 425). Our understanding of self-direction has been compromised by the lack of a clear definition. Candy, who Brookfield claims has written "the definitive text in this area" (in Candy, 1991, p. xi), claims that self-direction has been applied to four related but distinct phenomena:

- personal autonomy - freedom from internal and external constraints in everyday life
- self-management - self-direction within one's field of constraints
- autodidaxy - self-directed learning outside formal settings
- learner control - learner controlled instruction

These conditions don't exist in isolation. They overlap and interact with each other in different ways, depending on the individual (Candy, 1991, 1987).

Autonomy is a philosophical attribute and self-management is a psychological attribute of the learner. Either can be thought of as a goal or outcome of learning. Autodidaxy and learner control are related to learning style, and either can be thought of as a method or process of learning. Personal autonomy and autodidaxy are connected to a natural setting, while self-management and learner control are tied to a formal setting (Candy, 1991). Figure 3 offers an interpretation of these distinctions.

Goal or Outcome of Learning (Personal Style)

	Personal Autonomy	Self Management	
Natural	Personal Autonomy	Self Management	Formal
Setting	Autodidaxy	Learner Control	Setting

Method or Process of Learning (Learning Style)

Figure 3 - Components of Self-Direction

Self-Direction and Assistance

Since most learning requires the acquisition of a way of thinking about a subject, there is a limit to how much self-directed learning can occur in isolation, especially in the early stages of an investigation. Two common myths about learners are that they know what's best for themselves and they are capable of acting on that knowledge. Self-directed learners may be ignorant of the rules of discourse, discredited lines, and the relative complexity of ideas in a given subject area (Candy, 1991).

Thus it is not unreasonable for a self-directed learner to seek assistance. "The best way to master the rudiments of a new area is to be taught by a master" (p. 21). In fact, the most important characteristic of a self-directed learner may not be the ability to work alone but the ability to know when to seek assistance and what type of assistance to seek.

Situational Nature of Self-Direction

"Self-direction is a situational attribute of learners, not a general trait of adulthood" (Pratt, 1988, p. 165). Situational variables include negotiability of goals and content, time, cost, and class size. Learner variables include sense of purpose, prior knowledge and experience, self-efficacy, developmental stage, cognitive development, conceptual development, cognitive and learning style, moral reasoning, locus of control, commitment, and self-confidence (Pratt, 1988). Self-directed learning activities are influenced by the needs, interests, experiences, and actions of the learner as perceived by the learner. How needs are addressed depends on internal motivation, circumstances, abilities, knowledge, experience, and happenstance (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991).

Whether self-direction, or particularly autonomy, is a result of educational intervention or maturation, a person can't become autonomous in a universal and permanent sense. There is a limited transferability of competence from one situation to another. Any plan or program to develop self-directedness can only achieve marginal improvement in general aspects of learning competence; the need for domain-specific skills will persist (Candy, 1991).

Characteristics of Self-Directed Learners

To learn effectively on one's own requires a range of technical skills, familiarity with the subject matter, and a sense of personal control. A vital tool of the self-directed learner is the ability to formulate issues as questions (Candy, 1991), a skill that reflects some understanding of the material and a sense of what may be gained through the learning activity. Since self-directed learning is less linear than classroom learning (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991), learners should be prepared to depart from an original plan as new insights and opportunities arise.

Self-direction is linked to competitive individual effort and technologically advanced economic systems (Candy, 1991). Self-directed learning, as expressed by rugged individualism, has been highly valued by our society. Those who

succeed are often from a northern European background. Those from non-western cultures may have a value orientation based on communal values and holistic thought processes (Halverson, 1979). The same may be true of women, whose ideas about learning and knowledge may be more "connected" than individual (Belenky et al., 1986).

It is dangerous to generalize across gender and culture, but it seems reasonable to assume that self-directed behaviour should not be expected from all students, nor should it be imposed on anyone. In any case, it certainly should not be emphasized to the point where individual needs take precedence over social cohesion (Candy, 1991).

Critical Reflection and Action

Critical Thinking

Reflection is a process of exploring one's experiences to acquire new understandings and appreciation. It includes "making inferences, generalizations, analogies, discriminations, and evaluations, as well as feeling, remembering, and solving problems. It also seems to refer to using beliefs to make an interpretation, to analyze, perform, discuss, or judge..." (Mezirow, 1990b, p. 5). Critical thinking, or reflective learning, is defined as "the process of internally examining and exploring an issue of concern, triggered by an experience, which creates and clarifies meaning in terms of self, and which results in a changed conceptual perspective" (Boyd and Fales, in Candy, 1991, p. 390).

Brookfield (1990b) sees critical thinking as consisting of three interrelated phases: identifying assumptions, scrutinizing their accuracy and validity, and reconstituting them. In Mezirow's (1990c) description of the three phases, the learner must return to the experience to recapture as much detail as possible, attend to feelings attached to the experience and review them, and reevaluate the

experience. It is important to remember, as it is with self-direction, that critical thinking varies according to subject matter and context. The acquisition of thinking skills in one situation may not mean that those skills are transferable to another situation (Garrison, 1988).

Perspective Transformation

"Adulthood is the time for reassessing the assumptions of our formative years that have often resulted in distorted views of reality" (Mezirow, 1990b, p. 13). "Perspective transformation is the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our presuppositions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; of reformulating these assumptions to permit a more inclusive, discriminating, permeable, and integrative perspective; and of making decisions or otherwise acting upon these new understandings" (Mezirow, 1990b, p. 14).

Perspective transformation may be triggered by an externally imposed disorienting dilemma. It may be individual, group (as in learning circles), or collective (as in the civil rights or women's movement) (Mezirow, 1990b). What these experiences have in common is that they lead to a change in how the participants view the world and act on that new perspective.

Resistance to Critical Reflection

Adults may be unwilling to consider the contextuality of their situations and view their beliefs, behaviours, and values as culturally created and provisional (Brookfield, 1986). Our frames of reference are culturally assimilated rather than intentionally learned (Mezirow, 1990), and our assumptions may be so internalized that we perceive them as second nature. Becoming aware of these assumptions is problematic because of the familiarity of the ideas (Brookfield, 1990b). "The more intense the emotional context of learning and the more it is

reinforced, the more deeply embedded and intractable to change are the habits of expectation that constitute our meaning perspectives" (Mezirow, 1990b, p. 3).

"When experience is too strange or threatening to the way we think or learn, we tend to block it out or resort to psychological defense mechanisms to provide a more compatible interpretation" (Mezirow, 1990b, p. 4). Therefore, encouraging learners to think critically about their experiences must be done carefully. Freire's (1970) popular education model provides a useful perspective on how to approach this problem. Rather than attacking critical thinking directly, an educator will seek out issues that concern the learners in order to encourage a dialogue. The emphasis is on trust, support, and openness, with the educator taking the role as a partner rather than a facilitator. As this relationship develops, the learners are encouraged to question their understanding of the issues that concern them. Brookfield (1987) would agree with this approach, stressing support, attentiveness, sensitivity, and the reflection of learners' attitudes and habits back to them for examination. To Brookfield's list, Candy (1991, p. 331) adds practical skills: "making learners aware of the conventions and principles of the subject being learned, teaching what sorts of questions to ask and when, and showing how much and what kind of evidence is enough to determine the validity of a statement." Perhaps the most important consideration is for the educator to model the kinds of critical reflection the learners are asked to explore (Brookfield, 1990b).

Summary

While there are many theories which explain some aspects of adult learning, there may never be a single theory which can completely explain such a complex phenomenon. Conceptions of learning range from the memory of facts to the recognition of learning as an interpretive process. All learning is influenced by context, learning style, developmental stage, and perceptions of what it means to learn something. Perceptions of learning and the learning event will determine

whether the learner adopts a surface approach (which generally leads to a superficial outcome) or a deep approach (which generally leads to a meaningful outcome). Approaches to learning and self-awareness have been tied to self-direction, critical thinking, perspective transformation, and emancipatory learning, which are seen as desirable goals by adult education theorists and practitioners.

Chapter III - Methodology

Toward an Educational Research Methodology

Orientations to Learning

There are many theories which describe different aspects of the learning process. Merriam and Caffarella (1991) have summarized these in four distinct orientations to learning: behaviourism, cognitivism, humanism, and social learning.

Behaviourists define learning as a change in behaviour; research is directed toward the study of observable behaviour. Behaviourist theory has been applied to training and adult education programs which use behavioral learning objectives.

Cognitivists are interested in internal mental processes rather than external behaviour. Their focus is on how information is processed, stored and retrieved. Studies on adult development and aging often adopt a cognitivist perspective.

The emphasis in humanism is on human nature, potential, emotions, and affect. Humanists believe learning is a function of motivation as well as cognitive processes and observable behaviour. The concept of adults as independent and self-directed is based on humanistic assumptions.

Social learning focuses on social setting, claiming that learning is a function of the interaction of the person, the environment, and behaviour. This orientation stresses the importance of context and encourages modelling and mentoring (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991).

Influence of Orientation on Research

Lacking its own models, education has borrowed theory and data transformation techniques from other fields (Novak & Gowin, 1984), psychology in general and behaviourism in particular. "With some notable exceptions, much modern research on learning has until recently been dominated by four factors: an atomistic or quantitative view of knowledge, a behaviouristic or neobehaviouristic view of people, a preference for the perspective of the researcher over that of the learner, and a tendency to conduct research in laboratories or other artificial settings" (Candy, 1991, p. 249). "The overt repression in education of research studies not employing the behavioral paradigm is one reason educational research has been slow in advancing" (Novak & Gowin, 1984, p. 158).

An example of the problem with a behaviouristic approach is offered by Candy (1991) in his comparison between assisted autodidaxy and learner control. In the first case, the learner initiates the learning activity but decides to seek assistance at some point along the way. Learner control suggests an instructional setting in which the learner is given a task but is able to work on it more or less independently. To an outside observer focusing on aspects of behaviour, there may be no apparent difference between the two situations (Candy, 1991). The difference is in the notion of ownership - who initiates the learning activity. This is important as it will influence the learner's attitude, subsequent approach to the material, and the learning outcome.

The idea of "cognitive science" (Gardner, 1985) has also had an influence on recent studies in education. Cognitive science is based on an interdisciplinary study of mental functions. It suggests de-emphasizing affective functions and context, as well as biological, neurological, sociological, historical, and cultural factors. This would be done in the interest of simplicity, in order to facilitate the use of computers to analyze data (Gardner, 1985). Such an approach appears to be more interested in studying problems that are easy to address rather than those that are important and that might yield meaningful results. This is reminiscent of the joke about the drunk looking for his keys where the light is

best, not where he dropped them. Put more simply, since the variables that Gardner suggests we ignore all interact to influence our mental processes, it will be impossible to isolate one or a few of them and ignore or control everything else (Novak & Gowin, 1984). Another criticism of cognitive science that applies to behaviourism as well is that they both neglect feelings, an essential consideration along with thinking and acting, when examining the construction of meaning from experience (Novak & Gowin, 1984).

The Myth of Scientific Objectivity

Until recently, it was assumed that educational research should be based on the aims and methods of established science. Researchers embraced positivism in an attempt to gain credibility through the empiricism (Candy, 1991). However, the scientific method is a product of a particular orientation, the male-dominated western intellectual tradition (Keller, 1985). It is just one of many ways to construe reality, and recently science has been finding this approach too narrow to suit all its purposes. "It seems ironic that, just at the time that research in education has been striving to render itself more "scientific" (meaning more concerned with invariant laws and objective data), research in science has become more concerned with the relativity of knowledge" (Candy, 1991, p. 253). "Positivism and the positivist epistemology of practice now seem to rest on a particular view of science, one now largely discredited" (Schon, 1986). "It has been effectively shown that the Positivists' understanding of the natural sciences and the formal disciplines is grossly oversimplified" (Bernstein, in Schon, 1986).

Along with the realization that the scientific method can't deal adequately with all the problems faced by science, another myth that has been exploded is that of the scientist as an impartial, detached observer. Scientists are enmeshed in a web of personal and social circumstances, like everyone else. They have their own biases, preferences, social values and psychological attitudes (Gould, 1989). In this context, it isn't hard to prove that science has its subjective, creative side as well (Nettleford, 1986). In fact, "subjective thinking is...an essential step in the

process the scientist must follow in grasping the nature of the universe" (Kelly, in Mezirow, 1990c, p. 290).

The problem with the subjective aspect of scientific study is that it can lead to shoddy technique, data fudging, the abuse of statistics, and self-deception. "Science, as actually practised, is a complex dialogue between data and preconceptions" (Gould, 1989, p. 244). These preconceptions will cloud our judgement. For example, there have been many attempts to "prove" that men are smarter than women and whites are smarter than other races (Gould, 1981). A more personal case is that of Charles Walcott, an eminent geologist and paleontologist, who misinterpreted the fossils he found in the Canadian Rockies (Gould, 1989). His belief in evolution as an orderly, inevitable march of progress directed by God's benevolence led him to see the fossils he studied as relatives of existing creatures, rather than recognize that they represented previously unknown phyla that were now extinct. With an apparently unconscious bias, Walcott misinterpreted the data, ignored what was there, and assumed that what wasn't there was lost. All this was done in order not to threaten his prior beliefs (Gould, 1989). The greatest impediment to scientific innovation is usually a conceptual lock, not a factual lock. When making observations, we must see evidence for what it is, and not try to force it into a priori categories (Gould, 1989).

Current Trends in Educational Research

In 1984, Novak and Gowin (p. 150) observed that, "although it is useful to observe how theories and methodologies in other fields serve to construct new knowledge, education involves a unique set of phenomena, and a discipline of education must construct its own theories and methods." Today this is happening. As positivism continues to lose favour, many educational theorists are advocating "a new epistemological framework, one which aims to produce 'interpretive' accounts of phenomena rather than lawlike generalizations" (Candy, 1991, p. 431). Recent research views "learning as a qualitative transformation of understandings rather than a quantitative accretion,...it sees learners as active

construers and 'makers of meaning',...it concentrates on portraying the experience of learning from the learner's perspective, and...it seeks to examine the phenomenon of learning in all its complexity, as it occurs in 'natural' or 'real-life' settings" (p. 250).

Recent years have seen the development of a significant knowledge base about adult learning (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991). With this increased knowledge, "adult educators are moving from description to theory building; we are considering the sociocultural context in which learning takes place, thus shifting from a primarily psychological orientation to a broader psychosocial view; we are more cognizant of the social issues and ethical dilemmas involved in the provision and practice of adult learning; and we are examining notions about how knowledge about adult learning is produced and legitimized" (p. 316). This close look at adult learning has led us to recognize the value of the learners themselves as sources of understanding. Future research should be collaboratively designed with adults who are learning in informal as well as formal settings (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991).

The Complexity of Adult Learning

"Individuals differ from one another in significant ways that affect both their approaches to learning and their learning outcomes. Obviously, physical characteristics, personality, family background, intellectual ability, life experiences, personal goals" and, perhaps most significantly, cognitive processes will vary from person to person (Candy, 1991, p. 63). The world is multi-faceted and open to many interpretations (Saljo, 1988), and every adult's prior experience produces a unique world view through which new experiences and knowledge are filtered. In fact, individual learning behaviours are so idiosyncratic as to cast doubts on any efforts by theorists to identify general truths (Brookfield, 1986).

Gibbs et al. (1984) have identified four orientations to learning common to adult students: vocational, academic, personal, and social. An individual's orientation is complex and variable, it depends on a student's interests and aims,

and it may include two or more of the above types. An understanding of educational orientation is important if we want to understand students' experiences of learning (Gibbs et al., 1984).

Besides personal differences, cultural differences will contribute to a person's distinctive experience. Members of different cultures may perceive the world through different cognitive frameworks and learning styles (Anderson, 1988). An important but often overlooked distinction is that between high context cultures (which assume a high degree of shared meaning in interactions) and low context cultures (which assume minimal shared meaning). In interactions between these two cultural types, communication and understanding can suffer as people may not get the background information they need or expect (Hall, 1986). To add to the complexity, cultural differences, as well as personal differences, are fluid and variable; they must not be stereotyped and treated as static (Anderson, 1988).

The variety of learning events and the variable interactions among students, teachers, materials, and setting make it difficult to observe consistent regularities in order to form concepts and theories about teaching and learning (Novak & Gowin, 1984). The problem with pre-conceived categories is that they trivialize human complexity, shoehorn people, and lend a fatalistic view to human change and development. No individual is static and no individual represents a pure type. The problem, then, is how to conceive of general laws and categories that do justice to human uniqueness (Kolb, 1983).

Interpretive Approaches

Weaknesses in Previous Studies

Traditional research can't deal with the complexity and sophistication of learning processes (Magoon, 1977). Even if we could define all the variables

involved, an empirical approach would be ineffective because there would be aspects of the learners' mental processes and subtle elements of context at work that we might not have recognized and might not be able to recognize. Candy (1987) has identified weaknesses in past studies that suggest a naturalistic approach: the importance of context is overlooked; the studies are of a short duration and they focus on rote learning; generalizations are made to the entire population; assumptions are made about transferability of competence; the perceptions of the participants are ignored; and the studies are compromised by class, gender, and ideological biases. In addition, past research has suffered from a lack of a consistent theoretical perspective and the failure to create a cumulative knowledge base (Candy, 1991). These observations were made about research into self-direction, but many can be applied to research into learning in general and adult learning in particular. In any case, they serve as reminders of pitfalls to be avoided.

Characteristics of Valid Research

Valid research must be based on a conceptual framework that is sensitive to the complexities of learning in everyday study (Saljo, 1988). Since everyone's experience is unique, it is essential to recognize the highly individual nature of how people approach learning, situational variability, the random nature of human affairs, people as active choosers, and the dynamic and constantly changing nature of learning endeavours (Candy, 1991). Bonham (1989) suggests that qualitative methods, such as case studies, would be more effective than quantitative methods for studying learning styles. The question of what is happening may be more important than the question of whether a specific outcome has been achieved. Levinson (1986), on adult development, advocates examining all aspects of lives in progress and endorses biographical methods rather than standard cross-sectional and longitudinal studies.

Candy (1991) stresses the importance of interpretation, not just recording, and Dahlgren (1984) emphasizes the need to look at *what* is being learned, not just how much. Learning involves a qualitative change in understanding. Perhaps

the most important consideration is that the research method "should be 'grounded' in perceived reality, not interpreted from the preconceived theoretical frameworks of the researchers" (Entwistle & Marton, 1984, p. 214). "Meaning has to come from the individuals involved - their own perceptions of what they are doing and why they are doing it" (p. 224).

Building on Lincoln and Guba's (1981) minimum requirements of triangulation, reflexivity, and member checks, Lather (1991) offers a reconceptualization of validity that includes four features:

- triangulation - "utilize designs which seek counter patterns as well as convergence" (p. 67).
- construct validity - examine our preconceptions and be willing to allow the logic of the data to shape the categories of description.
- face validity - recycle description, emerging analysis, and conclusions through respondents.
- catalytic validity - conduct the research so that "respondents gain self-understanding and, ultimately, self-determination through research participation" (p. 68).

The Nature of Interpretive Approaches

Candy (1991, p. 452) provides a clear, concise description of interpretive research:

> Because interpretive research emphasizes the personal meanings of research subjects, it denies the existence of a "correct" or "true" interpretation against which research results might be measured. It admits of the existence and utilization of tacit knowledge; it allows for situational variability; it prefers to have substantive theory emerge from the data; it emphasizes the use of qualitative realities; it endorses idiographic interpretation of data; and it allows for the mutual, simultaneous, shaping of entities, including the impact of the researcher on the subjects being researched.

This type of research avoids 'how' and 'why' questions, concerning itself instead with 'what' questions. The researcher seeks an understanding of the phenomenon and tries actively to extract the underlying meaning of human actions (Entwistle & Marton, 1984).

Phenomenography

"In contrast to phenomenology, which focuses on the essence of experience and that which is common across individuals, phenomenography is a method for mapping qualitatively different ways in which people understand or conceptualize an aspect of their world" (Pratt, 1991, p. 13). It is concerned with people's experience and the interpretation of that experience (Pratt, 1991). "These interpretations are not psychological entities located *in* the individuals but rather different ways in which the world appears to the individuals. An individual is not said to *have* a certain understanding of a phenomenon but rather to act and reason in accordance with one" (Renstrom et al., 1987, p. 12). An example of research based on this tradition is the technique of exploring critical incidents in learners' lives. It is presumed that learners' general assumptions are embedded in, and can be inferred from, their specific descriptions of particular events (Brookfield, 1990b, p. 179).

Phenomenography is a second order perspective (Saljo, 1988). It is a researcher's impression of someone else's perceptions. As such it is essential for the interviewer to exercise great care during interviews and analysis in order to represent the correspondent's ideas faithfully. Perhaps the most important feature of phenomenography is its assumption that, "although there are as many idiosyncratic ways of describing something as there are people who experience it, there are a limited number of qualitatively different ways in which it can be understood" (Pratt, 1991, p. 13). "In phenomenography the very categories of description make up the main results of the research" (Renstrom et al., 1987, p. 13).

Constructivism

Central to constructivism is the idea that individuals try to give meaning to the perplexing variety and constantly changing nature of their experience. This is a dynamic process since, as conditions change, our perceptions will change as

well. Also, everyone's interpretation will be unique since, although there may exist an objective reality, perceptions of it will vary (Candy, 1987, 1991).

It is human nature to seek evidence to support our beliefs, not refute them. Our beliefs don't need to be true in the sense that they match reality; they only need to *fit* within the real world's constraints that limit the possibilities of thinking and acting (von Glasersfeld, 1987). Even a poor fit is better than nothing, and these models will gather strength as truth if they are not challenged. Since knowledge can only be learned and not taught, teaching is seen as a process of negotiating meaning in an attempt to help learners reevaluate their beliefs and develop a model which provides a better fit with the consensually validated version of reality (Candy, 1987, 1991).

Research Implications

The main focus of the kind of research suggested here is the learner in the context of the learning activity. "It calls for the attempt to understand how, in any particular situation, self-concept, overall orientation toward learning, shifting patterns of purposes, and frames of reference all interact to create the anticipatory schemes, and influence the strategies used by...the learner" (Candy, 1991, p. 457). Researchers should investigate the learners' interests, attitudes, intentions, and understandings, and attempt to represent them as faithfully as possible. It is important to recognize each person's unique perspective while at the same time acknowledging the shared nature of much human understanding (Candy, 1991).

Researchers must be aware of the danger of putting too much faith in their respondents' ability to analyze their own behaviour. For example, learners often underestimate the importance of dispositional barriers, claiming that cost is a greater factor than, say, their own disinterest (Cross, 1981). There is also the danger of obtaining a person's espoused theory rather than the theory in use (Candy, 1991). Stated attitudes, values, beliefs, and intentions may not correspond to observed actions.

For this type of research to be effective, careful data collection is essential. "Our knowledge claims can be no better or worse than the data-gathering tools we use" (Novak & Gowin, 1984, p. 166). In the interest of validity, research claims should also be kept as close as possible to the original events (Novak & Gowin, 1984). Finally, the categories we develop should have internal logic and consistency, and they can be tested for validity by comparison with other studies (Saljo, 1988).

Recommended interview techniques include exploring personal matters with sensitivity and raising intimidating issues in a non-threatening way (Mezirow, 1990). Brookfield (1987) suggests that researchers be specific (general questions often confuse or intimidate), work from the specific to the general (start with particular events and look for common elements in the descriptions), and be conversational (avoid any appearance of a formal, and therefore threatening, interview format).

Research Model

The Researcher

The researcher plays an important role in this kind of research. Data is not as much a product of participants' attitudes and behaviours as it is an interaction between researcher and participants. The researcher is constantly making decisions which shape the interviews, observations, and analysis. Therefore it is important to be aware of preconceptions which may influence the research (Lather, 1991).

I have been teaching for fifteen years, thirteen of those in ABE. In that time, I have worked with students from a variety of cultural backgrounds, including two years in Nigeria and four years at the Native Education Centre in Vancouver. Although I am aware of cultural differences, I tend to look for the

humanity we all share. Perhaps because of this, I relate well to most students. On the other hand, possibly because of my own smooth passage through school, I may not notice that a student who appears to be coping well is actually having personal or learning problems.

I believe my biases at the beginning of this study were mostly related to the results of the preliminary study. I expected a variety of perceptions on the nature of learning or what it means to learn something, along with a general awareness of personal strengths, weaknesses and effective techniques. I was also aware of the tension between my unavoidable preconceptions and the need to allow the data to determine the categories of description. I will also admit to a distant but possibly still influential background in mathematics and computer science which was grounded in a respect for neat, clean solutions to problems. Clearly, this is not compatible with my current intellectual beliefs on how educational research should be conducted.

Approach to the Study

The question of adult students' awareness of their own learning processes is specific enough to establish a starting point for the study, yet flexible enough to allow for change. Because I was dealing with students' perceptions of a phenomenon, most of the information came from interviews in which students were asked to describe those perceptions. However, at the outset, it was not clear what questions should be asked. Therefore, the purpose of the research, initially at least, was to search for the questions that would be most probing and insightful; the emphasis was on discovering questions, processes, and relationships, not testing them (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). For the first interview, I intentionally chose a student who would share her ideas freely without a lot of prompting. Over time, I became more familiar with the kinds of questions that would elicit students' insights.

The students were also invited to participate in a group discussion to address some of the issues raised in the interviews. This moved the focus away

from the interviewer and provided a forum for them to exchange views with each other. In addition, observations of the students in the classroom were used to check the validity of the statements made in the interviews and discussion. Marshall and Rossman (1989) suggest using observations for a different perspective, providing important additional information which allows the researcher to statements with observed behaviour. This is another argument in favour of using people you know as interview participants, assuming you have had the opportunity to observe their behaviour in the classroom.

Participants

Since it is impossible to develop a complete picture of all students' perceptions, research participants were chosen to represent a variety of experience. Variables considered included age, sex, cultural background, educational level, and career aspirations. What the students had in common was academic success in College and Career Access (CCA) English, a self-paced, high school equivalence program. They had either just finished a course, or they were making continuous (although not always smooth) progress. They had also established a comfortable working relationship with me. Although it is important not to bias the study by talking only to people you find congenial or sympathetic to your views (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1989), there is a case for interviewing people with whom you have already established a good relationship (Mishler, 1991) and from whom you might expect revealing, insightful comments. The researcher must get close to the people studied (Marshall & Rossman, 1989), thus reducing alienation and the hierarchic relationship that may exist in an interview (Mishler, 1991). If the research participants are chosen carefully, good rapport should already be established before the interview begins. If the interviewer is careful not to make too many assumptions about what beliefs and assumptions are shared, working with an acquaintance should not be a problem. The quality of an interview depends on the ability of the interviewer to ask appropriate questions and comprehend the responses, as well as the willingness and ability of the participants to provide honest, detailed answers.

The students were all told what the research was about and how much of their time would be required. It was made clear that participation was voluntary and there would be no penalty for not taking part. Students who did decide to be interviewed knew that they could refuse to answer any question, stop the interview at any time, and ask that the tape recorder be turned off. Tapes and transcripts of the interviews would be completely confidential. The students all gave their permission for me to use classroom observations to supplement the interviews and discussion.

Interviews

It is important that participants feel comfortable with the interview. Interviewing people in their own territory allows them to relax (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1989). Therefore I asked the students where they would like to conduct the interview. They all chose either my office, their homes, or my home. In all cases, we were the only two people present.

The interviews were relaxed and conversational, much like interactions we might have in the classroom. Besides asking questions, I also talked about the study and my experiences, and I answered any questions the students asked. This model is supported by other researchers. The interview should be an exchange between equals, not a case of stimulus-response in which the interviewer asks questions and the "subject" answers them (Mishler, 1991). "It is hard to expect 'honesty' and 'frankness' on the part of participants and informants, whilst never being frank and honest about oneself" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1989, p. 83). Interviewers should be willing to talk about themselves and their research, and they should convey "the idea that the participant's information is acceptable and valuable" (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p. 82). "Interviews conducted in an interactive, dialogic manner that requires self-disclosure on the part of the researcher encourage reciprocity" (Lather, 1991, p. 60). In this study, it was hoped that reciprocity would also come through students becoming more aware of their learning processes by reflecting on them and by seeing my analysis of their responses.

I approached each interview with a list of questions, but they were used as a guide rather than a prescription. I attempted to ask open-ended questions which would allow the students as much flexibility in their replies as possible. An interview schedule is useful for articulating your assumptions and identifying what you feel is important initially, but it is best to approach a study like this with a list of issues, not questions (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1989). With this flexibility, it is possible to adapt the pattern of questions to the experiences and responses of the participants. The approach may be directive or non-directive at different points in the same interview, depending on the interviewer's purpose at the time, but care should be taken not to restrict unnecessarily the range of possible responses. "A question which sharply defines a particular area for discussion is far more likely to result in omission of some vital data which you, the interviewer, have not even thought of" (Dexter, in Hammersley & Atkinson, 1989, p. 113).

Interview participants were invited to give detailed responses to the issues presented. Responses included personal context, prior experience, and relevant background information. Participants were encouraged to go into enough depth to give a sense of the meaning of a situation and their involvement in it (Mishler, 1991). To elicit such responses, I encouraged the students to tell stories, pursue their own lines of inquiry, and take control of the interview on occasions. Respondents learn from how interviewers respond to their answers (Mishler, 1991). If replies are cut off or interrupted, further replies will probably be brief and superficial. Mishler (1991, p. 97) credits Paget with asking questions that have a "hesitant and halting quality as she searches for ways to ask about what she wants to learn....She suggests that this way of questioning may allow for and encourage replies that are equally searching, hesitant, and formulated in the process of answering...." My own questions were often formed this way, not intentionally, but as a natural part of the conversation.

The following were suggested as guidelines for getting at the issues surrounding students' perceptions of their learning processes:

- Think of a time in your recent past when you learned something. Tell me about it.

- What is learning?
- How do you know when you've learned something?
- Has your approach to learning changed over the years? with age? with experience? because of different settings?
- What do you do when you encounter something new?
- What techniques do you use to relate new knowledge / information / experiences to what you already "know" in order to make sense of it?
- How have instructors helped / hindered your attempts to learn and your attempts to find ways to learn?

The exact questions asked were determined during the course of the interview and were influenced by what happened in previous interviews.

Analysis

Since "it is frequently only over the course of the research that one discovers what the research is really 'about'" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1989, p. 175), promising theoretical ideas were recorded during data collection or whenever they occurred. Marshall and Rossman (1989) suggest that, following each interview, the researcher should transcribe the conversation and select intriguing phrases that connect with the literature or suggest patterns emerging from previous data. This was not always possible, but each interview was certainly influenced by those that preceded it. A researcher should engage in a process of continuous reflexive monitoring: "question *what* one knows, *how* such knowledge has been acquired, the *degree of certainty* of such knowledge, and what further lines of inquiry are implied" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1989, p. 165).

Analysis was a continuous process that began at the start of the first interview. I was constantly looking for interesting patterns, surprises, inconsistencies, contradictions, unusual participant terms, and relationships to what was expected (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1989). Gradually, after many readings and attempts at organization, categories began to emerge. Marshall and Rossman (1989) see analysis consisting of organizing the data, generating categories, testing emergent hypotheses against the data, and searching for

alternative explanations. Organization involves reading and re-reading to become intimate with the data. Coding an interview depends on being able to restore the missing context (Mishler, 1991). Generating categories and themes is the most challenging aspect of data analysis - categories should be consistent but distinct from one another. Alternative explanations always exist, and the researcher must demonstrate how the explanation offered is the most plausible (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). The critical issue isn't truth but the relative plausibility of an interpretation when compared to other plausible interpretations (Mishler, 1991).

An essential part of analysis is sharing your insights and analysis with interview participants. This will help you determine if your interpretation of what happened corresponds to that of the participants. Don't assume that a question "meant" the same thing to all respondents; they may only partially share a common culture (Mishler, 1991). Asking for feedback will help participants feel they are an important part of the study, and it may provide insights to everyone involved. "Negotiating meaning helps build reciprocity. At a minimum, this entails recycling description, emerging analysis and conclusions to at least a subsample of respondents" (Lather, 1991, p. 61). In this study, all the participants looked at my summary of the interviews and discussion, and most saw the analysis and conclusions. They said I had represented them well, but their insights allowed me to clarify what I was trying to say.

A Previous Study

Several years ago, a comprehensive study of ABE students and programs was undertaken in the United States (Mezirow et al., 1975). The term ABE in this context refers to what we would call Basic Education and English as a second language rather than high school equivalence, but the intentions of the study were similar to this one. "We wanted to know how students see the program, themselves in it, the teachers, and other students" (p. viii). The approach was based on "grounded theory," a method developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967)

in which "the researcher goes to the field as an observer and an interviewer with a minimum of predetermined theoretical assumptions" (Mezirow et al., 1975, p. vii) in order to "build" theory.

The authors found that many students enroled in ABE with a tangible goal in mind: to get a better job, to become a better parent (usually mothers wanting to learn English), or to pass a specific test. Others attended for social reasons. The students typically were not clear about what to expect from the program, and many had to increase significantly their estimate of how long it would take to reach their goals.

Students who enter an ABE program often have a poor self-image and aren't confident in their ability to learn. They believe that many students never really get started because they feel threatened by the initial assessment tests. "Those who stick it out for the first few sessions usually find that the ABE classroom is far from threatening - indeed that it is relaxed, friendly, and informal - and that most teachers are warm and supportive...." They find that the "anxiety and shame diminish rapidly with the awareness that others are equally 'ignorant' and that, in fact, it is possible to learn" (p. 49).

Summary

Historically, education has borrowed theory and research methods from other fields. Some approaches, such as behaviourism and cognitive science, have been inadequate for dealing with the complexity of learning.

Recently, an increased knowledge base has allowed education to develop theory and methods based on qualitative rather than quantitative approaches. There is an emphasis on studying learning in natural settings, focusing on the experience of learning from the learner's perspective and recognizing that learners construct their own meanings.

In this study, eliciting students' responses was done through interviews supplemented with observation and a group discussion. Responses were not forced into preconceived categories; instead the responses suggested the categories. Analysis was brought back to the participants for verification. It was hoped that participants would benefit from this research by gaining insights into their own learning processes.

A previous study with similar goals and methodological stance found that most students attend ABE classes for specific reasons. They are often tentative and lacking confidence when they start, but these feelings usually fade in the relaxed, friendly, informal atmosphere of an ABE classroom.

Chapter IV - The Study: What the Students Said

Introduction

The Participants

Originally, ten students from the College and Career Access (CCA) English program were invited to take part in the study. All accepted the invitation, but one left school later and did not participate. The remaining nine (Gabrielle, Shevaughn, Louise, Nicolas, Shane, Carmelle, Duke, Pat, and Hazel) were interviewed and invited to attend a group discussion. All except Pat and Hazel attended the discussion. Afterwards I also interviewed Erika, who had been out of town during the original interviews and discussion, and Brian, a former CCA and College Foundations student who has been interested in my work since he took part in a preliminary study in 1991. Since then he has been offering insights into his progress through ABE and a diploma program at the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT). His comments appear at the end of this chapter.

In response to interview questions, some students spoke briefly, answering only what was asked, while others were willing to talk at length on subjects that interested them. Thus, the interviews lasted anywhere from one hour to two and a half hours. The discussion started slowly but soon warmed up and sustained itself even when I left the room to get lunch ready. We stopped after two and a half hours, more from hunger than an exhaustion of ideas. The discussion was fast paced; people had trouble getting all their ideas onto the table. The tone was occasionally argumentative but more collegial than some graduate classes.

Many of the students expressed an interest in this study. Three of them asked for a copy of their interview transcript, and several offered insights and clarifications after their interviews. After reading a draft of this chapter, the students recommended refining statements to better reflect their intended

meaning, leaving out false starts and repeated words, and correcting the inevitable grammatical idiosyncrasies of speech. Many of the students feel that this project is important. For example, Nicolas thinks that, through research of this type, "our teachers can better understand our point of view" and "achieve their goals, which is to teach the students in a very effective way."

Overview

This chapter starts by looking at the early lives and educational experiences of the participants to provide a base for understanding the process which led them to CCA and their subsequent relationship to the program. The next section will examine the student in the program, first by looking at contextual elements such as classroom setting, teachers, and material, and then by looking at the students themselves and the reasons for their continued success. The main part of the chapter looks at learning. My analysis of the participants' comments about learning led to categories which I call perceptions, self-awareness, attitudes, and behaviours. These categories reflect the distinction made by Mezirow et al. (1975) between people's actions and stated ideas. Perceptions, attitudes and behaviours are similar to Pratt's (1992) model of beliefs, intentions, and actions which he uses to analyze conceptions of teaching. Perhaps the same model can be used to analyze learning as well.

Returning to School

Early Educational Experiences

Aside from Nicolas, Pat, and Erika, everyone mentioned difficulties learning in grade school. Carmelle and Duke didn't elaborate on their problems, but everyone else identified a difficult family environment or learning disabilities,

and many identified both, as the cause of their problems. In any case, for these students, school was not pleasant.

Family problems ranged from a lack of support and encouragement to what appears to be complete dysfunction. Shane had a difficult relationship with his stepfather, while Gabrielle's situation was so bad she "became emotionally unable to do anything but just walk around like a zombie." She had to concentrate on "just surviving" and, consequently, when she left school she was still illiterate.

Many of the students from difficult family backgrounds also felt, in Gabrielle's words, "completely abused" at school. Louise "had a teacher who tied me to a chair and things like that, a teacher who screamed at me because I was doing letters backwards and upside down...." Hazel said she was categorized in pre-school as a non-learner. She often found that she knew the answers but couldn't write them down accurately. It was frustrating to see her partner get a better mark for an answer she provided. Louise was told she was intelligent, but her inability to do simple things indicated otherwise. She felt, "There's got to be something wrong with me. I'm crazy and nobody will listen to me. Nobody believes me."

Shane was "just appalled" at being accused of cheating on a final exam in grade ten. The test was multiple choice, "which is where I excel extremely because the information's there." Even though they knew he was learning disabled, the teacher, principal, and vice-principal couldn't believe someone with poor written work could do so well on a test. Shane concluded that the public school system simply doesn't address the needs of learning disabled students. "If their teaching style didn't incorporate your learning system, then there was no way....Because you don't fit into that norm...we should still be able to progress in a direction that we see fit."

Reasons for Returning to School

Most of the students came to the CCA program with specific or general career goals in mind. Carmelle needed grade ten to get into a business preparation course and Erika is interested in resource management. Duke said, "I came back to school because...I'm capable of doing so much, but I had no education behind me." He wants to become a police officer. Pat was an automobile painter who injured his shoulder. The Workers' Compensation Board is sponsoring him to get the prerequisites to learn the business end of his trade. Gabrielle is interested in naturopathic medicine and sees the need for formal training. In spite of her disabilities which would allow her to "stay at home and just sit here like a lump on a log," Shevaughn has learned, "I don't want to be idle." She wants to get away from low paying jobs and give her daughter a better life than she had ("I sure don't want to put my child through what I went through"). For her, school is the way to do that.

The other students were more interested in developing skills. Nicolas, a former ESL student, wants to improve his English so he can "understand and participate somehow in the development of this society because I am a part of it." Louise "really enjoy(s) writing" and "thought it would be a good idea to try and work on doing some grammar to help my writing." Shane wants to be able to function effectively in higher education; "my goal was to try to get it so I could give information...written as well as I can verbally." During a work experience program in high school, Hazel realized she had problems with certain aspects of office work and came directly to KEC to work on her English skills. She feels that the outside world is passing by and she wants to be out there helping.

Starting the Program

CCA attempts to help students return to school as smoothly and comfortably as possible. This is done through personal interviews, an orientation, and instructors who are aware of the problems faced by new students. In spite

of these safeguards, most of the students in this study spoke of negative early experiences in the program.

Shevaughn, Nicolas, and Duke were all "nervous." In fact, Duke was "scared to death." Carmelle and Duke were unsure of themselves and not confident in their ability to do the work. Gabrielle was totally "lost and confused," and Louise found the experience

> scary; intimidating. It was quite frightening to go back and go into a new situation, especially when you're carrying all these horrible memories and stuff around with you, not sort of really being totally sure of what to expect and how things are going to work....

Hazel "found it kind of confusing" initially and Erika described it as "strange." Pat felt "very awkward" about returning to school after so many years and being "in the education system again with a lot of people that I could be their father." These three adjusted quickly, but others took longer. Nicolas took about a month to adjust. Louise caught on to the process quickly, but "it took a long time for me to feel comfortable within myself...." Duke's initial nervousness wore off after about a week, but "it didn't really sink in to me that I was really in school until about six months later...." Shane didn't talk about his feelings but remembered having to deal, once again, with the basics of spelling, "which was the bane of my existence."

In the Program

Context/Setting

Once they became familiar with the program, most of the students felt comfortable in CCA English. Shevaughn "found that I can be myself here. It's a safe place, just to be me. I can make mistakes and whatever, and I'm not going to be shunned for it." Many spoke about the relaxed setting which allowed them to progress at their own pace. Gabrielle "like(s) that atmosphere of being able to

go in and work and not have someone breathing down your neck." For Shane, "a self-paced program...was what I needed because I didn't think I could keep up with the standard English course."

A big concern of the students was competition and stress. Gabrielle and Louise said they disliked competition. Louise "really liked the idea of not having to compete with everybody else, to keep up" and found "that took a lot of the pressure off." Nicolas doesn't like to compete with others, but said, "I like to compete with myself, to challenge myself." Some of the students noted that stress, both inside and outside school, interferes with school work. Carmelle observed, "I could have been a little further ahead but, possibly being stressed out, I have found that I'm not." Shevaughn stated, "I couldn't learn under...any kind of pressures."

The lack of pressure in CCA English was appreciated. Nicolas said he "didn't have the pressure that we usually have in class," and Carmelle was glad she didn't have the pressure of completing by a certain date. Hazel liked CCA because it's "self-paced. There's no pressure."

Many students appreciate the advantages of a self-paced program while recognizing the need for personal responsibility. Nicolas sees a need for "using your own kind of self-discipline instead of waiting for orders like in the military." Louise likes "the freedom of choice to motivate myself into working very quickly or being able to take a little more time when necessary to absorb information." Carmelle feels the CCA program "is basically what you make of it. I mean if you work hard, you get a lot more." She and Hazel both like the relaxed atmosphere but feel that sometimes it's better to be pushed by a timetable with due dates. Erika recognizes her tendency to procrastinate and wonders whether she'd be better off "in a classroom which...would force me to have to deal with time."

Louise concluded her interview with a statement that sums up what many students like about the CCA program:

> The self-paced class gives adults an opportunity to go into a situation that's going to be less stressful for them than what they've experienced in the past. Get rid of all the feeling of competition that I have to be the best or I have to be the same

as everybody else, and that takes a lot of the pressure off. And I think that makes a really big difference. You don't have that dread sort of hanging over your head that if I don't have this assignment completed in the next two weeks, they're going to string me up. That makes it a lot easier.

Teachers

One of the attractions of CCA is the possibility of getting different perspectives on a problem from different instructors. Hazel, Erika, Louise, Nicolas, and Shane all appreciate this feature. Hazel talks to more than one instructor about the same problem "because each has a different way of explaining it." Erika "liked the way you could always go up and it was like you were one-on-one, with different teachers so you got different feedback." Shane has a keen sense of different teachers' styles and uses them for different purposes. He believes that "different teachers are catalysts for learning different things," and "if one instructor is too easy on me, I'll actually go to someone who will challenge me a little bit more. Louise and Carmelle recognize the importance of personality. Louise found, with one instructor, "there was something between us that I wasn't comfortable with, but...I'd have enough confidence that I could go and ask one of the other instructors...." Carmelle said, "There's always going to be somebody that you're going to relate to a little bit better."

In general, the instructors were highly regarded. They were described as "eager and enthusiastic" (Gabrielle), empathic (Shevaughn), "available," "patient," and "helpful" (Louise), committed, qualified, and clear (Nicolas). On the other hand, there were also criticisms of the instructors. Gabrielle feels some are egocentric and unaware of students' needs. "Teachers allow people to stay stuck on something for months....There's no encouragement to go write tests." Once she had a problem, and an instructor "made a big to-do about it in front of everybody." Nicolas has encountered teachers who "don't know how to communicate," and Duke has talked to instructors who were unwilling to take the time to make sure he understood something.

There seemed to be a clear sense of what it takes to be a good teacher. Gabrielle feels it is essential for teachers to be aware of students' backgrounds and problems. They must "relax with the student" and not "talk down to the students." Louise said, "I need instructors that I can relate to," "somebody that does have the patience...." Shane knows that it takes more than intelligence to teach effectively. He has "met people who are extremely intelligent and well-educated, and they couldn't teach if their life depended on it." Pat recognizes the patience required to deal with students not understanding. "If I was a teacher, that part would be very frustrating. I imagine you just have to learn how to deal with it."

Reasons for Success

What has enabled these students to be successful in a self-paced program? Shane said, "Your progress here is on your own. You're doing it by yourself. I think that really...helps show that you're motivated." This motivation appears to take on different forms. For Gabrielle and Louise, it's personal. Gabrielle said, "I can do the work, and...to my surprise do it quite well, and that's invigorating. And not because a teacher might say I did it quite well, but because I feel good about it." Similarly, Louise notes, "I was doing it for me. I was no longer doing it for teachers and parents....It was a personal kind of growth." For her, success is not letter grades but "the feelings that I came away with....This has been successful because I can take that outside and apply it to wherever I want."

Shevaughn said she is motivated by "fear," but also "people motivate me." Nicolas said, "I get excited....Seeing that I am learning a lot and I am able to communicate with people in an effective way, that encourage me a lot. It kept me alive in this program." Because an injury ended his trade, Pat simply "looked at the future. I don't have any damn choice." For Carmelle, "if it's something that I should know or it's important, yes, I could put my mind to it."

More important than motivation is the idea of sheer persistence. This theme occurs in almost everyone's interview. Shevaughn said, "Just don't give

up because giving up means you're giving up on yourself." Louise is "persistent and determined," and she "won't give up." Duke and Pat apply their work ethic to school as if it were a full-time job. Duke is "determined to get my grade twelve education," and Pat said, "You just gotta persist and work at it." Similarly, Hazel is "determined to struggle through it," and Carmelle is "determined I'm going to succeed." Duke, Pat, and Carmelle all connect learning to hard work. Duke talked about "practice" and "doing my work over and over." To become better learners, Pat "could work harder at home," and Carmelle could do "more homework."

Only Shane and Erika don't speak about their commitment in these terms. Shane said, "If I don't find something easy, a lot of times I won't do it unless it's a necessity." Erika recognizes her tendency to procrastinate and not finish big projects, but she said, "I'm learning to push myself."

In addition to analyzing their own success, the students offered reasons why others aren't successful. Nicolas said that some students "lack that self-motivation," and Shevaughn claimed that "everyone's not there for the same reason: to learn." Pat feels that "it's a social event for a while," and some students don't progress because "they sit in the cafeteria." Nicolas feels that some students have problems because they are less interested in learning than in getting through quickly. "They just want to finish the program once and for all, but they are kind of neglecting from learning this and that. They are just kind of jumping, and at the end they got stuck because they didn't grasp the knowledge properly."

Erika stressed the importance of having a goal. "Without a specific goal, it's easy for a student to lose interest." Students who go to school "with only a vague notion of what they want" or "because it's somebody else's idea" may drop out. Also, "goals are more often impulsive than long term." Once the excitement has worn off, "the goal, that at one time was so important and attainable, has become distant and very faint. Many students give up because of this...."

Louise and Carmelle feel that students are responsible for their own performance. Louise said, "If they don't have that motivation, why are they here?" Carmelle feels that "they're letting themselves fall through the cracks." However, Gabrielle offers a different perspective. She feels that some students find it difficult to function effectively in school. They're "very insecure," and "they don't know how to ask" when they need help. There are also others "that want help and have asked for it, but because the energies aren't there or something doesn't connect, they don't get it." Gabrielle feels that CCA should help these students prepare and motivate themselves, but Louise insists that "it's not their responsibility to do that."

Confidence and Success

Many of the students spoke about an increase in confidence as they progressed through the program. Carmelle "lacked confidence" before she returned to school, but now "my self-confidence has...really improved....There's nothing I can't do if I put my mind to it." Duke said, "I didn't think I was capable of doing what I've been doing. I've progressed very well in my work....I feel comfortable, relaxed about any questions that I have."

Shevaughn noted, "As I grew up I realized I didn't have self-esteem," but "I've gained more confidence as again it's reassurance from the program." Similarly, Louise said she was labelled by others as "stupid" and started believing it herself. These labels "stopped a lot of the learning process." Progress in CCA English "gave me a lot of confidence. The longer I was in the program, it helped me to put away some of the myths that I had developed about myself in regards to my abilities to learn, and proves that I wasn't as 'stupid' as I thought I was." Louise now feels "that there are no limitations, and I can do or be anything that I want to be."

Nicolas said, "I feel more confident about myself. I can analyze, criticize, and express myself with the outside world...." Similarly, Shane said, "I feel a lot more confidence in verbalizing and discussing my points of view, and I think

going through CCA has probably been a good confidence builder in stuff that I do outside of class." He feels confidence is important. "If you don't trust your own judgement, you can't expect other people to trust it."

Feedback and Success

Although the personal nature of success has been mentioned, most students recognized the importance of physical indicators to confirm that they were doing well. Shevaughn said the best thing that happened to her in the program was "that I could get an A+, more than once." Louise and Carmelle were both pleasantly surprised to get A's and B's, and when Erika got good grades, "it was almost like the encouragement helped me...." Hazel "felt really good" about an assignment that she worked hard on and had it come back with no grammar or spelling errors. On the other hand, Nicolas said, "The worst thing that ever happened to me in this program is that I did very poorly in one test. I didn't fail it, but I felt miserable."

Shane feels it's important to have a transcript to document performance. "I think that was the best part is just having something to show people." On winning an award, Shane said, "It makes me realize that I am a lot more adept at a lot of things than a lot of people that I meet." The students also mentioned the importance of support. Gabrielle, Shevaughn, Louise, Shane, Carmelle, and Hazel all said they got little or no support with school in their early years. Carmelle now appreciates the support of her family. Her ex-mother-in-law "was very proud of me, and that meant a lot." Also, "it's really nice to think you've got the approval of your own kids." Gabrielle said she has been successful in the program because "I have incredible people to support me." She also feels that the people who drop out do so because "they're coming from homes that people aren't supportive."

Louise, Shane, and Gabrielle all appreciate the intimate relationship among positive feedback, confidence, and success. Louise said, "The more I worked on it and the more the results were good,...the more my confidence improved."

Shane has more self-confidence and self-esteem from the good grades and favourable comments he's received. Gabrielle is the most enthusiastic. "When I comprehended that, I just thought, 'Wow!' Now I understand, so then I get a good feeling, and the more I feel good, the more I want to continue."

Perceptions of Learning

The Nature of Learning

Questions on the nature of learning and knowledge elicited a variety of responses. Shevaughn equates learning with understanding and remembering, while Nicolas compares learning to understanding and "complete knowledge." Carmelle feels that "most of our school work is memory. It's memorizing the formulas or ways of spelling words...." For Louise, knowledge is less tangible. She sees it as "really abstract" rather than "concrete" and feels "there's no guarantee that whatever you learned, you're going to have forever." Hazel, on the other hand, believes that learning is permanent. "They can take pretty well everything that I own, but they can't take that knowledge that I know away from me."

Duke sees the topics he studies as isolated from one another. For example, even decimals and fractions are "two different kinds of things." Gabrielle, on the other hand, has passionately embraced the idea that things are connected. "Now I know that everything relates....It's been incredible." Hazel also "just discovered" that "it all relates, from the science to the English and stuff." For Shane,

> The way I remember things and the way I do things is everything's connected. Everything's tied together, and so once you've grabbed one little piece of it, the rest of it is all strung along. I mean it just keeps pulling more and more information out, like a net almost....

"One of the reasons I have a hard time with English is because a lot of the things I don't see the logic in." For example, grammar points seem to be isolated rules rather than part of a system.

Pat and Erika note that you are not conscious of everything you learn. Pat said, "You grab things you don't even know you're grabbing." Erika has heard people say they learned nothing from a course but, through careful questioning, they can recall a substantial amount.

Measures of Understanding

Most of the students evaluate their understanding of a concept by checking with themselves or with others. Erika said, "That's when I knew that I'd learned something was when I could picture it in my mind, where before it was sort of a blur." Hazel measures her understanding by "testing with myself,...replay it, redo it" and "rewind it in your mind." Shevaughn decides she's retained something "if I remember when I'm asked again."

> For Shane, understanding means being able
>> to talk to somebody who knows about it...and to be able to actually discuss that information with them, and...being able to have a base of information in which you can start to...tack it on in the right place on that chain of events or that logical progression.

Pat will approach an instructor, "listen very carefully, and then say what I think. And I ask questions." He has strong opinions and stands by them unless he can be persuaded otherwise. "I believe in what I see here. You tell me why I'm wrong." Carmelle, on the other hand, puts more faith in authority. She feels she has learned something "when I take my work up to the teacher and she says it's right." Nicolas uses both internal and external checks. He understands something "when I can explain that in my own words to myself and when I can explain to other people and make them understand."

Duke and Shane measure understanding in terms of performance. For Duke, understanding something means "that I'm capable of doing it over and over." For Shane, it's "to be able to do it on your own without an outside input...and do it correctly." He also feels that learning consists not only of "knowing what to do, [but] when to do it, how to do it, and where you should be doing it, and being comfortable with all those decisions that you've made."

Pat is not happy just being able to do something. "I want to know why do you want me to do this?"

Several students referred to an intuitive aspect of understanding. Louise said, "My instinct will tell me like that whether I'm right or wrong." Pat knows he's understood something "when I feel confident that I understand" and Carmelle when "I feel that I've learned it." Gabrielle said, "I can feel it in my head; I know when I know something" and described the feeling as "giddy...like a light bulb comes on." Hazel also referred to the feeling of "excitement. I know for myself I get really happy, knowing that I know it."

Subjective Reality

Louise, Carmelle, Hazel, and Shevaughn all hit upon the notion of subjective reality and the personal nature of experience, sophisticated concepts that are gaining prominence in the literature on learning (Saljo, 1988). Louise said, "We all bring our own experiences into any situation. Your experiences of something and mine are going to be vastly different, so our perspectives are going to be vastly different, too." Carmelle agreed, adding, "Sometimes, even though you experience the same things, you both get something different out of it." Shevaughn stressed the importance of interpretation. "People say things because that's the way it is....It doesn't mean that it is that way. It's the way a person interprets it." Hazel is aware of how important point of view can be when observing an event. She described different scenes, using diagrams to illustrate her point. For example, if three people saw an accident, "these three people would see the accident at the same time but have different stories."

Self-Awareness

Past Influences

Gabrielle, Louise, Shane, and Erika all feel they are influenced negatively by people and experiences from the past. They recognize the need to resolve these difficulties and are doing so with some success.

At the age of thirty-four, Gabrielle finally broke away from her mother's control, although "with that came the real need to read properly and to learn to cope...." One current problem relates to staying in school:

> I know my old patterns where I would quit school, you know, and so I had to develop patterns and skills to enable me to go forward, and knowing that in the morning if I wake up and I don't want to go to school I don't go to school....As soon as I make that decision, then I go. It's like as soon as I quit avoiding or resisting, the resistance goes. And that's where I've learned that skill over the years, that what you resist persists. So I quit resisting and then I'm able to move forward.

A bigger problem is "dealing with the testing room. I still haven't got past that....Where my pain's coming from is that hurt I felt as a child that really has nothing to do with what I'm doing as an adult other than the fact that I haven't dealt with that pain."

When Louise started the program, she had a problem with "re-experiencing certain situations" from her past, "regarding the learning problems and my emotional reaction to not being able to comprehend and how angry that would make me feel...." She also recognizes her tendency to interrupt the flow of her writing to ensure correct spelling, a habit she developed when she was a child and her mother corrected her work. Louise acknowledged that

> a lot of the past experiences play a big portion of what's taking place right now....It's really hard to overcome all those negative situations and make it positive, you know. It's hard to put yourself in that position of even taking the risk and the gamble to trust.

Although he said you should "try not to let prior experiences influence the way you do things now," Shane realizes how difficult that can be. For example,

he still has a physical aversion to writing. "Even now in IEPA [a support program for learning disabled students and as non-threatening an environment as you could imagine] when I'm writing something and I don't know how to write it, my palm starts to sweat....My heart rate goes up; I get nervous."

Erika sees, in herself, her family's obsession with neatness and perfection. She has a tendency, both in school and at work, to focus on details at the expense of the overall picture. "I'll write notes, and then I'll rewrite them, and everything is so neat and tidy, and I've spent so much time on this...." She also has a history of not completing major assignments, often because of problems with organization and interest. "Sometimes I wonder if it was coming from a relaxed family towards education that made me feel relaxed about education." Having become aware of these problems, she is now attempting to address them, apparently with some success. Erika recently completed a major research essay, the last assignment in the CCA English 12 equivalence course.

Characteristics and Abilities

Gabrielle described herself as "systematic" and "disciplined." She recognizes the need to be focused. "We haven't developed the skill not to think of everything at the same time, you know, so I'm just learning that." Shevaughn said, "I don't like change after a while" and observed that "I can't have a lot of things going on in my life at once because I don't remember after or during, and I just get lost....I get confused about my directions." However, she has realized that "when I dealt with personal issues, that's how come I'm able to learn...." She also said, "I've learned to listen," which has helped as well. Pat "can be self-disciplined" and sees himself as "an observer. I like to keep an open mind and watch." He also said he has an excellent memory.

Louise notices a pattern in her work. "I really don't like rewriting things, so I like to write it all and get it perfect the first time." However she acknowledges that "moods affect how you choose and how you react to things...." Louise also said, "I'm very easily distracted. I need to be in a really quiet kind

of environment...." Carmelle agreed, adding, "I like the English room better. It's quieter in there." However, Shane said, "I find that if I'm by myself I don't work as well as I do if I'm in an environment where there's more things going on around me, which a lot of people find unusual. I mean I do homework with the TV on...."

In spite of his problems with spelling and grammar, Shane said he has a high IQ and has "always been able to talk with people and understand what they're saying, and talk to people who are educated and they know exactly what I'm saying...." Duke said, "I know I can do it, in my own mind, but when it comes to understanding on paper and that, I can read it maybe a hundred times over, and I still don't understand what I have there." However, later in the interview he talked about "being able to understand my work a lot more than what I did when I first walked in." Duke also said, "I like working with my hands," something he appears to be good at, when you consider his ability to fix engines, TV's, and washing machines. Referring to working on her car, Erika said, "It's just a matter of getting the confidence. Once I understand how easy something is, I can do it again."

Carmelle and Shane provide a summary with comments on awareness of our strengths and weaknesses. Carmelle said, "We're all good at something, and none of us are all good at everything." Shane added a thought on addressing the weaknesses:

> The older I get, the more I realize I know things about stuff that people will never know, and so that's my own bank of knowledge that I use, and if I don't understand something, then I'll ask you because maybe you'll know, and if you know anything, tell me and then I'll know.

Learning Disabilities

> Shane: It was like being chastised for something I had no -
> Louise: no control over.
> Shane: Yeah.

Because of their difficult experiences in school, Shane, Hazel, and Louise became aware at an early age that they were different from the other students, and they wondered about that difference. Louise "thought of it in terms of 'Why am I so different? Why am I struggling so hard with things that appear to come so naturally to everyone else?'" Shane and Hazel knew they were dyslexic but didn't know what it meant. Shane said, "I knew for a long time that I was 'learning disabled dyslexic,' but that really doesn't tell you much until you start trying to figure out where the problems are." Hazel knew that "dyslexia was a learning disability, but what was the learning disability?"

All three are aware that, as Hazel put it, "I just need to learn in a different way, and it would probably need to be explained in a different way than normal." Shane said, "The way I learn is a lot different than what was being presented to me most of the time...." Louise observed, "I don't think I relate to information the same way as most, quote, normal people. The skills that I've had to develop to be able to keep going, I think, are different from other people's...."
For example, Louise and Shane can't take notes while listening to a lecture. Louise said, "If I'm busy trying to write something down, I can't hear what's being said...." Shane added, "With the way I learned is I can read something, comprehend it, or I can listen to somebody and comprehend it, but I can't write notes and listen at the same time because, for me, writing is a challenge."
Hazel has a similar problem with writing. "I knew it, and I understood it, but when it came down to writing it into sentence forms, I wouldn't know."

Another common area of difficulty is spelling. Shane is aware of his problems here. Louise (and probably Shane, since he's good at multiple choice tests) can recognize a correct spelling if it's written down and knows when she has spelled a word incorrectly, but she has trouble correcting mistakes in her own writing. Hazel is "just aware of" the mistakes made by dyslexic students,

particularly letter reversal, and is becoming familiar with the "different patterns with these vowels" and their sounds.

Shane, recognizing his problems with the mechanics of the language, said, "I still don't have a really good grasp of the English language when it comes to a written format, although verbally I can converse with anybody." On the other hand, Louise finds that "writing is sort of my clearest, focused way to communicate," probably because she has a chance to organize her thoughts. In conversation, "I think I'm being clear, but when I go to verbalize it, I can't find the words that I want, and I get lost." Her ability to communicate verbally depends on the context, the person she's talking to, and what kind of day she's having.

Shevaughn is also learning disabled, although her problems may relate to an automobile accident when she was younger. She is also visually impaired, although this isn't a major problem when she has enough light and uses a magnifying glass. Through different programs she has become more aware of herself and her learning problems. One problem is blanking out. "I'm void; my mind's gone; it's blank." This can happen any time." Another problem is memory. "I forget things that I learn....I'll understand it then, but that doesn't mean I'll remember or understand it in the same way again....What I take in and what I absorb and what I retain and what comes out are different."

Preferred Presentation

Although, as Louise observes, "we all learn differently," most of the students mentioned instructor explanation combined with written material as their preferred presentation of new information. Perhaps this is because these are the two most available resources in CCA. On the other hand, these students may have been successful in the program because their preferred modes are readily accessible.

In any case, two points are interesting. One is that everyone mentioned the importance of the instructors. Louise said they are "very important for me," and Shevaughn finds that "one-to-one basis works really well." Duke said, "If I didn't understand it, I would go and get one of the instructors to explain it to me. It's much simpler." Pat believes "everyone should be aware that if they're not exactly clear on what is to be done, ask."

Also, most students liked to get two or more perspectives, supplementing the readings with instructor explanation or vice versa. Shane, who considers himself a good listener, "would prefer oral presentation at the start and then with written back-up." He also likes group discussions. Nicolas said, "You give the information in booklets and then, if we don't understand something, we go and ask you...." Carmelle feels, "Sometimes it's a little of both. Sometimes it's maybe the instructor explaining it to me, or sometimes it's...the outline of it in your book or the written explanation or whatever. Yeah. It's a combination I think."

Gabrielle, Pat, Duke, and Erika mentioned different forms of input, but they still appreciate the instructors. Gabrielle said, "I'm very visual, so I think that seeing something on video teaches much better, plus being explained by a teacher." She also finds a diagram easier to follow than written instructions. Hazel said she learned from watching while she was growing up, and that still appears to be true. Before starting a big project, Pat likes to see an example of what other students have done, and Duke appreciates an example of what's expected. Erika also likes "a lot of examples because I find examples really help, and nothing that's too lengthy that's just going to bore you, but something that's really clear, specific, with lots of examples." She also likes film and lecture because "sometimes it seems to sink in a lot more than reading something."

Reading

Because of the volume of written material in CCA, reading is important, and many students talked about the development of their own skills. Gabrielle said, "I saw very clearly I had to survive a little better than what I was doing, and

in order to do that I had to get a job, and in order to do that I had to read." She tried to do it on her own and with the help of friends, but "even though I was learning to read, I was still not learning to cope, and I wasn't comprehending. I was memorizing but I wasn't comprehending." This realization eventually led her to formal education. Hazel used to disguise her reading problems by getting people to read things for her, but "I realized that now, since I've attended here, that I've gotta do it by myself and stop depending on other people...."

Shane noted that "my comprehension's quite high," and Duke said, "I found I'm understanding a lot more than what I did years ago. My reading, it improved a lot. I always could read, but I just didn't read enough." Hazel and Shevaughn find reading more difficult, but they have discovered the advantages of re-reading. Hazel said,

> I remember when I first started reading, when I started attending here, I had to keep on going back to the first sentence because I wouldn't remember what I'd just read, from word from word, like not putting it together. I was so busy sounding the word out than actually understanding what the message was.

For her, "it was a struggle....I understand some of it but not all of it. Every time, if I was to read it over, I would pick something else up." Shevaughn said that every time she reads something, "I see it at a different level....The only way for me to understand anything I read, I have to keep reading it over and over. Do you know how exhausting that gets?" Erika doesn't have a problem with reading but still finds, "Now that I've read it for a second time, I'm seeing a lot more in it."

There were different opinions about how helpful the CCA reading program was. Carmelle said, "I find the workshops here are excellent." Pat said, "I think that's an excellent thing that everyone should be pushed into." He has found that he can "read a hell of a lot faster" than he used to, and he has learned to read selectively. When Hazel started, she was so concerned with pronunciation that "I wasn't comprehending the meaning of it." Now, "I understand a lot more." On the other hand, Gabrielle feels that timed reading is "quite ludicrous" because it encourages competition, and students who are required to do the reading program (most of them) "are in there thinking, 'I'm not intelligent or I wouldn't have to do this.'"

Attitudes

Learning

For many of these students, learning in high school was not that important. Pat and Duke both observed that, when they were in school, there were always decent jobs available for those who did poorly in school or quit early. After leaving school, though, coming back is not always easy. Pat thought about it, but "I have a family and a mortgage...and you want that pay cheque...." He finally did return because his injured shoulder took away his trade. Gabrielle's early experiences gave her a negative attitude towards school:

> There is no teacher that's going to teach me. No school system's going to teach me. I'm not going to school. Schools are stupid. People that are in schools are just a bunch of people that are little sheep being led in a certain direction. The school system tells you how to think, why to think, and where to think....

Gabrielle still thinks that the premium society places on formal education is absurd. However, she finally came to CCA after realizing that she needed it to pursue her career goals, and a high assessment score allowed her to start at a grade eleven level.

Almost everyone interviewed talked about how much they enjoy learning generally and in CCA English specifically. Shevaughn said, "When I come home, start thinking about things, and trying different ways, and that's what I find about school, and that's why I enjoy it." Shane sees a connection between learning and enjoyment. "The more fun you have, the more time you spend on it because it's fun, the better you get at it." Duke said, "I enjoy it more because I'm learning something new now that I had never known before." Pat said, "I like writing," and he also enjoys challenges.

Some students spoke in more glowing terms. Louise said, "I'm really fascinated with learning; I'm really fascinated with life, and yet I just got really turned off for so long, and now it's like I'm just waking up to it again, and it's all coming back. It's exciting." Hazel "look(s) forward to the challenge of

understanding it....I kinda got excited." Nicolas also said, "I get excited" about learning something new, and Gabrielle finds it "invigorating."

Not all learning in CCA English was embraced so fondly. In the discussion, there was resistance against rote learning, particularly grammar. Shane is happy "if I can understand how something goes and then see why you're doing it," but he finds some grammar rules arbitrary and unnecessary. "If I still understand what the author's trying to say, then that's the only thing that I'm concerned about is the information being passed along and not the format in which it's being passed along." Duke puts it more succinctly: "Why does a sentence, a proper sentence, have to have a subject and a verb?" Louise also has trouble with grammar, but she sees its purpose and takes a softer stance. "I can live without it. Grammar is certainly not going to be my main life's pursuit. I felt like I'd taken it as far as I could."

Some of the students talked about the importance of really understanding what you're doing. Carmelle is "finding that I'm maybe spending a little more time on certain things, but that's just because I want to know the work well." Nicolas and Shane examine the issue more deeply. Nicolas said, "That's quite important for me, to understand what I'm doing, not just doing things mechanically but understanding things." Shane claims that if you complete an assignment without understanding it, you get no sense of accomplishment. He feels that people who are struggling with something "should be put on to something where they actually feel like they're progressing, where they get a sense of accomplishment." For example, Hazel talked about trying different techniques to improve her spelling but finding that "they don't seem to be working, so that gets frustrating."

Readiness and Responsibility

During the discussion, Gabrielle made a series of interesting comments about readiness to learn and personal responsibility. She claimed that we are all

capable of learning and will do so when we are ready, regardless of whether or not there exists a program to help us:

> I believe that we have the ability to do what we want to do, no matter what it is. It is there for us to do within ourselves. There comes a time when we will do it and when we don't do it, and it doesn't matter whether CCA is here to do it or not. We will do it at that time in our growing stages of our life.

Gabrielle said that, in the past, "I was not personally ready to learn, so therefore I never ever learned." Recently she decided "it was time that I learned what I need to in the English process." Since she registered in CCA, her progress has been excellent.

Gabrielle also talked about taking control of her life. "I can change it for me. No one else can....I know that if I ask the right questions within myself,...the answers would always come to me. Now not everybody agrees with my answers for myself, but I do." Louise expressed a similar idea:

> One of the options that we have as adults is we have that ability to be able to explore so many different ways to learn, and that's really exciting because once you get past this idea that you're stupid or you can't do it or you're slow or whatever and realize that you're an intelligent person, then...creatively you find other ways to deal with it and other outlets,...so you allow your mind that creative ability to come up with answers that may be different from what they're trying to teach you, so everybody looks at things this way, and you look at something going out that direction. So what? That's great! And that's what I mean about exploring other options....

Working Alone and With Others

Gabrielle, Shevaughn, Louise, Nicolas, Duke, Hazel, and Erika all expressed a preference for working alone rather than with a partner or in a group. Reasons given included different level and personality (Shevaughn), "different speed" (Nicolas), distraction and confusion because of "too many different ideas" (Hazel). Louise said she's neither a leader nor a follower and is "not very cooperative" in groups. Erika said it's hard to organize groups, and "some people always end up doing all the work." On the other hand, Shevaughn does like the camaraderie of the classroom, and Duke admits, "I wish I had somebody that I could work with," particularly outside of class time.

Shane, Carmelle, and Pat all like working with someone. Shane likes discussing his ideas with one or more students, and Carmelle is "sort of a people person anyway" who likes to feel "accepted" by the group. In fact, if she needs help, she may go to another student rather than a teacher. "If there's a student that I can rely on, I do. I'll ask them because I find that, I don't know, sometimes you can relate better." Pat has been working with someone who is "in a similar position." He found that "we kind of pushed each other along....You can help motivate each other...."

When it's necessary to work with a partner, Gabrielle likes to work with people who are "willing to be clear and honest with what they're feeling," and Erika wants "someone that's enthusiastic and wants to work...." Shane and Hazel both talked about working with partners in high school who complemented their abilities. Of his partnership, Shane said, "We did a couple of projects together where my left side, artistic side, and his ability to write notes as fast as I was coming up with ideas got us good marks...." Hazel's partnership enabled her to avoid reading. They would do the reading and I would do the experiment, setting up the microscope and stuff like that, and if I didn't understand it, I would word it in a way that they would read it, so I would never read out loud." The idea of complementary partners is supported by Bonham (1989, p. 33), who says, "Those who have the same profiles...are said to enjoy working together but to learn less effectively because they reinforce one another's weaknesses."

Assistance

The students interviewed appear to require different amounts of support and assistance, and they have different attitudes toward tapping that support. In the discussion, Gabrielle expressed a belief that people will learn when they're ready, whether or not they have access to a formal system. This met with disagreement from Shane, Duke and others. Louise claimed, "Some people need structure," and Carmelle wondered, "If you don't have a framework, what are you working towards?"

Gabrielle's need to do things on her own ("I trust nobody to do anything for me") and her unwillingness to accept direction ("I've not been able to be told what to do for many years") were not typical of this group either. Duke said, "Any time I need the help, I go up and ask and I get it....There's no way...I could even do it, except for the help that I've been getting and it just makes it a whole lot easier." When Shevaughn needs help, she will "ask the teacher," and she will "keep asking questions" when she doesn't understand. Nicolas said, "If I don't understand something, it's because I don't have the knowledge to understand it, so I have to go to the teachers and ask them...." He also feels that "the interaction between teacher and student...is what counts the most in these schools." My classroom observations indicate that Gabrielle's attitude towards instructors is softer than she claims, but it does depend on how she feels about the person she's working with. "To me it's obvious who you can talk to and who you can't." She has also sought out friends to help with her learning, suggesting that there are people she trusts.

Because of previous negative school experiences, some students find it difficult to approach instructors. Shane has learned "not to be afraid to ask," and now he likes to get people to read his work and offer feedback. Louise will ask for help, too, but admits that "you have to get over that fear and that insecurity...." Her initial reaction, to do it herself, "stems from really young, being self-conscious and making errors and being laughed at and stuff, so I have to feel really almost desperate before I am motivated to the point where I will go and ask...." Duke still has problems asking for help. "If I look at something that I don't understand, then I get terrified....I do try to figure out things on my own because I will not ask somebody because I don't want them to think that I'm stupid...." Duke's other comments and my observations indicate that he has managed to overcome this problem to some extent, since he does make regular use of the instructors.

Other students have a need or a desire to do it on their own, but they seem to know when they need help and find it easier to ask for it. Carmelle said, "I needed more of their help then, when I first started. Now...I like to be able to find the answers myself, because then I feel that I've really accomplished

something....When I do need help, I do go and get it." Hazel observed, "If I don't understand it, I'll keep on and keep on, and...when I keep getting stuck in that same area...then I know I have to see it in a different point of view, and explained to me in a different way, after narrowing it down." When working on a poem, Erika "tried to figure out as much as I could on my own, and then whatever stuff I didn't understand or I wasn't sure if my own idea was correct, then I would ask." Gabrielle spoke about the dangers of seeking help too soon. "If you haven't exhausted your own means, then your subconscious is still working at it, and it's still trying to help you, and then you go and get input. You are going to confuse what's trying to come up to the brain." Louise feels a need to solve her own problems, but she also likes to get feedback from others about what she's doing. "I have to work the process out myself, so sometimes it helps for me to talk to somebody so that I'm hearing it, but I have to work the process through."

Louise, Pat, and Erika all talked about the importance of clarifying assignments before starting them. Louise said, "I need a lot of help and a lot of guidance, generally getting started, to make sure I have a really clear understanding of what is expected...." Pat needs to supplement the written instructions with explanation. "You go and get the booklet, browse over it, and then come up and say, 'Okay, you tell me more about what I'm supposed to do here,' because it can be confusing." Erika got on the wrong track with an assignment because of "doing it all by myself instead of consulting a teacher." Now "I'd go and talk to a teacher and figure it out beforehand."

Learning Behaviours

Dealing With New Material

The students experienced a variety of initial reactions to new material and assignments. Nicolas said, "I kind of get excited, and sometimes I get kind of nervous." Carmelle thinks, "Oh, God, I'm not going to be able to do this," but

"once I got the concept of what it's about, then I can relate to it quite well." Gabrielle's response is, "I get nauseated," but she finds that by accepting her fears they are easier to deal with. This is similar to the tactic she uses to address other old patterns such as quitting school. Duke offers an example that is not from ABE but is instructive nonetheless. When he first started to repair his car, "I was sweating. Every time I would open the engine, I would look at it, and I would shake my head. 'Oh where do I begin?' That's the first thing I always asked. 'Where do I begin?'"

Shevaughn, Shane, Carmelle and Duke spoke about taking their time to digest new material. Shevaughn said, "It has to be really thought out for me to give a decision I feel comfortable with. When he gets a lot of input, Shane needs time to organize it in his mind. After a particularly intense period, "I took two days and just kind of went through the stuff and kind of put things where they should be...." Carmelle uses techniques learned in the reading workshops. When faced with written information, she will "sort of skim through it, but first read your questions, and then read your story. In that way you're somehow able to answer the questions a little bit better." Duke said, "I would read it first. If I didn't understand it, I would think about it to try to understand it, and if it wouldn't clue in, I would maybe read it four times and think about it for about maybe fifteen, twenty minutes." If that didn't work, he'd ask for help.

Gabrielle, Erika, and Nicolas all emphasized the importance of relating new material to prior knowledge. Gabrielle has recently arrived at the concept. "That's just new to me. Maybe I did it before, but not with my knowledge." Referring to her research essay, Erika observed, "I wouldn't really know where to start, but now I've done my essay, I've learned the different types of essays, so I can use that knowledge for it." She also finds it easier to learn new things if she can "imagine how I could actually use it in my life." Several times during his interview, Nicolas mentioned the importance of using prior knowledge to work on new assignments. For example,

> When I got a new assignment, a new booklet, because of the things that I've been learning in the program, I always remember the things that I've been learning and I try to apply them. The critical analysis, I always apply the critical analysis to every new assignment that I have to work on.

Louise has developed one of the most elaborate systems I've ever seen for dealing with new material. She likes to label and categorize things, and to do this she has developed a system of mental "drawers" which contain different types of information. For example, she has drawers for particular subject areas and others that she calls "imagination...practical skills...emotional...people...even drawers for myself." Louise has been using this system for as long as she can remember, so she can usually find a home for new material. "I've got so many drawers that there's always a place for it somewhere." When she does encounter something "that I've absolutely never heard of or have never related to, then it gets put into this kind of anything drawer....When I figure I'm ready and that I can handle it, I'll take it out a piece at a time and then continue to try and shove it back into these category drawers." This is just an overview of a complex and well-developed system, but it does give a sense of the thought Louise has put into coping with new information.

Strategies and Techniques

The students interviewed draw from a vast repertoire of approaches to help themselves learn, and they recognize that everything can't be attacked in the same way. Hazel said, "Each time you learn something, it's a different process of learning it. That's what I found with myself. It's not always going to be the same patterns. It's always going to be a different method of learning." Shevaughn noted, "I try a lot of different techniques because it's not that it always works." Duke described how his approach has changed. "When I first started I would just look at it and say, 'I can't do it,' but today I would make a stab. I would try three or four different ways of doing it." This matches Louise's description of an intelligent person. "A stupid person would have just accepted the fact that they were stupid...and would have given up. An intelligent person says, 'Yes, this is difficult. Yes, there are problems, but we will work it out....'"

Because of her dyslexia, Hazel has tried a variety of techniques to help with her spelling. She has tried sounding out the words carefully, splitting them into syllables, using cue cards, and putting the words into sentences. She avoids

confusion between the letters 'b' and 'd' by memorizing the spelling of her brother's name which contains both letters. One interesting technique involves associations. "How I remembered them was the different situation at that time. Each is different. It's like using landmarks,...and you remember the moment, and that's how I remember the spelling of some words." The association is more to a feeling than a location, and "the memory reminds you of that feeling."

Shane has similar problems with spelling, but finds that "breaking down the word into other words" can be helpful. He uses the example of "clothes" and "cloth." Also, he said, "My use of a dictionary is getting extremely good." In high school, Shane avoided spelling problems in his writing by using a simpler word than the one he wanted. Louise, on the other hand, said, "I'm not going to substitute it for an easier word just because I know how to spell it,...so it would slow down my writing process...." She is learning to write down words she knows are incorrect and come back to them later "if I feel that's it threatening to stop the flow of my creativeness."

To organize a big writing assignment, Louise likes to have all her ideas and information "written down on separate pieces of paper, and I can move things around and shift things until I feel that they've clicked into the order that I want to have them....Sometimes it's a matter of experimenting." This technique may be necessary because "I seem to be able to focus on one kind of information at a time; I can't focus on the whole picture...." Shane, on the other hand, said, "For me to learn something,...at first I have to have an understanding of how the whole process works in a really rough sense, and then from then on, work on the smaller things...." Another feature of this type of exercise for Louise is that "it can't be pictures; it has to be words," and she has to see the pieces physically next to each other. Hazel finds a visual approach more appealing. She recently tried using drawings to help organize her writing. "I did the diagrams and the pictures, and that helped me understand how to write it." She plans to use this technique again.

Other students' organizational techniques were more typical. Carmelle starts with "a brainstorm thing,...take the most important things of the

topic,...eliminate some of the others, and...write the importance of them in proper order....Then sum it up at the end, tying everything together." Duke has refined his letter-writing technique. "What I did before was...I would write it straight out into a letter. Now I would pick out the important parts of what I wanted to discuss about it, and...I would give details to what I mean."

Reading was also important to many of the students. Erika said, "I always read it too fast," so "usually I'll read it over first and I'll get an idea, and then I'll read it over again...." Shevaughn said, "It's not only what I understand; it's what I see the first time and what I don't see, and I've learned to read it slowly...." Duke has realized the importance of reading the explanations and examples carefully before going on to the exercises. Nicolas looks for key words in the readings and when talking to instructors. "I always pay attention to certain of the specific words that are quite important in the assignment as well as when the teachers are talking to me...and they repeat one word in a different way...." Shane talked about reading ahead when he was in high school, and Hazel still does so she can "get a general idea of what I'm going to be doing."

Louise and Hazel find it useful to hear the words being spoken rather than read to themselves. Louise said, "If I'm just reading something, I can't recall what's been read if I'm just reading it to myself. But if I read out loud, or if I'm telling it to you, and then I'm hearing what's being said, then it starts to have some sense to it." Hazel likes to get other people to read for her. She used to get her science partner to do so, and "every time they would read it to me, I comprehended it better than me reading it myself." She also listens to tapes of novels she has read, "and I would understand it a little bit further than what I had read myself."

Several students take an active approach to reading. Shevaughn said, "That's what I end up doing: reading it and then I always go back and ask questions about what it means...." She also likes to test things out to confirm that she has learned them. After reading a passage, Erika asks herself what she has just read, and Nicolas tries "putting things in my own words. In that way things make sense to me." Duke uses context clues. "If you understand the sentences

and you have a few big words in there, you can put two and two together to understand what that big word probably means."

Shevaughn and Duke reported having insights while they were away from class. Shevaughn said, "A lot of times when I go to bed at night, I think about my day, and that's when a lot of things kind of come." Duke does the same thing. "I try to think about my homework when I go to sleep....I might forget in the morning when I wake up, but lots of times it's still in my mind...." He also talked about his attempt to understand sentences and fragments. "I could do that work in class, but it wasn't the same as thinking about it. Like to me it was hard thinking about it, but when I thought about it when I was walking, it just came; it came easy to me."

Shevaughn, Shane, and Louise have managed to solve their own problems while waiting for or talking with an instructor. Shevaughn said, "A lot of times when I get to the desk and I'm waiting in line,...I try to read it on my own, go over it in my mind, and then by the time I get to the teacher it's clicked in, and so I end up telling them what I think about it." Shane said, "When I have a problem and I approach the teacher, I usually find that I'm the one who solves the problem....I'm trying to explain why I don't get it, and through that process I come up with, 'Ah, that's it. Okay, thanks.'" Louise finds that, "just by hearing me as I tried to talk it out, I found that I already knew the information." I have had this experience myself, and I have seen it happen to other students as well.

Louise, Duke, and Erika talked about using tape recorders for different purposes. Louise has taped lectures and conversations because "you can play it back and make sure you're accurate and that you've got all the information that you want." It's also possible to take notes because "I can stop it when I need to." In the discussion, Louise suggested to Duke that he try taping the paragraph he was having trouble writing. Duke was responsive to the idea since he had once memorized acting lines using a tape recorder. Erika has tried this method as well, and she has also tried recording sentences containing new words to build up her vocabulary.

There were different perspectives on managing study time. Shane likes "short bursts of extremely in-depth things and then time to sort through it on my own and think about what I've just taken in...." Nicolas finds that "when I sit at the table and start writing for a long period of time, I get exhausted and I block my mind, so what I do is take breaks...." However, Duke has a problem with that method. "I don't stop. I can't stop. It's there. I know if I stop I'll lose it."

In spite of all these techniques, some students found that they needed one more. If you are really stuck on something, leave it. Try something else. Gabrielle said, "One particular question can just maybe not sink in, and then if you move to another one, it will just sink in." If he has problems, Shane feels that "I'm allowed to set them aside until I can approach them, but at a different time...." Louise and Duke both admit a reluctance to do that, but Louise said of her grammar work, "I decided to leave it and put it on hold," and Duke put down his chemistry unit "at least for a couple of months, and then I'll go back into it...." When Hazel had problems with spelling, she still did a little bit every day, but she worked on other areas as well.

Self-Direction

When asked what they thought self-direction meant, the students mentioned motivation, working without assistance, deciding what to study, or some combination of those. Hazel thinks it means "motivating yourself," while Nicolas sees it as a "kind of discipline." Erika thinks it refers to "somebody that doesn't need someone to help them," and Gabrielle said, "I won't go to someone else to do it." Shane said it's "doing things on your own to try to keep progressing in the direction in which you want," and Pat thought "it could mean that you have a particular area that you're focusing on, and you're directing yourself in that particular area." Pat also said, "It could mean you self-direct your learning right out the door and never come back...."

Louise, Shane, Nicolas, and Duke all believe that the CCA English program supports self-directed learning. Louise feels that, although there may be a

common goal, "the path that I choose to take that's going to get me to the goal may not be the path that you would necessarily take or somebody else would necessarily take...." Shane thinks the program is self-directed "because there is nobody sort of pushing you," and Nicolas does because "they are not telling you all the time what to do....You have to do things on your own." Duke thinks it's self-directed because help is not always available. "An instructor can only stay with you for so long. They have other people to attend to." On the other hand, Gabrielle feels, "I still am not allowed my individuality. I still have to follow a structure...." These comments, made in the discussion, met with disagreement from Louise and Carmelle.

Within the context of the CCA English program, all of the students who talked about it see themselves as self-directed, at least to a degree. Duke said, "I do have a drive on learning something myself," and Pat said, "I don't need someone standing over me to make me learn." Nicolas is "kind of" self-directed, and Erika is "sometimes, sometimes not," in the sense that she needs help occasionally. Similarly, Hazel is self-directed "if I know the material, but if I don't, no. I would need guidance through it." Louise works well within a framework. "If I don't understand,...then I'm frustrated. But once I've gotten the hang of it, or once somebody's set me in the right direction, then I'm okay...." These descriptions fit into what Candy calls learner control, which refers to taking control of your learning, once you have the necessary material, within the structure of a formal setting.

Related to learner control is self-management, which still applies to formal settings but assumes the learner is free to decide what to work on. Shane has applied this principle, admitting, "I haven't followed the curriculum as it's laid out....I've gone through the curriculum and picked out the parts that I think are extremely relevant...." After struggling with his assignments in spelling and grammar and getting nowhere, he realized, "If I want to do something I should just do it on my own...." He started writing stories and, as a result, "my writing has improved a bit." Many of the other students could be described as self-managing as well since, as noted in the previous section, they decided to move on to something different rather than stay stuck where they were. In fact, most

CCA students are self-managing. They always have the option of choosing to work on a specific subject or on a particular assignment within a subject area.

When asked to describe self-directed learning projects they had undertaken, the students offered a variety of examples. Duke took his engine apart and Erika is currently working on her car's cooling system. Shane applied his mechanical ability to bicycle repair, Carmelle learned to knit and crochet, Pat corrected his golf stroke, and Hazel learned to analyze dreams. Louise and Duke wrote the GED test unassisted, Shane taught himself to skim read, and Nicolas said "I tried to learn English on my own,...but it didn't work. It's quite hard." Gabrielle described raising a family as a self-directed learning activity.

What is common among these activities is an appreciation of resources and an awareness of when to use them. As Pat points out, "No matter what part of life you go through, you learn all the time, and someone's always going to have some kind of influence on that knowledge...." Also, "other people have already learned what you're about to learn, so why not use their knowledge?" Pat, Carmelle, Hazel, Erika, and Shane all used people and books to help with their projects. Shane got "direction from other mechanics," and Duke asked a mechanic friend how to begin. Nicolas enroled in a formal program when he decided he couldn't learn English on his own.

There is a sense from the interviews that the students like learning, and they're willing and able to do a lot on their own. Louise said, "I like researching information. I really enjoy that." Shane uses the library and watches popular science programs on television. Erika and Gabrielle prefer doing it themselves to formal education. Erika said, "Why take a course if I can learn it all on my own?" Gabrielle takes a stronger position. "I don't feel that I'll stay in the educational system because I find it to be very pathetic. Even though I would love to educate myself, I can do it at home....I've been doing it on my own all my life...."

This form of self-direction is what Candy calls autodidaxy, learning based on activities that take place outside of formal settings. It was common among the

students interviewed. Candy's fourth category is autonomy, which refers to people who are independent in most or all aspects of their daily lives. This topic wasn't addressed in the interviews, but Shevaughn feels she is "independent," and Gabrielle also appears to have control over her life. "It was a conscious decision to stay illiterate, and it was a conscious decision not to be illiterate, for me." I would expect that the others exercise at least some autonomy as well. In spite of their many responsibilities, people who can decide to return to school as adults and do well in their chosen program must have some control over their lives.

Applications

Perhaps the greatest gain made by these students during their time in the CCA English program has been an increase in confidence and self-awareness that they can use to accomplish what they want in the outside world. Gabrielle has developed a positive attitude and has learned to "take responsibility" for herself. She said, "I'm feeling more confident when I'm talking with people," and she communicates more effectively. "Now I do it more clearly, more precisely, and much more verbally, instead of manipulation. Shevaughn is "learning to ask questions," "learning more about self," and learning to make decisions for herself. She said, "When I go home, I use what I learned at school." Shane is "a lot more aware of people" and "what their motivation is in real life...." Louise has developed "skills in dealing with people and not being so afraid of people that I'd be able to talk to them confidently or honestly or without the fears....The more exposure I have to people, the less fear there is." However, she still has a fear of new people or new crowds.

Pat has recognized a need to be rational rather than angry when dealing with the Workers' Compensation Board and bureaucracies in general. His ability to communicate has also improved. "I was always confident in myself in dealing with them, but sometimes I'd finish a statement and be unsure of what I'd just communicated. Now I'm thoroughly confident, and that is a direct result of what I've done in here." Pat thinks his writing has gotten better, too. "I think my basic style is still the same in the way I would write something, but I can make it more

effective. I can hit harder when I want to hit harder, at the same time being very diplomatic." He plans to use his reading skills to deal with the "continual flow of literature from dealers and suppliers" if he ever ends up running a body shop.

Shane believes that, in formal education, "you learn things but it's not the same way in which you learn things in life...." Nicolas, however, feels that the way you learn in CCA English is "the way that things function in the real world." He claims that formal education "enables us to be more effective at the job site." Nicolas also said, "When I just came to this program, I didn't know even how to put the words in a sentence together....Now I'm able to read and write in a proper way...." He has learned to express his ideas effectively in writing, and "I can use the tools that I've been learning in the CCA program and apply to any kind of information or book that I'm reading....I try to get the meaning of the information....I get my own conclusions....I analyze the context. I have my own inferences,...and I have a better approach about the different issues." Duke's reading has also improved. "I understand a lot more." Erika has applied what she has learned to reading, letter writing, and movie viewing. She particularly appreciates the speed at which she was able to read her book on automobile repair. Hazel said that, every time she learns something, "I try to put it into the outside world, relate it to how I can use it."

Beyond ABE: Brian's experience

As Brian was going through school, he had to deal with "problems at home" which caused an "inability to concentrate." He missed details and had difficulty following sequential instructions. Brian believes that "a lot of people who come from troubled backgrounds suffer from that because that's a basic defense mechanism is not to pay attention."

Brian, a tool maker, "could see the metal trades running out," so he attended ABE classes and is now finishing his training at BCIT as a safety officer.

When he first started in BTSD (the former name of the CCA department), he "was afraid. I was definitely afraid that I couldn't do it....Some instructors weren't that helpful," but "I was encouraged by certain instructors....It was really, really important at that time for a little bit of encouragement and nurturing, almost parental-like....It only took me a few weeks in BTSD to see what was going on." He liked the idea of starting in a self-paced program and moving to College Foundations once he felt comfortable about being in school again.

The reasons for Brian's success are similar to the reasons given by other students. "I was motivated....Once I make up my mind that I'm going to do it, I usually do it." Also, "fear is a big driver for me....I found a comfortable level of stress...." Students who drop out may not have that sense of commitment. "I found a lot of people who didn't continue in BTSD, that I would talk to, just didn't consider it that important in their life." Also, younger students see their education "more as a problem than an opportunity for self-improvement."

When he first looked at the BCIT program he had chosen, Brian thought, "It looked like a heavy program, so I was quite discouraged because I always thought I was dumb...." However his early results in CCA were good, and in time he found he could handle more difficult assignments. Brian feels it is important to build confidence by encouraging success through a gradual transition from basic to more advanced material. Confidence, self-esteem, and knowledge are related. "The more things you learn about, the broader your scope. The more you've understood, the more confident you become, the better you feel about yourself."

Brian first became aware of the problem he has taking in information while he was at KEC. "I knew something wasn't right, but I didn't know exactly what it was, so what I have to do usually is I check with somebody else or check with an instructor or I check with somebody else's notes." He has thought about his strengths and weaknesses as a learner and feels "it's really important to think about that....I found out I wasn't stupid, that I just hadn't applied myself [in high school] or understood my learning capabilities and how to apply my assets...."

Brian has become almost relentless in his use of the instructor to help with assignments and clarify what's expected of him:

> If I was given an assignment when I first started my upgrading, I would just basically take it home and then try and figure it out, or go to the Learning Centre and get help there. When I get an assignment now, I really clarify everything with the instructor.

"That's my number one resource....Go back to the instructor again and again and again, and find out what they want you to know, where they want you to end up." He likes to see things presented clearly and precisely, and he tries to negotiate an approach that both he and the instructor find acceptable.

Different points of view on a topic are also important to Brian. He will seek out other instructors or experts in the field, and he feels it is important to supplement the instruction by working with other students. "You definitely learn at BCIT to get along with students a lot better because you need them and they need you...." He has also gained insights into his own weaknesses by trying to explain concepts to others.

Brian is aware that he needs time to digest new concepts. "I don't catch on quickly, so I have to do it on long term and take a basic concept and wait for my head to digest it...." He keeps all his old work and tries to compare current assignments to what he has done previously:

> I look it over and look at how I strategized it, and I keep all my scrap notes and I look through that and try to get a basic idea of what I did, and I find it really cuts my time down. It cuts my frustration down. I feel a lot more positive about what I'm doing.

Although he said, "I'm really not a real independent learner," Brian thinks of himself as self-directed "to an extent." He did extensive research and chose his career, school, and program carefully. Within a course of study, he is self-directed in the sense that he knows when and where to seek help. When working in a group, "I am the first one to say we need some direction from outside, some input, and I usually know where to go...and how to use that source to our best advantage."

Because his trade encouraged precision and attention to detail, Brian initially applied these techniques to all his academic work. However, "I've learned how to take the most important points of something and do them to an acceptable amount of detail and then leave it." He also said, "I'm a lot more patient with myself," and he finds it useful to spread out an assignment rather than do it all at once.

> Before I would just do it, start it and finish it, spend as much time as I could on it. Now I try and space it to take different looks at it, so I can do part of it, leave it, do part of it and leave it, and come back and see what I did in the first part, see if I still feel the same way."

Brian tries to apply what he has learned to everyday life. "If you just turn it off when you walk out of school, you're really wasting a valuable asset." He thinks about the science he has learned while working around his home, and he has become more aware and critical of the biases in people's arguments. Brian measures success, not in grades, but in how much he gets out of a course, and he feels he has gained the confidence and problem solving skills he will need on the job. "My whole educational experience has given me a lot of confidence that I can do that."

There is a striking similarity between Brian's perceptions and those of the others in the study. Because of the intensity of his program, Brian may put more emphasis on focus and discipline, but there is a familiar sense of strengths and weaknesses, and an awareness of resources and how to use them. There is also a sense that self-awareness is not static in anyone but changes over time.

Summary

Almost everyone in the study had problems learning in public school, because of learning disabilities, family difficulties, or both. They returned to school with a career goal or to develop skills. After the initial fear and anxiety, most felt comfortable in the program. They liked the lack of competition and

stress, and they found the teachers to be patient and supportive. Many of the students saw a connection among success, confidence, positive feedback, support, and enjoyment in connection with their learning. Most students were aware that all problems can't be attacked the same way, and they had a repertoire of approaches at their disposal. The learning disabled students in particular had been aware from an early age that they were different from other students, and they had developed elaborate strategies to overcome their weaknesses. Most of the students are self-directed in the sense that they have undertaken their own learning projects, and they have a sense of when and where to seek help when necessary. Their greatest gain has been an increase in confidence and self-awareness which they can apply outside the classroom.

The biggest differences were in the students' perceptions of the nature of learning. Learning was seen by some students as abstract and connected, and by others as memorizing isolated facts. One student saw it as permanent while another said there's no guarantee you'll have it forever.

Chapter V - Conclusions and Implications

Review of the Argument

Chapter 1 introduced the premise that a major purpose of education is the development of independent, informed people who can adapt to changing social conditions. Thus, learning facts has become less important than acquiring learning skills that can be applied in a variety of contexts. Therefore, the people who will be successful in the modern world are those who have learned how to learn.

Learning how to learn is an important concept in a process that begins with self-reflection and continues to self-awareness, awareness of one's own learning processes (cognitive self-awareness), and metacognition. From there it leads to self-direction, critical thinking, and perspective transformation, which are seen as desirable goals by adult education theorists and practitioners. This progression should be seen as cyclical rather than linear. It is a process in which the components interact with each other, and one continually returns with a new and deeper understanding.

Cognitive self-awareness is essential because it enriches, and in some cases enables, the process of learning how to learn. Since it has an important relationship to the acquisition of higher order thinking and learning skills, it would be useful to know more about it. Does it relate to age? Is it developmental? How does it influence approach to learning and performance in an adult basic education (ABE) program?

This study investigated ABE students' cognitive self-awareness in the context of a self-paced English program. It is hoped that the results of the study will be useful to educators who wish to help their students become independent,

self-reflective learners, and to the learners themselves who may gain insights into their own learning processes.

Theme and Variation

In spite of the different backgrounds of the students in this study, there was much in common among their educational experiences. Their early education, return to school via ABE, and perceptions of the nature of their success in the program followed similar patterns. The biggest differences occurred in their perceptions of what learning is.

Shared Experience

Almost everyone who took part in the study had problems in public school. These problems were attributed to learning disabilities or family problems, and many students mentioned both. This is not surprising since Coles (1989) feels that there may be a connection between environment and learning disabilities. Perhaps because of these negative experiences, the students were intimidated by the prospect of returning to school. They said they felt "lost and confused," "nervous," and "scared to death," and they found the experience "scary, intimidating," "kind of confusing," and "strange." However, once they became familiar with the program, most of the students felt more comfortable. They liked the relaxed, informal setting, free from the pressures of competition and having to keep up with the rest of the class. The experience of settling into the program after the uncertainty and anxiety of the first few days is similar to that of the students in the study done by Mezirow et al. (1975).

The students in this study were all academically successful in their program, and they had clear ideas on the reasons for that success. Most of them saw a connection between success and confidence. Confidence could come from

a sense of personal progress, positive feedback, or good grades on an assignment. Support, encouragement, and approval from family and friends were also important. Many students cited an increase in confidence as their greatest gain from the program.

Readiness to learn was also seen as a prerequisite for success, as was the idea of personal responsibility in the context of the program. Purpose was also important. Everyone in the study returned to school with either a career goal or a desire to develop specific skills. Although the students had developed sophisticated learning strategies, they spoke more about persistence, determination, and hard work than mental processes. Success was more a question of attitude than cognition.

Enjoyment of learning was also tied to these themes. Enjoyment, readiness to learn, purpose, persistence, support, positive feedback, confidence, and success all appear to build on each other. It was suggested that students who drop out are lacking one or more of these characteristics. Perhaps strength in one area can counteract weakness in another. For example, maybe a student who is lacking support and a clear purpose could succeed on sheer persistence. However, if a student is having trouble, it might be wise to check if one of these conditions is missing. If learning and enjoyment are in fact closely connected, surely students who are frustrated by lack of progress will stop enjoying what they are doing and eventually drop out.

Differences in Awareness

There is a range of personal styles in most ABE classes that is represented in this study. At one extreme are students who are more active and take the initiative in their learning. They have strong but negotiable opinions on most topics, and they will challenge instructors' ideas. In most cases, these were the students whose interviews took the longest because they were willing to talk at length about whatever interested them, and they also contacted me after their interview to clarify or add to points they had made.

At the other extreme, students are more passive. They prefer to be assigned material and will generally accept an instructor's opinion on what is right or wrong. These students were cooperative, but their interviews were shorter because they only answered the questions asked. They didn't go off on tangents, and they didn't offer anything unsolicited.

The active students have what theorists might call a more sophisticated or well-developed perception of learning. They see truth as subjective rather than an assertion by authority, and they see learning as connected and abstract, rather than the memory of isolated bits of information. Among the students in the study, this sophistication has nothing to do with age, but it does appear to be connected to grade level. It may also relate to previous educational experiences.

There is, of course, a danger in categorizing and labelling some students as more sophisticated than others. It is not that simple. For example, one student thinks of learning as memory and teachers as authorities while recognizing the subjective nature of experience and the importance of really understanding what you are trying to learn rather than treating it superficially.

The distinctions among students' perceptions of learning are similar to those made by Perry (1970) and Belenky et al. (1986) in their work on stages of development. One student believes that, no matter what our circumstances are, we will learn when we are ready. Another feels that students have problems because they are not interested in learning but only in completing the program. If approach to learning is influenced by perceptions of learning (Candy, 1991), perhaps readiness to learn and the deep approach to learning envisaged by Marton and Saljo (1984) are also developmental.

What is Important?

While there is variation in students' perceptions of learning, it may be argued that these differences and others are not important to all ABE students. There is in fact a strong sense of self-awareness and cognitive self-awareness

among the students where it matters most - in areas of personal significance. Students from difficult backgrounds are aware of those past influences and are attempting to deal with them. Students with learning disabilities became aware at an early age that they were "different" from the rest of the class. As a result, they have been thinking about their learning longer than the others, they have developed personal strategies to deal with the material and now, as adults, they are more sensitive to their own needs. There is an appreciation for the importance of literacy and the development of reading skills, particularly among those who had problems reading in the past. The students do not think of themselves as self-directed in the sense of being able to work unassisted, but they are aware of available resources and have a keen sense of when and where to use them, a skill that Candy (1991) feels may be the most important characteristic of a self-directed learner. In short, the students are aware of their strengths and weaknesses, they take advantage of their strengths, and they are trying to address their weaknesses.

Also, some of the goals prescribed by adult educators and theorists may not be valued by all students. For example, some students appreciate the critical thinking skills they hope to acquire in the College and Career Access (CCA) English program, but others are more interested in doing what is necessary to get a job and put food on their table. They may find it difficult to see what role critical thinking and perspective transformation play in their immediate future. In fact, many students appear to have undergone some kind of transformation anyway during their time in the CCA English program. The students reported an increase in self-confidence, a more positive attitude, an awareness of people's motives, an ability to communicate and deal with people more effectively, and a recognition of the need to be rational rather than angry to make a point. These changes do reflect the notion of perspective transformation envisioned by Mezirow (1990a, 1991). If it is true that readiness to learn, confidence, and success are intimately related, this result should not come as a surprise. Perhaps these changes are a result of an academically successful experience in an ABE program.

Themes and Expectations

Throughout this study there was tension between my preconceptions, which were based primarily on the literature and the results of the preliminary study, and the need to allow the data to determine the categories of description. There were, in fact, similarities between my preconceptions and the results. As expected, most of the students were aware of their own strengths, weaknesses, and effective strategies. There was also a range of sophistication among students' perceptions of what learning is. The initial uncertainty associated with starting the program was expected, although the depth and intensity of the fear and anxiety surprised me.

Still, I believe the analysis represents what actually occurred rather than what I expected to occur. The main categories which emerged were called perceptions of learning, attitudes, and learning behaviours. These are similar to those developed by Pratt (1992) and Mezirow et al. (1975), but I didn't notice the similarity until well into the analysis. Also, the observations supported what was said in the interviews and discussion. One exception was the student who claimed that she would never get help from anyone. Although this was untrue, further discussion indicated that she really meant she didn't like being told what to do. She wanted the power to decide who she would ask for help and when she would do so. Finally, all the students read the analysis and agreed they were represented accurately. They offered insightful comments and suggested minor changes, but nothing that affected the overall meaning.

Self-Awareness Revisited

Self-awareness is a complex phenomenon. In Chapter 1 it was suggested that it may be influenced by culture, past experiences, stage of development, perceptions of learning, context of the learning activity, and subject matter. In

particular, this study supports the idea that self-awareness is personal and contextual, and it changes over time.

Self-Awareness is Personal

Self-awareness, by definition, is personal. What is important for someone may not be for someone else. For example, the students who are learning disabled or strongly affected by their past are aware of these influences, and they are trying to deal with them in ways that other students don't even need to acknowledge. There is also a sense of when and where to seek help which, of course, varies from person to person. The students themselves appreciate their differences. There is a recognition that "we all learn differently," and we won't all experience an event the same way.

It is not appropriate to generalize and make judgements about people's perceptions or degree of self-awareness out of context. Instead, these must be seen in terms of people's backgrounds, goals and aspirations. What do they want to get out of school and life? Is critical thinking necessary? If so, is it urgent?

Self-Awareness is Contextual

Self-awareness also varies according to context (as do self-direction and self-confidence, for example). Many students are more relaxed working one-on-one or in a familiar group than in a classroom full of strangers, so they feel they are able to function more effectively in a self-paced setting than in a conventional classroom. Others, recognizing their need to be pushed, see the advantage of due dates and keeping up with the rest of the class. The students are also more aware of their learning in areas where they have problems, and they have developed strategies for dealing with those problems.

Although this study concentrated on the CCA English program, the students brought in other learning experiences which made for interesting

comparisons. Many of them have undertaken self-directed learning projects in response to a need or an interest. It appears that the learning projects, both self-directed and classroom, in which the students had some background were approached with more confidence and a clearer sense of how to proceed.

In his work on learning how to learn, Gibbons (1990) has identified three different types of learning: natural (spontaneous interaction with the environment), formal (direction through a learning procedure), and personal (self-initiated learning). He suspects that "all three dimensions require different forms of cultivation" (p. 67). To paraphrase the words of some of the students, the same techniques won't work for every learning endeavour.

Self-Awareness Changes Over Time

Self-awareness increases from childhood to adulthood, but does it continue to increase in adults? The students did report a gain in self-awareness during their time in the CCA English program, but there is no direct evidence of such a change, nor could a change be expected over such a short time period as that of this study. However there is a compelling piece of evidence that comes from two interviews conducted with Brian, one of the students in the study. The first took place while he was an ABE student, and the second almost two years later while he was at the British Columbia Institute of Technology:

Peter: Has being here helped you become a better learner at all?
Brian: Absolutely. Definitely.
Peter: Tell me how. In what ways. What things have happened?
Brian: Uh, gee, that's hard to say. (March, 1991)

Peter: Do you think you've become a better learner since you started in CCA?
Brian: Definitely. No doubt about it. And it's all helped. Every bit of it.
Peter: Okay, so what things have happened? In what ways are you a better learner?
Brian: I was always one to start something and then grind on 'til it's finished and do every piece of it in extreme detail, because my trade oriented me in that manner, and I've learned how to take the most important points of something and do them to an acceptable amount of detail and then leave it...and I've learned to let myself think about it and not be too impatient with myself, and let it sit and cook, and then go over it again and see how I maybe understood it a little bit more and give myself time to do that, and I found that, when I don't have that time, I don't get the concepts....(December 1992)

It could be argued that what has changed is not Brian's awareness but his ability to articulate his experience. However, acquiring the language to describe your feelings and behaviours must imply an increase in understanding and self-awareness. It is also useful and perhaps necessary for the next step which is taking action based on that awareness.

Adequacy of the Model

The model developed in the first chapter was an attempt to relate the literature on adult learning to self-awareness, cognitive self-awareness, and learning how to learn. It developed over time and was still changing as I prepared for the first interview. As noted in the previous section, the concepts described in the model are complex. In particular, self-awareness is contextual, personal, and changeable over time. What is important for someone may not be for someone else. What is true in one context may not be true in another. What is true today may not be true tomorrow.

Also, we must be careful when making judgements about our students' levels of self-awareness. For example, where would you place the student who sees learning as memory and teachers as authorities, while appreciating the individual nature of experience and understanding the need to learn something thoroughly and not just cover it superficially?

One problem with the model may be that what it describes and what the students talked about are different processes. The model is concerned primarily with cognition. The students, although they spoke about learning strategies, attributed their success to readiness, hard work, and positive feedback. These are more related to maturity, attitude, and support than cognitive processes.

This doesn't mean that the model should be discarded. Self-reflection does precede self-awareness. Self-direction and critical thinking will not occur without

some self-awareness. We must remember, however, that self-awareness in particular and learning in general are too complex to describe using a two-dimensional model.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Study

Although these results apply only to the group being studied, they may reflect the experiences of other ABE students as well. It is hoped that those who look at the findings of this study will be able to relate them to their own situation. They may also draw their own conclusions or discover other avenues to explore.

Future research could look at self-awareness in different groups: men, women, students with a particular educational purpose, students with learning disabilities, or students from similar cultures, age groups, or educational backgrounds. It might be useful to do a longer study or a follow-up of this one to find out what happens to students after they complete their ABE program. It would also be interesting to investigate adults in other educational and social settings. The most important research question in this area, because of its practicality, is how to encourage students to become self-aware and develop the skills necessary to learn how to learn.

Implications for Practice

Initial Contact with Students

The students in this study were frightened by the prospect of returning to school and nervous when they first started. If these are the students who adapt and meet with academic success in the program, what are the initial perceptions

of those who don't adjust and eventually drop out? They must feel at least as anxious and uncomfortable. In any case, since the students in the study felt comfortable once they became familiar with the program and procedures, we must try to ensure that familiarity comes early to all our students.

It was suggested that you need confidence to be successful, yet success is necessary to gain confidence. Since many students arrive with little confidence and poor self-esteem, there is a need for a supportive, nurturing environment and manageable assignments to get them started. Competition and stress should also be avoided. To accomplish this, some programs even put off assessment testing for a few weeks until the students get settled (Mezirow et al., 1975).

A student in the study suggested another way to help students adjust. "You might want to find out how they think that their background...has affected their attitude towards learning in a negative way and how they could deal with that." While it may not be appropriate to dig too deeply into someone's past, we could at least "inform the students they might be dealing with some old problems."

Teachers' responsibilities

The students have a clear sense of what they like in a teacher. They want someone who can relax with the students and not talk down to them. They also value patience and an awareness of students' backgrounds and problems. In short, they want someone they can relate to. The students also liked getting different explanations from different instructors, and most liked the combination of instructor explanation and written material. We should make sure the students know that these different resources and perspectives are available and accessible, and they should feel comfortable about taking the same question to more than one instructor.

It is felt that ABE instructors respond very well to students' expressed needs, but what about their unexpressed needs? Although students must

recognize the importance of personal responsibility in a self-paced program, some may need to be reminded and pushed occasionally. One student said that some people may feel insecure about approaching an instructor, and others may simply not know how to ask for help. We should be aware of students who need support, motivation, or encouragement to write a test, for example. While we shouldn't impose ourselves on people inappropriately, there are times when it makes sense. We must be sensitive to the needs of the individual.

We should also not be limited by our sense of standard approaches and accepted ways of solving problems. Instead, we should first find out how a student views a particular problem. Some students, particularly those who are learning disabled, have developed well-reasoned personal strategies that they find effective, and we should learn to work with them instead of imposing our own structure.

Encouraging Self-Reflection and Cognitive Self-Awareness

"Much, perhaps most, of the time we think and learn non-reflectively" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 15). A student in the study suggested that people don't think about their learning until they are asked to. In other words, self-reflection and self-awareness don't occur spontaneously. In this study cognitive self-awareness was demonstrated, but perhaps that was because students were asked to think about their own learning. It can't be expected to occur naturally in an ABE classroom.

To encourage self-reflection and cognitive self-awareness, instructors should ask their students to think about how they approached certain learning tasks, particularly during the one-on-one sessions that are common in a self-paced ABE classroom. Learners should be exposed to a variety of instructional techniques and learning demands, so they can become comfortable and gain confidence in unfamiliar situations (Candy, 1991). Perhaps students could be given opportunities to talk to each other about their learning, one-on-one or in

small groups. These sessions would have to be seen as belonging to the students, not to satisfy some instructor or course requirement.

Encouraging Active Learning

Instructors who want their students to engage in learning behaviours such as self-direction and critical thinking should begin by modelling those behaviours themselves. Also, some of the students in this study reported feelings of fear and nausea when dealing with new material. If that is the case, then we should apply the same criteria to new material that we apply to new students. We must do our best to provide the patience and support necessary for them to adjust to the new situation. We want students to engage themselves as active learners and critical thinkers, but we can hardly expect them to do so until they have overcome their initial anxiety and begun to relax in the classroom.

If readiness to learn and deep approaches to learning are developmental, then all students won't exhibit these behaviours. Some will need more direction than others. The potential is there among most students, but we can't expect active learning from everyone without some assistance. Instructors need to find out where the students are starting from as early as possible in the program, and help guide them through the process that begins with self-reflection and leads to self-awareness, self-direction, critical thinking, and perspective transformation.

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Appendix - Sample Interview Transcript

Interview - Gabrielle - December 2, 1992

P: Do you want to use your own name, or do you want to make up a name?

G: No. Use my own name.

P: Okay. That's an interesting point because some people don't want to be identified, and some people actively want to be identified.

G: Well I'm going to be in a film in March that's going to say my whole life story. I don't think I need to pretend that my past doesn't exist any more. I'm going to be on television for all to see.

P: There's a power issue too. People want their name used because these are their statements and they want them represented as part of them.

G: Hm. I don't think in terms of power but at all. I think in terms of do I stand with conviction, do I believe in absolutely everything I'm saying, and if I use a name that isn't mine, am I ashamed of what I'm saying. Now that's my own opinion. That's not necessarily that I think someone else thinks that way. I feel this totally for myself. If I don't use my own name, I don't stand behind what I'm saying, so I have to, for me it's a very strong statement saying I said this by saying my name, but not for the public to hear, for myself. I'm agreeing to do this with you because I like you. I think you're a good teacher and I think you take the time out to hear where a person's coming from, and before you can teach anybody anything you need to know that person a little bit. You can't teach anybody the basics unless you know the basics about them, and I feel that I connected there with you.

P: It's part of a - I see it as part of a process. You don't find out about someone and work with them. You work with them and find out about them and work with them and it evolves.

G: But you take the time to listen.

P: Yeah, well that's -

G: And I don't know one teacher in there that does that really clearly. I know that there's some that have the potential to do it, but they have a lot going on in their lives right now, and it makes it difficult for them to hear others when they're dealing with their own issues. This (. .) having a strike happening, personal lives. To me it's obvious who you can talk to and who you can't. That comes from being illiterate and picking the right people that are going to direct you in the right direction. Not everybody can do that. I don't think everybody has that skill.

P: Right. Yeah, well it's a skill or a personality trait or something. I think it's something that can be developed.

G: Hmmm. Most definitely, because I can see mine developing. (It) has changed in form just in the four years that I decided I was going to read and write. I mean that was a conscious decision. It was a conscious decision to stay illiterate, and it was a conscious decision to not to be illiterate, for me. I'm not saying for everybody that's true, but for me it was a decision,

because when I was not reading and writing I thought people that read were stupid. That's how I thought, that they stuck themselves in books, and they didn't see really what was going on in the world. Because I come from very (.) people. My parents read, right, and they did - so to me all that reading just represented denial of life.

P: So tell me again, now that the tape's on, what happened that you didn't learn to read and write a well as your literate family did? What happened to your schooling?

G: I didn't have any schooling because I - because of an abusive background, because of an abusive childhood. Now I can look at this as an adult. As a child - I'm totally looking at it as an adult. When I was younger, I didn't read or write because I didn't have parents that were coping with - like they were abusive, both of them. I mean I'd like to say just my father but my mother has to take responsibility as well and, uh, because of the abuse that went on in my family, and the beatings, the sexual abuse, the emotional abuse, I did not read. I couldn't read. I became emotionally unable to do anything but just walk around like a zombie, and that's basically what I did the first, probably fourteen years of my life, fighting them, just surviving, so my focus wasn't whether I could read a book. My focus was surviving in my home in the family unit. And not only did I not function with my parents, I didn't function with my brothers and sisters, 'cuz now I don't read and write and the school system is poorly set up because, I mean the town that I'm in is very dysfunctional itself, so the teachers that are there are not helping. I mean everybody knows everything about everybody in this particular town, which is (.) Lake, and um -

P: Where was that?

G: . . and so all the teachers are dysfunctional, and they didn't ask why I was acting the way I was, and the fact I came, uh, that when I'd leave home in the morning I was leaving a very unhappy environment. They just decided that I was a menace, that I was a problem, so they called in a psychiatrist to discuss that, and from there - and I didn't read, so when I was tested, I reacted to those tests. I reacted as I was being rejected again as I was being rejected in the family, in my home. So when I was dealing with the psychiatrist I said very stupid things, and I really remember . . if anything from that I remember very clearly him saying - asking me quite stupid questions, to me. I mean I was eight years old and he asked me questions - what do I think is really brave? What do I think I should do - what would I do if I was really brave? And I thought that was quite irrelevant to school, and I remember thinking, well "Why is he asking me that?" and I answered very stupidly. I thought I was going to pay dearly for it and I did, and um, he had blocks I had to put in - squares in squares, circles in circles, but I didn't know that. I mean I didn't know you put a square in a square and a circle in a circle. He didn't, to me, explain that to me, or I didn't comprehend his explanation, because I did not put the square in the square and the circle in the circle, so they saw me as having - being disabled and put me in with handicapped children, and from there I was in with retarded children. They were retarded, severely retarded, not handicapped. I was handicapped because I couldn't read. They were mentally retarded. I was in - the classroom had eight kids and there was two of us that were normal, in my opinion, John and I, and, uh, he - his mom didn't keep him in there where mine did. My mom believed if somebody said there's something wrong, there's something definitely wrong with that person, so I stayed, John left, and there was such a commitment between him and I that I was devastated even more that they took him away because he was my - he was my salvation.
. . . (section about other children in the class) . . . so that was the environment I was in for there years, and - every day, you know, it was every day, and I would just go to school and sit in a chair, but we didn't have desks like the - a normal class. This was - you just come in and sit

down in a circle and if you ran around in the classroom that was what you did, but there was no schooling at all. I don't remember ever looking at a book. I was not taught anything. We just went there and functioned, and so the illiteracy problem became even worse and the parenting became worse because now I'm acting out. Not only am I acting out at home and saying, you know, fighting the system and my environment at home, I now decide I'm going to take on the (school in this particular) thing, and I become very violent and aggressive and obnoxious and all the things that come with it and start picking on everybody.

P: So how old were you when you left school? How long did this go on for?

G: I was fourteen.

P: Okay. How old are you now?

G: I'm thirty-nine.

P: And it's been the last four years you said that you -

G: When I was twenty-six was the first time that . . I thought - I was divorced from my first husband and I saw very clearly I had to survive a little better than what I was doing, and in order to do that I had to get a job, and in order to do that I had to read. I couldn't get a job without filling out applications, and so I went to a literacy school in Edmonton at um - what's that college called? It's downtown Edmonton.

P: Doesn't matter.

G: Anyway I didn't fill - I went there - I - They have assessment exams, like every other place, and I told them that I (couldn't) read the assessment exams, and they go, "Oh do your best." (short sentence missing). And I thought that was really kind of pathetic when I had just said I can't read. Why write an assessment exam? That's why I'm coming to school, and they - and I was very honest about it, where up to that point I lied a lot. I mean I had - I had manipulated everybody to do everything for me in my whole life, and now I was taking responsibility to do it for myself, and uh, I don't think I was quite twenty-six; I was twenty-five, and my - when I went I was only grade two, grade three level in reading and higher in math, and they felt - they told me that was very strange. They said that that was . . that I had a very different way of dealing with things, and I thought they were saying I was stupid, so I quit, and, when I look back, that's not what they were saying, but that's how I took it. So I lasted I think five and a half weeks, and learned basic reading to where I could read a little bit better than when I went in there, because I really did focus on the reading aspect of it, and then I shut down again. I completely shut down, but I did - now I would start reading articles a little bit and force - try and force myself to read at home, and my daughter now, _____, knew I was illiterate, and she's my oldest (one), and it was very embarrassing for her. So she found that, you know, mom you've got to learn to read. You've got to, you know, work at this, and her - then I met my second husband, and we were together for a while, and I was very honest. I told him that I wasn't very - I had no education and I couldn't read very well. With him, not with a lot of people but with him, for some reason I felt okay with that, and he taught - and he sat and read with me every day, and so I'd follow along and he'd read to my son at night and I would read - I'd follow along with him and learn words. I'd memorize them, but I wasn't comprehending. I wasn't . . I was following along reading and hearing these words, but I wasn't comprehending, and I was still very frustrated as a human being and very destructive, finding ways to self-destruct all the time, and the marriage wasn't a healthy marriage, because he had an alcohol problem, but he had his

own set of problems that he brought into the marriage. I had my own set of problems I took into the marriage plus my three children which in itself is a whole group of emotions themselves, so he withdrew into his world and I withdrew more into my world. Even though I was learning to read, I was still not learning to cope, and I wasn't comprehending. I was memorizing, but I wasn't comprehending, and so, of course, I left that marriage eight years later. That'd (be up to four) - that'd be four years ago, and I decided I had to comprehend what I was reading. It wasn't helping that I wasn't comprehending, and I . . had to go to - I was forced into counselling. I never had any counselling up to this point, and I was forced into counselling by (name) said that uh, he's my ex-husband, he said that if I did not deal with this, he would not stay in the marriage, and I felt very threatened and rejected, so he phoned Survivors of Incestuous Families, and they intervened, sort of, in a way that I would - I think a six week counselling period (. . six weeks .). I have a pattern, and so six weeks I lasted in that. Well their course was over six weeks, I think it was. And then there was - you could continue on if you want, but I didn't; I left. I left Edmonton, Alberta. I realized - they told me I didn't have to love my family if I didn't want to, and I thought, "Oh, I don't have to like my parents. This is neat." And thought I had to listen to my mother. If you can believe at, what was I, thirty-four years old, my mom could tell me what I could and couldn't do. Now I don't know how many people do that to themselves, but I definitely did. My mom decided who my friends were. She decided everything for me, and um . .

P: I think that's more common than you suspect.

G: Oh (God) it's disgusting. So my mother - they told me I did not have to like my mom and father, and I . . I don't know. Something about that was wonderful, hearing that. It was wonderful, somebody else saying that to me. I thought it, all of the time. I thought, I don't like my family and I don't want to be around them, so when I heard an outsider tell me that, I used it to the fullest. Instead of dealing with it and staying and saying "Okay, let's work at this. Mom, you're not going to tell me what I can and can't do. I have my own life. I go au revoir. I'm out of here. I'm leaving. I'm taking my kids. I'm leaving. And that's what I did, and with that came the real need to read properly and to learn to cope but still with an attitude that there is no teacher that's going to teach me. No school system's going to teach me. I'm not going to go to school. Schools are stupid. People that are in schools are just a bunch of people that are little sheep being led in a certain direction. The school system tells you how to think, why to think, and where to think, is what I was thinking. And so I still was anti-education but wanting to really learn to read. I mean I agonized over it. I mean I bought the Britannica Encyclopedia and could not read. I thought I'll buy the Britannica Encyclopedia and I will learn to read each and every word in the Britannica Encyclopedia. Well when I open a Britannica Encyclopedia, what do you do, you know, where do you start? Just how come they use words that are so big? So that didn't work, and uh . . but that I bought those many years ago, so four years ago I decided that I would go to a school. It was - I would produce documentaries, is what I thought, about people that can't read and write. So, okay, if I'm going to do this, then I need to know how to do documentaries; I need to know how to work a camera, do sound, all of this stuff, so I applied to go to this school, Columbia Academy, on Broadway, and when they accepted me I knew that they were a poor school because I still couldn't read and write very well, and they accepted me, and I knew immediately they were not a very good school. But I still stuck with them. I went in and I befriended the head school - or at that time he wasn't the head school teacher, but I knew he would be. I don't know why I knew he would be, but I knew he would be, and I befriended him. And he knew because he's a teacher I did not have very good reading skills and writing skills and he just really took a liking to me, and we became extremely good friends, and he taught me probably more than anybody on how to read and write properly. Not properly 'cuz still I'm working on that, but reading to where I was comprehending, but he didn't do it in a way that he

says to me, "I know you can't read and write." He just went and he listened to my rambling; he listened to me and not ever say a word to me, not ever say, "Well, Gabrielle, you're a little bit off, you know, the marker here, a little out to lunch." He'd go, "Well maybe try it this way," you know, and he didn't ever confront me (about . .) until (. . . .) and it's only been in the last - since I've been to King Edward that I've really opened up to him and said to him - said things to him such as, "My God, I cannot believe you ever listened to some of the (things I said). You were a very patient friend and I thank you dearly for that," and I also have a friend in my life that has - would not do anything for me. If I say, "Well how do you spell this?" he goes, "Sound it out." You know, always sound it out, and I'd go, "I can't" and he would not take that. He would say, "Get a grip. Just listen to the word. Sound it out." And I go, "How can I sound out a word I've never been taught the basics? How do I know, you know, the basic sounds of a word if I don't understand that?" and he goes, "Well if you'd open up to it and listen to it, you'd understand it" and he goes, "and quit using excuses not to do it" and he was very blunt and very - and sometimes I thought very mean, but I see where he was coming from now. Then I didn't. I hated him with an undue passion most of the time, and I thought I was going to kill him, but his theories worked, 'cuz I had to sound out the words, and I had to learn to spell, because he was the person around me that knew how to spell that word, and if he wasn't going to give it to me I wasn't going to go ask the neighbour, you know, so there I was having to do it on my own. So in the last four years I've had very - the people that have come in my life have been teachers, and they have been really patient with me and work - and really cared to help me in a way that they didn't make it appear that I was stupid. And that's what I've had up to that point is people that would get very impatient with me or they would tell me that I would have to go to certain places, institutions, to get taught, that I couldn't learn . . .. A skilled person would have to teach me, someone that understood illiteracy or someone that understood certain things, and I didn't believe that. I believed that that would hinder me, if I went to illiteracy programs and that, because they teach you like you're a child and we're not children, and when we're taught as children we feel even more stupid, and it's pathetic. This system is not a healthy system, so I just felt, every time I tried with the system I felt less than the person teaching me. And I already had an issue with teachers. You know, it's lucky they survive around me. I mean I used to have fantasies about blowing schools up, you know -

P: I still do.

G: - with several teachers (. . . and) I put some teachers in there with that bomb. So I had issues, very heavy issues around. So it's been arduous on my part and the people in my life's part to work with me and be patient with me, because coming from a place of you think you comprehend and you don't comprehend, having someone tell you in a manner that you feel even more stupid, especially when you're using words you have no idea what they are, and I tend to do that, or I did. I feel now I comprehend much clearer. But there was a time I would try and use words. I'd hear them and then I would try and integrate them into my conversation, so I would sound more intelligent and I was saying the wrong words. And I notice that in a lot of people that are not well-read when they're talking.

P: I notice it in people who are semi well-read who want to appear to be well-read, but they also, I think, have a lot of confidence or whatever, a lot of chutzpah or whatever, because if they use - if they do something . . if they make a mistake, then it's just water off their back; they just go on.

G: When I watch at King Edward when I'm sitting with people, because I think I'm there just to observe. I mean I don't feel that I'll go any further than King Edward with all honesty. I don't feel that I'll stay in the educational system because I find it to be very pathetic. I mean even though I would love to educate myself, I can do that at home. I don't need to do it (. .). I'm

disciplined to learn. I've been doing it on my own all my life, in my opinion, so I feel that I can continue educating myself, but I have a difficult time sitting in an educational system and functioning the way I feel I want to function. It's too dysfunctional. It's very sad and the teacher - the people that are in positions to teach need to work on their own lives before they can teach other people.

P: Is that the nature of the dysfunction or what is dysfunctional about the education system? Let's just look at the college. Let's look at the program you're in right now.

G: Well, I think that the program I'm in right now is a good program that where you can learn at your own speed or however . . and I think that's wonderful. If you have the proper direction. If you don't have the proper direction, you're going to get lost in that, and what I see is most people don't get proper direction. I see the teachers there who have - a couple of teachers there that have no business being there at all. They're absolutely the most egocentric people I've come across, and they deal with the students as if the students are stupid, and they've . . if the teachers were to listen to the students there's not one student I know that likes this one particular teacher, and this one particular teacher is very aggressive and very - he talks down to the people. He doesn't listen to what they're saying. He overdoes it with the marking, overdoes it with everything, and any other teacher will mark it right, and this particular teacher will make sure you . . it has to be - it absolutely the way he wants it, and in my opinion, it's not the right way, and in the opinion of any person that has ever mentioned anything to me about this particular teacher says the same thing, and when you have someone in a teaching position doing this to people because they come from their ego and not from wanting to help people and teach them because it's their passion, then it gets lost. They're not getting taught properly, and then the people stay in their insecurities and their dysfunctions.

P: You don't have to answer this but who are you talking about? You don't have to answer it.

G: _____. Because he just is . . I've told him off several times. Like he will say to me - I was in the reading . . what is that class that you - that everyone insists that everybody take and it's quite . .

P: Oh, speed reading?

G: Speed reading. Is it speed reading?

P: Well it's like that. It's -

G: Timed reading. Timed reading, which is quite ludicrous, and because no matter what a teacher can see in that, people are going to compete with other people, and they're not in there thinking they're intelligent doing this silly little thing. They're in there thinking I'm not intelligent or I wouldn't have to do this. There's something about my reading that they think that I need to pick up that speed and really it has nothing to do with reading. Speed has nothing to do with reading, because I can read very very fast - very fast, but I mean one of the other teachers was telling me that they don't even have a speed at the speed I read, and so -

P: It's off the chart, ay?

G: Yeah, it's off the chart, and - but that doesn't mean I comprehend it. Even though I can write the - answer those answer - the questions, the questions are logical. People can read and grab out of the universe, or whatever we want to say, logic answers. I mean teaching comes from a logic

place. I mean there is some basis to the logic, so anyway he was . . he told me I had to stay in it, and I was like reading 800, 900 words a minute, and I, like excuse me, I could be in this the rest of my life and you wouldn't be satisfied, you know, and I have no interest. And he goes, "You have to challenge yourself." Like well I challenge myself every day. I don't need you to tell me I need to challenge myself. You're just a teacher. You're not my keeper. There's a difference you know. Go to hell. But I don't agree with - he's very - a lot of people have difficulties with him. I don't know anyone who doesn't, and I talk to a lot of - I mean, I don't know why people choose to talk to me about school, but they all sought me out to talk to me about a teacher. It's as if I'm going to go raise hell or something and tell that teacher to quit, which I don't, with the exception of _____; I've had arguments with him. It's . . they feel comfortable. I listen to what they're saying and they know I understand that they're not understanding how it's being taught, and when they're talking to a teacher - the teacher - they feel very uncomfortable with the teacher. There's two teachers in there that I know that people never complain about. You're one and . . . she's there sometimes

(discussion of who it is)

G: Because I did this one that _____ set out for me and I did it. I took it up and it was marked right, and then he says, "I was the teacher, and I have to mark it," so I gave it to him, and he - but he didn't know that it was marked by another teacher and she said excellent on it and marked a whole bunch of things on it, and he said - he goes no, no, no, and I walked up to him and I go, "What are you talking about?" and he goes "This - " he goes "You just aren't following the . . the guidelines." and I go, "It's already been marked. I just gave it to you because you told me I had to. It's already marked off the book," and he go - and he says, "Well, who did you talk to?" so, which was the woman with the blonde hair, you know (. .) looks like Doris Day, what's her name?

P: The blonde? The blonde's _____.

G: Yeah, _____. She's the one that had marked it and said it was okay, so then they discussed it - discussed me (. .). That's the day I decided I'm leaving English, that they don't have it together enough in there, and I haven't gone back to doing English since.

P: I noticed.

G: I haven't worked on anything in English. It's just a disruptive environment to me, so - and I have such an issue with that anyway, I went and I totally focussed on biology where the teachers were intrigued and eager and enthusiastic, and then we did something. It was like wow, you know, the work we did, they just were blown away by it, and that - because _____ and I decided to work together, they (. .) very smart. She latched right on to me because she's very insecure. Now there's a person that if a teacher knows their work would take her and work with her, because she's got the intelligence, but she's working with illiteracy problems; she's working with emotional dysfunction from her home. She comes from a very violent background, a very hurt place, and she's got a lot of things going on, and she's the type - she's the type of person that is - I mean she reminds me of me six years ago. It's like the mirror is so incredible, and she - she talks with a vocabulary she doesn't understand, and she is very hurt, and so she knows who to latch onto to get work done, and she copies absolutely everything out of the book, and doesn't do anything on her own, and she's scared. And now if some proper teaching was happening, somebody would notice that, that here's this person that really wants to learn and wants to better her environment, get off of welfare, be able to support her children, and move forward. There's the type of person people should be helping, because they're so willing to help themselves, and

she's not getting that. She's not getting that at all, and she fears that I'll quit the system, and she goes "Well why don't you just -" so she encourages me to stay for her sake, and I mean that's what I would have done seven years ago, six years ago I would have - if I met somebody that I found security with, I would not want that person to leave.

P: Maybe we should hire you as a counsellor. This is wonderful, but I'm starting to lose my thread, which is more my problem than your problem, but can I sort of backtrack to some foundational stuff, and when you feel like it, just .

G: Ramble on like I just did?

P: Yeah. I mean this is what it's all about is rambling on.

G: I do it well.

P: But I'm sort of - I'm still sort of linear and mathematical and I want to fill in -

G: That's good.

P: - the things -

G: I'm trying to learn that.

P: - so dadadadadada and then you came to - you decided to come to King Ed and check out -

G: My dysfunction led me to King Ed.

P: - the program here. Okay. Why did you decide on - can I call it CCA, the new name, rather than College Foundations for, say English?

G: Why did I decide?

P: Yeah.

G: . . . . . I'm a - is it a jack-of-all-trades? Is that the word?

P: Could be.

G: Yeah. Jack-of-all-trades. You give me anything to do and I do it, and I can do it well, but I'm not a master of any (of them), okay? So what I wanted to do was become a master of one, which is naturopathic medicine I find very (.), so I had to study - I phoned around and I thought, well, I'll take proper training instead of doing it the backwards way, you know, according to Garp, instead of doing it through, you know, people that don't have an education; they just have skills of life. So that's the way I was always learning, and I wanted to be able to work with people, so I researched it and I found out I had to have - I had to have, there was no, if, ands, buts about it, two years college to get into any naturopathic hos - university, college in the United States. Vancouver, same thing, two years arts, and that's all they want is arts, which made no sense to me whatsoever, so I thought, okay, how determined are you? And I thought about it and thought about it for a year. I gave it a year. I went and wrote the exam a year ago at King Edward. Actually it was a little longer . . a little - it was about a year and some months ago. I went with my daughter and wrote the assessment. I went - she was writing the assessment and I went and

wrote the assessment with her, and I came in on basic education. I would have to start I think grade 8 or 9, and I just said, "I don't have a grade 8 or 9 attitude. I don't have a mind of a grade 8 or a grade 9. I cannot do it, so I just shut down again. I became quite depressed. How can I get an education if I can't get past those assessments? How can I get in there and show them that I have more intelligence than their silly assessments? So I set my - I hummed and hawed for a year. _____ went to King Edward, and she's coming home and she just (.) go to get her grade 12 really fast. She had half of it; she needed to - she didn't have enough credits, so she went back and she would not ever go to school and yet she was acing it, and I'm going, "Excuse me, _____. How can you ace something and not work at it?" And she goes, "Because the teachers they've got," and I go, "Well how do you mean the teachers they've got?" And she goes, "Well, mom, they - you just need to hand in something that sounds good, and they're happy with it. They don't care what you're doing as a person." And I go, "That's pathetic, and that really bugs me." So one day she came in and she goes, "Mom, I never did an essay. I was painting the house. I never did this essay, and I have to hand it in," and I go, "When do you have to hand it in?" and she goes, "Today at noon, or at one o'clock." And I go, "When was it assigned?" and she goes, "Two months ago," and I go, "Two months ago, and you have to have it in today." Michael and I were there, and she goes, "and it has to be something (in) a current issue," and I go, "Current issue and it has to be handed in today." I go, "The only current thing I can think of right now that I know anything about is the Bryan Adams issue." She goes, "Bryan Adams. What's about Bryan Adams?" She goes, "Isn't that, he wrote a song or something. They're not giving him credit or they're not playing it on the radio?" and I'm going, "Exactly," and she goes, "Okay, let's write it," and I go, I'm painting the kitchen, she sits down, and we write this essay. And she aced it. She handed it in at one o'clock and she aced it. She came home. Michael and I, who's the gentleman at this Columbia Academy, he's no longer with them, we opened a business together. He and I were just blown away by this. What kind of teachers do they have that this kid could sit for an hour, write an essay, take it to them, and get an "A" on it? And, um, and he goes, "Do you see, Gabrielle? Do you see the kind of teachers they have, and you are concerned about your - you are concerned about looking stupid?" He goes, "Smarten up." So I thought, okay, it's time that I challenge it again, and I went and wrote the assessment, and I aced - and I got really - I got high Eng - I got grade 11 and 12 English. It blew my mind. I just - I was so invigorated by that, blown away that, okay, now I hit these particular little things that never let me in past grades 2 or 3 or now - and at one point grade 8, and now I'm on a grade 11, grade 12. Now all of sudden I'm validated. Can you imagine? Me who's against all this is validated at grade 11. I'm already feeling like I've already got a brain, and it just took this assessment, and the encouragement I got from the woman that gave me the assessment, the woman that was in doing the assessment, she - on the assessment it says what type of education, because I had no education, I don't lie about it 'cuz I want to learn properly. I don't want to learn from a lie by saying I have grade 10, you know, so I feel better about things and people don't think I'm stupid. I told the truth. No education. No formal education. And she told me when I was writing the exam, well maybe I shouldn't be writing those particular exams then, and I went, "No, I want to write the hard one. I don't want you giving me the special treatment. I want to know where I am, and so when she marked it - when the mark came back, she saw me in the hall walking to get the marks and she remembered me, and she said, "You did remarkable. You have no idea. You should be very proud of yourself," and it changed my whole way of thinking about education at that particular moment. At that particular moment. Now the education system's okay cuz' I got a grade 11 and grade 12, and I was really excited. I'm going to go to school, and I'm going to get that grade 12 and I'm going to get out of there and then I'll get those two years college that they want me to have so much, and I'll just - I'll kick butt. Well, now I'm in there.

P: Okay, but why did you decide to go to self-paced instead of College Foundations?

G: I could go fast.

P: Okay.

G: I could go really fast, because I know I'm a disciplined person. I can get grade 12 faster than if I would go into the College Foundation, which isn't true because I still have to go through College Foundation to get -

P: - some of the -

G: - for some of the - exactly, and which I didn't like College Foundation at all. There's too many egos up there. It's . . it's just I have some issues (. .), and again I - you can go here, they say you can get your grade 12 by doing this layout that you have in, how do you say it, CC - ?

P: CCA

G: CCA. And to me it's easy, you know. I mean it's easier than, than to have to write a test and then . . there's issues around that. But I just felt really comfortable with that program, and plus I couldn't get in (.). It was full.

P: Okay.

G: But I didn't want in there anyway, even if it wasn't full. I didn't know you could do it at your own pace. I only found that out when I went to (.).

P: So, you told me a little bit about - you told me actually you told me a lot about your experiences, but what - do you remember what you felt like the first couple of days of classes?

G: Yeah, lost.

P: Was it - Okay.

G: That it was pathetic, and that the teachers were not - very help - you were very helpful. I mean you - but you weren't there very much. I met you once in the beginning, but when I first went there, I don't think you were there the first day I was there.

P: Possibly.

G: The first two days I was there I felt totally lost and confused. I felt I was stupid still at this point. I didn't think that I comprehended what the directions were saying. I just am now learning that the directions say what you're to do. You see, I used to think there was a hidden agenda in (those) directions. I used to think, "Oh, they're trying to trick me with these," and I'll tell you more people think that than not, 'cuz _____ is still saying that to me. She goes, "There's other things in there. You have to learn to be careful." I say, "No there's not, _____. You follow that and that's exactly what they want. Trust me. I used to think the way you do." But she doesn't hear me, and she won't hear it until she's ready, and that's the reality. She isn't going to hear it until she's ready, but now I can see that you follow directions and that's what they want. I never knew that.

P: Yeah, and if it doesn't work out that way, we want to know about it so we can change the directions.

G: And I see that.

P: That means that we haven't described it properly.

G: Exactly, and I can see that. I see that with being in biology, because . . I take - I don't - there would have been a time I would have read the directions, done the work, and been satisfied with the mark. And now I read the directions, do the work, and if I don't get the mark (.), then your directions are wrong. Now why am I not getting the mark? If you have proper directions, I would have done it properly, because I'm not -

(end of tape)

G: - originally, and have things in on time and do this. That's pressure adults don't need. They have enough pressure at home as it is. You - I mean I'm in it (.) at night, so I mean I'm not just talking. I'm taking Biology 071 at night, and you have to be there; you have to do certain things, and it's a pressure; it's an incredible pressure.

P: Okay. Any other differences between the two biology courses you're in, self-paced and classroom?

G: The one in the self-paced program there's a lot more work involved, because you're not in a classroom discussion (area) or anything, so they can't judge from that, so the work is more intense; however there's more time to do it for some reason to me. But yet I get it done faster. I get my work done a lot faster in 061 than I do in 071 because I'm doing it with me not being told by another person how I can and can't do it. However there's (. .) understand (why) people prefer that. I don't. I've not been able to be told what to do for many years, and it hasn't changed, and I don't think it's going to.

P: You mentioned that you'd seen people drop out of CCA in the early days. Can you think of any other reasons why people - do you know of anybody else who's left and why they didn't stick with it?

G: They didn't stick with it - I know two particular people that didn't stick with it because they felt that when they would talk to teachers that teachers did not give them proper direction, and they felt that the work . . one teacher would tell them one thing and another teacher would tell them another thing, and one would say one thing was okay and the other would say no, it's not okay, and they'd have to redo it. So they felt very confused, and I mean I hear that now when I'm there. I hear them. They feel confused (.) the way the teachers are. You see I don't blame the teachers for that, because I do believe you have a guideline that you follow and you pretty well have to stick with that. I feel that the teachers aren't basically the problem here. It's the type of individual that is being dealt with here. They come from hurt places and places of confusion, so everything or anything the teacher's going to say is going to be heard confused. So I mean you're working with a double-edged knife here. You're working with people that need counselling as well as education, and they're not going to go to the counsellors in that school. Maybe some will, but I bet you the counsellors aren't as busy as they should be. They probably could be busy 24 hours a day if they would really want to deal with these people and get them on the road to recovery.

P: So, why were you - why are you able to survive, stick with the program, do well?

G: 'Cuz I have incredible people to support me. I have friends that admire the fact that I come from illiteracy, and they're blown away by the fact that I (.) here, that I did as well as I did on the program anyway to get in, and plus once I'm in there that I'm getting A's in my - I mean everything I do in biology I'm getting 100% on, not 90, not 80, but mostly 100%. Now my exam's not as high, but any assignment I hand in is usually 100%, and that blows my mind, and that blows - it encourages me more and more every day to go back, because it's so invigorating to do that well for yourself. I'm not doing it for anyone but me. Now most people that go to school, there's always a hidden agenda. There was for me for many years. I was going to do it to better my - for my kids' situation. I was going to better my situation with my husband. I was going to better my situation with my parents. I was going to better my situation with everybody in my life, and until I decided to do it for myself, it didn't get anywhere, and I'm doing this for me. When I get 100%, I gloat. I don't even share it with anybody any more. Like I don't have to pick up the phone and go to my friends, "Hey, I got 100% today," 'cuz all's they ever say to me, "Well of course. You're an intelligent person." And that's not what I want to hear. I want to hear, "Oh, that's great," but that's not what I get, and so I just keep it to myself, because I say it to me - "That's great; I got 100%," you know, so I feel good when I get that. Not that I have to have 100%; it just is a (neat) feeling.

P: Have you always - did you do that well from the start, when you first started, or did you have to sort of settle into the system a little bit and . . . what was your comfort level over the - over the time - ?

G: I loved to be at school when I first went. It's less and less now, but I mean I loved going there and working and my mind being occupied, my mind being into a book and learning something. You (gotta) understand. When I read that . . a comma goes a certain place, I'll go to English now, I mean I've been in biology (.), a comma goes in a certain area or a period, or you can spell a word, or I spell a word right, I feel so good, you know, inside. I feel such a good feeling, because I did not know that's how it was. I did not know to complete a sentence you have to have commas and periods and apostrophes and all of those things in there. I used to think, well, those are just wasted little things, and when I comprehended that, I just, I thought, "Wow." Now I understand, you know, so then I get a good feeling, and the more I feel good, the more I want to continue, you know, and the sad thing about it all is is that it's starting not to feel so good, you know, and I'm starting to see the whole picture, not just a little part of it.

P: So you mentioned one thing about the reading program (. .). Were there any other sort of glitches or difficulties that you can think of? That threw you off or left a bad taste in your mouth or whatever?

G: Yeah, I wrote a spelling test, and I had explained to the (man) there that I had a fear of exams, and they say well - you see I think exams are pathetic. I don't think an exam can judge anything, because some people have a photographic memory, and they can look at something and go write it. That doesn't mean they comprehended it or that they're intelligent. That just means they remembered absolutely every word that they read, and now they can repeat it. Now there is nothing in telling me that's intelligent. That just tells me they get to pass their test at 90 or whatever or 80. Because they judge at that level, I have to judge at that level for myself. But yet I know I know it inside, but you put me in a test situation, all of a sudden my mind just goes no. Because I've convinced myself I can't, and even though I'm trying to reverse that and say I can, that doesn't mean it's that easy. It takes a while; it takes a little bit of programming there. I'm going to have to reprogram myself with that one. And I wrote a spelling test and I did very poorly on it, but if I did it in a classroom I did very well on it. I was getting 90 and 98 so _____ was just saying, "Great, Gabrielle. Go write your exam," and I go, "Nah, I'm not ready," and he

goes, "Go write it," and I go, "No, I'm not ready," and he goes - and then I just avoided it and avoided it and he goes, "Just do it." So I did it, and I flunked it, and _____ was the marker, and he made a big to-do about it in front of everybody, and I was sitting at the table and he . . and I knew they were talking about me, so instead of sitting there I turned all red and I got embarrassed and very - and then old patterns came in and I got choked up and I just about started crying, and I tried very hard not to cry, and I got up and I went up to him and I go, "If you have something to discuss with somebody, discuss it with me. I'm the one that wrote the damn thing, not them," and I go, "I told you - I told _____ that I had difficulties with the exam (room). He kept encouraging me to write it. I wrote it; I did not do well, and he goes, "But this doesn't go with this," and he says - and so everybody's looking over at me and I'm thinking, okay don't lose it here Gabrielle (. .). My pattern would have been to quit right then and there, and he - I said to _____, "I wrote - I explained to the other _____ about it. Now talk to him about it," and _____ said, "_____, I - we've worked it out; just drop it." And so he just closed the book, very angrily thinking I didn't deal with it properly, and he goes, "You have to rewrite that," and I haven't, and nor do I know if I will. You know, I don't even know if I will continue in the English program, because it's just not a comfortable feeling, and if I'm not comfortable, why do it? It's not going to get me anywhere. Just because I might spell a word right doesn't make me an intelligent person, you know. That's the difficulties I have. However, I want to spell properly, but a test room isn't going to teach me to spell properly, because I can spell properly. I can take the word and figure it out now. There was a time when I couldn't, but I can now, but they're going to decide what - where I am with my English without spelling tests - on that particular (thing).

P: Yeah. What assignments have you done in English that you liked? That you enjoyed or -

G: Well, I read that Ted Bundy story, and I wrote my opinion about, because I'm so opinionated I enjoyed writing that opinion about the book, and _____, he marked it and he put on it, "Thank you very much for giving it such hard work," and it wasn't a mark, but he appreciated all the effort I put into it, 'cuz I did put a lot of work into it, and I enjoyed that. I enjoyed that I could write my feelings about something and somebody not judge it, like I'm putting this person down. Also I was expressing my feelings towards it, and that felt good. I liked that.

P: Right. When you get an assignment like that, what's the first thing you do? Pick any English assignment. When you sit down, what do you do first?

G: I get nauseated.

P: Then what?

G: I let all my fears go in, and I stare at it for a long period of time, and decide that I let all the thoughts go, I can't, I can't, I can't, and I go, "Yeah, you're right; you can't," and then I go, "Okay, now that you can't, what are you going to do about it?" and then I decide that I'm going to work on it and not get rid of all those fears and then I challenge it. So I have to go through all my emotions (enabling) to go to that point of being able to do that.

P: Okay, how do you get rid of your fears?

G: I don't try to get rid of them. I let them happen. I just allow the feeling. I sit there and know that I'm feeling that fear, but what my old pattern would have been is I feel that fear, shut down, shut the book, and not do it. Now I go, "Okay, I feel this feeling. What am I going to do about it? Am I going to run away from it, or am I going to accept that I have this feeling and be okay

with it?" And I've learned to do that. I've learned that if I accept my feeling, I'm okay with it. Then I can do the work, and what - and to my surprise do it quite well, and that's invigorating. And not because a teacher might say I did it quite well, but because I feel good about it. It took a lot of work to get to that place. I mean the simplicity is there, but it took me years and years to get there.

P: Is it something that you sort of hit upon, or it sort of developed slowly, or - this initial approach?

G: I've always believed it but never exercised it. I used to say things to my older brother. He would say things to me like, "That's just the way it is," and I used to think to myself, "I had this feeling inside, (well it's) not right. I know inside myself I can change it," and I used to say it all the time, but I wouldn't practice it. And now I get to practice it. I can change it for me. No one else can.

P: Okay, but what enabled you to do that?

G: I just thought that. What enabled me to do it was having the support of people in my life. What enables me to be different, maybe, than what other people are, and I'm not quitting and I'm not walking away, is I have people saying, "You can do it." I have people in my - I'm not coming from a place of - when I go home at night there's arguments with my husband or arguments with my children. I mean there is that, my children in my life still. However, I'm very fortunate. They want me to do the best I can. Not everybody has worked in their relationships to the degree I have with my children and with my friends. We're very - we believe in conversation. We have - if we're angry we need to express that anger; if we're happy we need to express that happiness. We have developed that over the years. It's taken us many years to get there. I don't believe everybody's that fortunate. I believe that a lot of people are coming from other places, so I really am feeling fortunate in the fact that I do have a support system, and if I do feel that I'm not getting what I need at school, and the teacher isn't showing me, I have a tea - a friend that's a teacher, and I go, "Look, I'm not understanding what this teacher is saying, and I'm not really understanding where they're coming from," and he will explain it to me, and he will take the time with me, and he will read it out and say . . and then I can read it to him, or we can go over it, and he will say, "Well now, how do you feel about it?" He won't do it for me. However, he takes the time that not all teachers have, because he's not in school teaching any more. He has a business with me, so - we have a business together. Therefore we can work together, and if I have something that I need to do, not everybody has a teacher in their life, you know like that, 'cuz people are in teaching. I mean I have other friends that are tutors, but they teach all day and the last thing they want to do is have to do it when they get home at night, you know. And I don't - and I can understand that, you know. I mean I'm a therapist. I do massage, trager, and I do that work, and that doesn't mean when I come home from doing that work with other people, do I want to do it with my kids or my friends. You know, that's my job. I don't necessarily want to do it as a friend, you know.

P: Yeah, I know what you mean. After I'm patient all day, I come home and bite Terry's head off.

G: Yeah, exactly.

P: I don't have to be patient with you.

G: Yeah, that's what I'm like at school. I go to school all day. I'm patient with all those people, and I come home and I'm (rude) to my children, you know, and I know that's the same for the teachers. (They) don't think that they're supposed to be special. You know I don't think that (someone) you chose to be a teacher to be special. I don't think that any of us have a right to put that burden on somebody.

P: So, anything else that you use over and over again to get through assignments or whatever? Any standard techniques? You're allowed to say no.

G: But I do use a lot of different little things, I do, to get me past, because I know my old patterns. That's it. I know my old patterns where I would quit school, you know, and so I had to develop patterns and skills enable me to go forward, and knowing that in the morning if I wake up and I don't want to go to school I don't go to school, you know. I don't lay there going, "I should go; I should go; I should go." I go, "Well I'm not going to go," because that's how I feel, and then as soon a I make that decision, then I go. It's like as soon as I quit avoiding or resisting, the resistance goes. And that's where I've learned that skill over the years, that what you resist persists. So I quit resisting and then I'm able to move forward.

P: So, let me put some words in your mouth. So let me sort of test my understanding of this. You're . . the basis for your success and your ability to progress starts from a recognition of your old patterns, and once you recognize them, you can develop strategies to do something about them. And is the strategy sort of similar or is it different?

G: It's different. My strategy is much different now.

P: But I mean for different things, like just getting to school or dealing with the testing room or -

G: Different. Dealing with the testing room. I still haven't gotten past that. I'm still not doing very well in that area.

P: Is there any - okay.

G: Getting to school is I quit resisting, and when I get an assignment in English, I will allow all my fears to come out and identify them and honour them, and then move forward with them. And I absolutely and in no way compete. Competition to me is the last thing education needs, and so whenever I see I'm in a competitive situation, I remove myself from it. If I see someone trying to compete with me, I will not sit by that person. If I see that I'm - that someone has got my goat and I'm going to start competing with (him), I have nothing to do with that particular situation. I remove myself from it, so I'm (observant at all time) of my emotions.

P: Do you try to take advantage of your stock of knowledge when you get something new? Do you try and relate it - relate new information or new material or new assignments to what you already - ?

G: I never knew that until now, but now I do. Now - that's just new to me. I - that's just - like maybe I did it before, but not with my knowledge.

P: Not consciously.

G: Not consciously. Now I know that everything relates. Since I've been in biology, I have grown so much because I did not know everything - there was a basis of element, you know, there was a reason why, you know, like I did not understand . . I just learned that evolution, you know - I just learned that there's a theory of evolution. I didn't know that. I didn't know that until three months ago, no actually two months ago, whenever I started, September - the end of - October. I just learned that. I mean how incredible. Now I see that where everybody gets their information from, and just the basics of biology teaches you that, and I didn't know that, so now I can now take what I have and relate it with other things and work it together and get more information.

P: Okay, and that was - you just learned that in biology?

G: Yeah.

P: That's wonderful.

G: Yeah, that was - it's been incredible.

P: You know what? I thought I understood the theory of evolution, but I keep reading more and more about it and realizing that there's subtleties that I didn't have any inkling of before, so I assume there's lots more subtleties -

G: It's fabulous. It's . . I am so glad I left English and went into biology, and it was the biggest fear I had, because I have no sciences. I have no basis, so when they - I went to biology - I think they made a mistake where they placed me, and -

P: It's based on reading level, largely.

G: Is it? Well she's - they put me in the grade 11, and I thought, well, they were making a mistake. I really did think they were making a mistake, so then when I looked at the biology book and they - and it's . . the words are, you know, and information I never knew anything about. I'd look at a plant a plant's a plant's a plant. Dirt's dirt dirt, you know. Sand's sand, you know. Even though I have a gift for the green thumb, does it mean I understood the concept behind it or the words behind it or whatever man wants to say goes behind it. I just knew mother nature was a certain way, and I was a certain way with mother nature. Don't abuse her and she won't abuse you, and you know simplicity, and I kept it very simple, and all of a sudden I'm learning why things happen the way they do, and I had to force myself every day to go in there. Every day, and I knew if I didn't go in there I'd quit, and I did not want to quit. And _____ was the person I knew I would work with. I don't know why; I just knew that, and because I pick who I'm going to work with, and _____ was the person I was going to work with. I knew that she was apprehensive, and I knew that whenever I asked her a question, she withdrew, and I just finally said, "Listen. We have to do field trips. If you want, we can work together. We can work through this, and then we'd have each other to work with. And she goes, "Well, you're too far behind," and I go, "Yeah I am. You're right." Before I would have taken offence to that, and my feelings would have gotten very hurt, but she's a hurt person, and I am very fortunate to see through that, and I said, "You're right on," and I go, "but what I'll do is start where you are and I'll catch up." And you see because I didn't know anything at that point. I knew wherever I started wouldn't matter, and so what I did is start it in the middle, and I did my work, caught up to her, and did our work that we were doing, but what I learned while I was doing that is the basic how to do it, and that's what I need is to learn how to do it. Once I learn how to do it, I can do it on my own. And so at night I would be doing 071 plus catching up to

_____ plus doing the work _____ and I were doing, and I found that biology has taught me that there is a whole element of thought other than just the black and white way of thinking that I had.

P: When you get something new, (if) it's new material or a new assignment, do you have a preference for how it's presented? Like I'm just - I'm thinking of lecture, film, discussion, lab -

G: I'm very visual, so I think that seeing something on video teaches much better, plus being explained to by a teacher. (But) if you have a video for everything that one is to learn, then they can watch it over and over and over again, and I think there's more people that learn that way than not, visually and listening, but they don't catch it the first time, so lots of people say, well, tape it. Well taping it doesn't work always, because there's - as you say static in the taping and you know the noise in the background. People haven't worked, myself especially, and I'm just learning this more and more every day, is that we can't separate background noise to what we're trying to learn, and always the background noise wants to get . . rear its ugly little self right in there and say, "Okay, here I am. Pay more attention to me." And when you haven't learned to focus in a book scenario, in which that's what you're dealing with is people that have never learned how to learn from books or learn from direction, and basically the same thing from all of us is we have not learned to do what you were able to do is to pick up a book and read it and write a test and pass it, and so we have this head, this brain that's going constantly and all of our minds are working in a hundred different directions, and we're trying to also pull in information that society says we have to have to function, and so now we have to have this stuff society says we have to do to function, and we miss it because our brain and our head's going in other directions. Everything else is trying to - we haven't developed the skill not to think of everything at the same time, you know, so I'm just learning that.

P: I'm just losing it.

G: Good for you. They say where I am is where everybody wants to go, and I don't understand that, you see. Where I want. . I'm trying to find where you guys are, being able to pick this up and read it. You see I can have a thousand and one conversations at one time, and I can - if the phone was to ring, I could talk to whoever on the phone, listen to you, cook a meal, chew gum, you know, clean the kids up, vacuum the house, and do all this stuff at once, and still get it.

P: Yeah, the key is still getting it. A lot of people do - can do that and they do it all poorly.

G: I've learned the skills to do it all, because I was doing it all since the time I was young. That comes from my - that comes from being forced to survive in a very abusive environment. And I think a lot of people have that. I don't think I'm unique by any means. I think that there's a lot of us out there, and I can identify them, and King Edward's full of them. Unfortunately . . for them. I - my heart goes out to them. It's an arduous job.

P: Yeah. So let's say you need help on something. You decide that you need to get some help with something you're working on. What would be the first thing you'd do?

G: Pick the right teacher.

P: So human resources, ay?

G: Yeah. Pick the right teacher, and if that teacher is not available, ask a student. And if there was a video, I'd go to a video, but I would want the person to person effect first and then the video for backup.

P: Okay. Do you know the term self-direction?

G: Mm hm.

P: It's an education term. What does it mean to you?

G: That I take something and - for myself and I will read it and I will try to direct myself to do it on my own, or I'll decide something for myself, and direct myself in that way, that I will do that. I won't go to someone else to do it. I (.) get direction.

P: So do you think of yourself s a self-directed learner by nature?

G: Mm hm.

P: Okay. Do you think the setting in the English room lends it self to self-directed students? Do you think it's a self-directed setting?

G: Do I think that it's a self-directed - yeah, I do. They just need to . . they need to be able to pick out the people more clearly that keep it from being that way. 'Cuz there is people that need extra help, and . . that they're self-directed, but they're hurt. They're very dysfunctional and those particular people when in the room like that, whether they talk or not, their energies are there, their emotions are there. I believe you don't have to talk to express your feelings. And if you're receptive to it, which I think most people in that classroom are, because they come from the same environment.

P: One thing about self - like contemporary thoughts on self-direction. A big part of it is knowing when you should get help. You know, you can do it on our own, but you can recognize when it's time to -

G: important

P: -to get help and what sort of help to go for.

G: And not be running every second; there's that and then there's that, not asking, and . . I think when you've exhausted it in your mind to where you really feel you can't do it, and that means trying it and working out, and exhausting your own thoughts first before getting others', 'cuz there's where the confusion comes up. If you haven't exhausted your own means, then your subconscious is still working at it and it's still trying to help you, and then you go and get input. You are going to confuse what's trying to come up to the brain, and (then you're going to) confuse the message.

P: That's interesting. Now you said that you like working with people. What do you look for? What characteristics do you look for . . in a . . like . . in a lab partner or whatever?

G: The willingness to do their own work. With input. Working together and not wanting the work done poorly, and a similar belief system, and good conversation. It's very important to me to have people in (.) space that are willing to be clear and honest with what they're feeling and

be able to say that and myself be able to say what I'm feeling without being offended, because it's different (here). I don't see (anybody hurt anybody), and nor do I think anyone's saying anything to hurt me deliberately. I think people say hurtful things, but I don't believe they do it deliberately. (. . .) about masks. I'm not (. . . . . .) She was different, but that - I don't have those types in my life.

P: Have you ever tried to learn anything on your own without taking a course or asking somebody for help?

G: Oh, yes.

P: All the time?

G: All the time. Aimlessly I may add sometimes too. Oh yes. All of the time.

P: Okay, so pick an example and tell me what it was like.

G: Raising my kids. I have to say raising - I chose to have a baby without asking anybody, and I did - I mean it was just happened. What did I (.) cooking. Anything that took reading skills and I didn't have them. I just (be) getting to a place of such dysfunction and pain that is - the words I don't even think I can find. I can't express not knowing reading and writing to anybody. It's a feeling, and when you don't read and write and you try and learn, it is the most horrendous feeling in the whole world, because you're in a - it's so imprisoning, because there's no way what you're doing is right, and you know it, but you're not going to admit it, because you have such - you're taught such silly functioning skills as a child to - you're taught ego and you're taught . . from parenting you're taught all these things that don't serve you; they hinder you, so all of the things I was taught hindered me from learning, so when it came time to make decisions to want to learn things, I tried always on my own, because I didn't have the right skills to do it with others or to ask. If I was to ask then I'd look stupid. That's the first thing that came to my mind. If I asked somebody, then I'm going to look like I'm stupid, so every time I had a conversation it was very interesting. Every time that someone would ask me how I learned something, I said I'd read it in a book. Then they believed me. But if I said I just learned it on my own, they didn't believe me, and so I learned really early not to take credit for my own skills.

P: Authority. The power of authority.

G: Mm hm. Pathetic, and I taught all my kids not to believe in the power of authority, and now they don't even listen to me.

P: Okay, so you said earlier that you have some awareness of your own learning. You think about your own learning. What . . any further thoughts about that?

G: I'm aware of my own - any further thoughts in my knowing my own -

P: Yeah, I was thinking about you were talking about just being aware of your emotional response when you first hit something, and realizing that if you just let that happen, then you can get through to the other side and you work effectively on . . That was one example. Anything else -

G: Um, I'm willing to listen to other people tell me if they see something in me. I'm willing to listen to that. If someone says to me, "Well, you're not quite getting this," I'm willing to hear

that. Then I will look for ways to educate myself in (that .), to not be ignorant. I don't take someone saying to me, "You're ignorant," as a negative. I take that as I don't know something, so then I will try and learn that, and I will ask where I would get the directions (from). Now I didn't always have that. I did not always . . I was not always open to someone telling me something, you know, but now I am. I really believe, you know, the basis of any type of learning, any type of situation, if it's not - if you're not coming from (a family that's had) really good direction, even not really good direction but direction in (.) or whatever, I really believe that a lot of things that hinder us is our own insecurities, and thinking that was (stupid, I really think that . . .) for people, but (. .) is that they just don't feel intelligent, but yet they will say that they feel they're intelligent, and they will talk like they know (everything), but really they're ignorant, and that needs to heal before the education factor can change. I've healed a lot to get where I am.

P: So how does that awareness or that healing process help you in your work in an academic setting?

G: Well now I don't think that somebody's hurting - that when I do something and somebody marks it then I'm stupid. That's just your opinion, that you don't agree with what I'm doing. I don't take it literally. I don't think, "Oh my God." He knows more than I, or she knows more than I do. It's more, okay I've done this work and that person does not agree with it. They have to follow their guidelines, and I just happen not to be fitting in their guidelines, and I comprehend that (. . . .).

P: Have you ever thought about what it means to learn something?

G: Oh yeah, I think about that a lot. It's invigorating.

P: What does it mean?

G: What does it mean. It's . . to have knowledge. To learn something I don't know is to have more knowledge (. . . growth).

P: Okay. How do you know when you understood something. How can you tell?

G: (I can feel it in my head). I know when I know something.

P: What's the feeling like?

G: Giddy. Like a light comes on in my . . like a light bulb comes on (again). It's just an incredible feeling. I feel open. That's the best way to describe it. I feel very open and I like it, so I think I explained that to you when I learned the ABC's. It's like the most phenomenal feeling in the whole world. There's just nothing like it. I don't know if I'll ever experience that feeling over again, but it was incredible. Now I get little feelings like that when I comprehend.

P: Do you think that being in CCA has helped you become a better learner?

G: Mm hm. By far.

P: In what ways?

G: Comprehension. Knowing that I'm - if I want something I have to work at it. No one's going to do it for me. That I (. . .) have the skill to get everyone to do everything for me, and I think

that the teachers that are there, not all of them, I think some of them can pick that up in people. That they're a different breed of teachers. (. . .). No, no, I mean I (. . . .). No I like it. I mean I like that atmosphere of being able to go in and work and not have someone breathing down your neck.

P: Right. Do you think that what you've learned in CCA has applications to the outside world? . . . Does it end at the classroom door, when you step out of the building -

G: No, I take it -

P: - do you take some of it with you?

G: Yeah, oh yeah.

P: What?

G: Um . . the fact that I - that - I take with me every day the work that I do. I take the knowledge I'm learning. I take the fact that I'm growing every day with me, and when I - when one is learning and developing, they take positiveness. If you're not developing, you become stagnant and (.). I know that one, oh so well, just sitting there stagnating.

P: Right. Any practical aspects that help you to function . . on a day to day basis?

G: I don't think so. Like what?

P: I don't know, being able to calculate a sale price -

G: No.

P: - being able to get your meaning made clearer when you're sitting at a desk trying to talk to a bureaucrat.

G: (I) talk better. (I remember being told that).

P: Is that useful? Is that -

G: Yes. Oh most definitely. I'm feeling more confident when I'm talking with people. Even in the short period (. . . . .) stick with it.

P: Does that mean you can get what you want more than - ?

G: No, I've always been able to get what I want.

P: You just offend people (more often).

G: No. I - no. I've always gotten what I've wanted. Now I do it more clearly, more precisely, and much more verbally, instead of manipulation. So, but it's a (. .).

P: What would you - if you were in charge of the college, what would you do in CCA to make - to help you learn better? What changes would you make?

G: The introduction to it. Certain teachers wouldn't be in the program. The teachers would be skilled in other areas. Learning at self-pace takes a teacher that learns at self-pace, not a teacher that comes from the traditional way of being taught, and just because you put on a pair of blue jeans and a sweat shirt doesn't make you kick back. And just because you're not wearing a suit doesn't mean you're a teacher. But, yeah, I would - the teachers would be very relevant, and the introduction to it. There's good teachers that have introduced it well, and there's ones that haven't, and, yeah. It would boil down to the teachers.

P: Okay, what -

G: Because you're going to be the same student.

P: Yeah. What do the good teachers do?

G: They relax with the student. They can pick out when you're not hearing something, and saying, "Is that clear to you? Is there something I can do to help you, (maybe), it be more clear or, you know, express yourself; don't be scared, you know. I'm here to learn - teach. I'm here for you to understand. Don't be intimidated. I know that it - you're in a new situation and (one) needs to see it," instead of bombarding a lot of information, a lot (. . . .) when I first got here, a lot is said, and I know they have a guideline; they have to follow, and they have to keep to that. It doesn't make it a good one.

P: Right. So what do the bad teachers do? ('Cuz) you're talking about the introduction still?

G: The introduction, um -

(tape ends)

. . . .

G: (talking about a book I was looking at) I find that with most of that stuff. Alternative thought, you know it all comes from the same thought.

P: So, before the banana, I was asking what the bad teachers do in the introduction that makes them ineffective.

G: They talk down to the students. They have a holier than thou attitude and I'm the teacher; you're the student, (let's say). And when you're dealing with adults, as a greater percentage of the people that are in this program, the last thing they need is that. That's what they've been dealing with their whole lives is that feeling as equal as the people they're dealing with. They wouldn't be there if they felt good about themselves. They would not be in that program. They'd be out in the world just like everyone else is that are okay with it, you know. I'm not saying everyone in the world's okay. I'm just saying that they would not be at King Edward if things were okay with (their lives).

P: Okay, keeping in mind that what I'm ultimately trying to get at here is your perceptions of your own learning, is there anything you want to add, anything I should have asked but didn't ask?

G: What makes people quit?

P: Okay, what makes people quit?

G: The teachers. No. Insecurities, home environment, feeling of inadequacies, feeling they can't do it anyway. Why try? Feeling very stupid. I know one girl in particular that quit and if the teachers would have been more alert could have stopped it, and she quit because she thought she was a stupid person (in the class), and not - and I know I've heard this and I've heard teachers say it; I've heard my friends say it. We're not counsellors; we're not there to make people stay in school. We're there to teach. Well? I'm sorry, but (that's the world) and we're there and (. . for) to do it all. I mean there's a complete program, not just one part of the program, to enable for it to work, we have to work all of it, not just a part of it. So to me we're always (positive). (Me) even as a student. I mean I didn't really appreciate them telling me to go do the school advocate program. Two of the teachers told - recommended that I do it, and I didn't really appreciate that at first, because of what - I mean I took on a full course load, plus I go to school at night, plus I have a family life, plus I have a job, and being a school advocate takes up a great deal of time, two days a week for three hours on those days, plus things that you have to do on the outside, plus I think I already am a school advocate. I hardly need to be going and being taught how to be one. And they're not teaching me anything in there that I need to know anyway. It's very much towards the immigration and (. . . .) English as a second language, so it's been interesting. It's interesting watching the whole thing. I'd change the whole god damned program, if the truth be known.

P: What would you do?

G: I'd get rid of the lot of it. I'd get rid of a lot of . . not this part. (I mean just . . King Edward. myself. . .)

P: Okay, let's not get into that.

G: Yeah, it's too (depressing).

closing remarks and brief conversation

G: I really feel very strongly about _____. Not one of the best teachers. I've had teachers with - people with (. .) and it's not healthy. I mean there's a couple of them, but I mean that's irrelevant. The irrelevancy of the teacher is - what's relevant is the people are going there - I know what it's like to live in a world of not (moving), of not succeeding in the school situation, not taking a year off and going travelling around the world and being on my own and doing my own thing. I know what it's like to be the opposite, being a part of dysfunctional families, in a lot of pain, never knowing where to go to get out of it, staying amongst all of the hate and the anger and frustration, and thinking everybody else is to blame, and when I found out I was to blame for my own problems and my own pain, that even intensified it even more to where I had to learn skills to deal with that, and I couldn't blame anybody (anyway), even when I wanted to.

P: Well, I don't know. My understanding of it is that you're not to blame, but you are now responsible for dealing with it, and I think you can quite justifiably blame other people for the problems that you have, but you can't blame them for not doing something about it.

G: Well, I would - I guess what I really would like not to do is blame, so therefore I can deal with it better. If I sit and blame Frances, my birth mother, or James, my birth father for their years of bringing me up, I stay really angry (. my) frustration, because they're still there. They're still doing that same environment -

P: But it's not relevant is it to blame?

G: No, no, exactly. So why blame?

P: It's not your fault.

G: No, it's not - it's -

P: Ago.

G: Yeah, and it's past, so get on with today and deal with it. (I'd say) that to me is the most important of all, and if I developed that over the last four years by following the route and not literally by going with them, and (. . . .) but picking up a few new age books and self help books, as much as I find them to be quite - now that I've learned to read, I find them all quite silly, but they did help me get where I am, you know, just by saying take responsibility, take responsibility, take responsibility. And that's what all of them say, the same thing over and over and over again. Well I finally got take responsibility, but I also see in them that they want to put the responsibility on everybody else, you know, like they want to erase the fact that there's child abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, all the types of abuse out there. They say we manifest that on our - well, why did you bring that into your life? What lesson did you need to learn? What mirror are you seeing there? Well, those are simple ways of not dealing with reality, and so you just them that one step further. Yes take responsibility, but that doesn't mean it's right, and that doesn't mean it doesn't have to change, because it has to change, and I'm very clear about that. I have to go out there and change (it) myself. It has to change. Parenting has to change.

P: Right.

G: So we have to (.) - to get good teachers you have to get good parents.

P: That's right. (. .) requirement.

G: That's right. (.) come from good parenting. But where would we get teachers now?

P: We could build them.

G: From robots. We could build them. I like that. We could build our teachers.

P: IBM. Building better teachers.

G: I'm having problems with my computer . . . (tape turned off).